

The Commodification of Islam in Halal Cosmetics Advertising in Indonesia (Judith Williamson Semiotics Analysis)

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain the commodification of Islam in the advertisement of Wardah cosmetic products through Judith Williamson's semiotic analysis. Advertising as a communicative medium aims to influence consumers by constructing the dominant discourse in Muslim society. One of them is seen in Wardah's beauty product advertisement by building Islamic discourse. This qualitative research uses the advertising semiotics method which examines the relation between signifier and signified in an object. The researcher analyzed the scenes in five Wardah advertisements. The results show that "Wardah TV commercial" embeds Islamic discourse through the concept of "halal" cosmetics through text and audio-visual components. This Islamic discourse was built through language and then commodified as a product with a "halal" label attached to Wardah's commodities, namely using natural alcohol, not being contaminated with prohibited materials, and the production process in accordance with Islamic procedures. Furthermore, Wardah's advertisement featured multi-talented artists Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki, who were known as hijrah models, singers, and film actresses. Thus, Wardah succeeded in "borrowing" the meaning of popularity, Muslim youth, and achievement so that the product obtains a significant meaning based on the artist's reference system. The decommmodification process looks at the ideology that is hidden and played by industrial interests in the segment of Muslim society in Indonesia.

Keywords: Semiotics; Commodification; Judith Williamson; Islam

Introduction

Advertising is not only a persuasive medium to inform a product but also an instrument to build discourse. The language used in advertising is not neutral but is formed through social construction that is aligned with the interests of producers (Noviani, 2000). Media and cultural studies see that advertising is an ideological vehicle that carries a certain discourse. One of the dominant discourses in advertising is Islamic values in Indonesia.

The discourse of Islam in Indonesia is varied. There are national points of view represented in large Islamic organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah. However, various oppositional groups reject the idea of Pancasila and try to implement Sharia law. These opposing groups are moderate to extreme. Some groups interpret Islam as more liberal and secular (Wirawanda et al., 2018). Islamic discourse can be seen through the practice of choosing halal cosmetics in Indonesia and through the pioneering of Wardah halal cosmetic products.

Wardah is an original Indonesian halal cosmetic brand that was founded in 1995 under PT. Paragon Technology and Innovation (PT. PTI). Wardah was founded by Nurhayati Subakat, who currently serves as Commissioner of PT. PTI offers products to support women in appearing "beautiful" according to their character. This brand has received a halal certificate, which makes it the pioneer of halal brands for beauty products in Indonesia. The word "Wardah" itself comes from Arabic (الورد), which means rose. The rose is one of the most popular flowers and is also known as the queen of flowers. The word "wardah" itself is one of three Arabic names that are considered Islamic and are proposed to be the brand or name of a halal beauty product to be produced by PT Pusaka Tradisi Ibu. Of the three, "wardah" was chosen. Products issued and produced under the Wardah brand consist of four categories: skin care products, especially for the face (skincare), body care (body care), hair care (haircare), and make-up. Skincare products from Wardah include toners, serums, facial cleansers, facial soaps, moisturizers, micellar, facial masks, facial scrubs, face creams, eye creams, and essences. Wardah already has several taglines, namely *Kosmetika Suci & Aman* (1995–2008), *Inspiring Beauty* (2008–2018), *Feel the Beauty* (2019–2021), and *Beauty Moves You* (2021–present), which are then manifested in the production of "halal" advertisements for Wardah on television and social media.

The concept of halal in Islam itself refers to the use of materials that do not contain haram elements. In addition, the halalness of cosmetic products is also determined by the manufacturing process. Even when using animal parts that are

categorized as halal, the animal must be ensured that it has been processed according to Islamic law. Likewise, with product testing. If done on animals, a cosmetic product is declared halal if the test is not carried out with the intent to harm or kill. In Indonesia, the halal label on cosmetics is issued by Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) (Fahmi, 2017).

The perspective of media and cultural studies sees advertising as an ideological matter, so it requires tools to understand how advertising constructs Islamic discourse through semiotic readings. Semiotics, in general, is a science that examines the relationship between signs. Semioticians have their characteristics, from Saussure (1966), Charles Sanders Pierce (1991), Roland Barthes (2013), and Umberto Eco (1979). Semiotics that specifically describe signs in advertisements refer to Judith Williamson's semiotics through audio-visual components. Judith Williamson's semiotics involve understanding the creation of ideology or myth by advertisers through a naturalization process so that it is not questioned again (Andreas, 2021). Artists featured in advertisements play an important role in building discourse constructions aimed at audiences.

Based on the description of the background, this study asks, "How is the commodification of Islam in advertisements for Wardah beauty products? And how does Wardah Advertising borrow the artist's "myth," which creates new meanings in their products? The purpose of this research is to explain the form of commodification of Islam in Wardah advertisements and to elaborate on the concept of borrowing the artist's "myth" that appears in each scene.

Previous researchers have explained the previous understanding related to commodification with Islamic values. Anisa, A. N. A. (2021), *Waktunya Berhijrah Dengan Pasta Gigi: Analisis Semiotika Judith Williamson Dalam Iklan Pasta Gigi Sasha*, which describes toothpaste products as not just cleaning teeth but as a symbol of one's Islam. With the tagline "Waktunya Berhijrah" and recruiting Shireen Sungkar and Teuku Wisnu as brand ambassadors through an ad that lasts 15 seconds and displays Islamic values such as a model wearing the hijab and currently reciting the Koran. Sasha emphasised that this toothpaste product is a product that has a Muslim market share. Meanwhile, an article written by Rino Andreas (2021) entitled "*Stereotifikasi Perempuan dalam Iklan Perbankan (Pembacaan Semiotika Judith Williamson pada Iklan Mandiri Online)*" explained that Mandiri Online ads featured Tara Basro and Reza Rahardian, who borrowed their "myth" into Mandiri Online products.

Furthermore, Kholqiana, Fauzianin, and Azzahra, in their article entitled "*Representasi Komodifikasi Simbol Religi dalam Iklan Wardah*" (2020), explain the forms of commodification of religion found in Wardah Tone Up Cream advertisements. The research demonstrates the claims of halal products starring women wearing hijab as a symbol of religiosity for Muslim women. The method used in this research is descriptive-qualitative with a critical paradigm. Operationally, the research method used is semiotics. The results of the study show Wardah advertisements show that there are three forms of commodification of religion in advertisements labeled halal: the first is the use of Islamic iconography (description of identity), the second is the use of influential figures, and the third is the use of texts or content from advertisements with Islamic messages. Based on the above, the novelty of this research is that research related to Judith Williamson's reading has not been widely used in Indonesia. So as to provide a perspective on semiotics, especially in the field of advertising. The approach in the political economy of media is divided into three aspects, including commodification, spatialization, and structuring. Commodification is a form of commodity in communication that utilizes message content in the process that takes place in the media industry to create messages from collected data into products that can be sold (Mosco in Hareyah, 2012). Commodification is the process of transforming goods or services that have use value (value based on ability to meet needs) into exchange value (market-oriented value). Commodification is one way of approaching the mass media in the political economy approach. Mosco (2009) defines commodification as the process of changing the value of a product that previously only had a use value and then became an exchange value (sale value). In this concept of commodification, communication is a potential arena where commodification occurs. This is because communication is a commodity that has a very big influence because what happens is not only commodification to get surplus value but also because the message conveyed contains symbols and ideology that can be used to sharpen the awareness of the recipient of the message (Mosco, 2009).

Advertising is a communication tool capable of building strength in constructing social or new realities to become more attractive and promising (Hereyah, 2012). Advertising also has the ability to present various characters, even if only as an embodiment of a larger social category (Noviani in Hereyah, 2012). The construction of advertising reality that is built comes from materials that exist in everyday life. This forms an ideal portrait of social life and is used to represent something normative, such as happiness and satisfaction (Hereyah, 2012). In her 1981 work *Decoding Advertisement*, Judith Williamson explains the principle of borrowing signs and borrowing social codes in advertisements. He gave an example of how advertisements present famous film actors. The figure is borrowed from its myth, ideology, image, and characteristics that are inherent in the figure. Advertisements that have succeeded in transferring meaning to the product have an effect, namely that the image of the film star is indirectly attached to the product image. Here, semiotic analysis becomes very relevant to explain the relationship between signs and meanings created through advertising media. Semiotics is used to explore the meaning obtained through texts by arranging signs in a certain way and using the applicable cultural code (Syafuddin & Andreas, 2018).

For a deeper reading, it is necessary to understand the context in which advertisers choose to describe the advertised product or service. This is useful for building critical awareness of the interests inserted by advertisers. Judith Williamson advances the concept introduced by Roland Barthes of mythology or myth further in her 1981 book *Decoding*

Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising. He explains how the meaning of a sign is willing to be transferred into mythology in advertising to give products that don't mean to be important. The goal is to unravel the deceptive mythology that this ad propagates. By reason of Saussure, he argues that meaning is conveyed by someone who has meaning in reference to the signifier. The signified is the idea, and the signifier is something; together, they form the sign and are wholly inseparable from any form of communication. According to Williamson, the function of open meaning in an advertisement is to create in the minds of viewers unclear or latent meanings. For a semiotic analysis of advertising, several points must be considered. Judith Williamson divides the process of constructing the meaning of a currency of sign, including first the product as a signifier (signified, concept, or meaning), the second product as a signifier (product as a signifier, form), then the product as a generator, and the product as a currency (product as exchange rate) (Djamereng, 2018).

Williamson explains how the relationship between signs and products in advertisements has the aim of providing information to audiences, implicitly or explicitly. Products act as markers, which initially have no meaning or are empty but become essential because they "borrow" values from people or objects that previously had value added. Thus, advertising functions to create new meanings for products that have transferred meaning to themselves from other objects, namely the context in advertising. Williamson (1981) argues that their role in production makes up the real difference between humans. However, in advertising, it is the resulting product that creates the difference as a result of the invocation of the false category by this advertisement. Advertising blurs the real differences in society by replacing them with people's consumption patterns. Through the act of buying something, Williamson calls it ideology. She said:

"Ideology is the meaning made necessary by the conditions of society while helping to perpetuate those conditions. We feel a need to belong, to have a social 'place'; it can be hard to find. Instead, we may be given an imaginary one. All of us have a genuine need for a social being and a common culture. The mass media provide this to some extent and can (potentially) fulfill a positive function in our lives." (Williamson, 1978:13).

Methodology

This qualitative research is a descriptive analysis of a socio-cultural phenomenon. This study uses the advertising semiotics method, which was popularised by Judith Williamson. Data sources are divided into two categories: premier data consisting of five Wardah Commercial TV commercials, which were selected purposefully, where the retrieval is determined because it is a rich source of information according to the problem under study (Sugiyono, 2016). The advertisements examined included "*Halal dari Awal*," "*Ramadhan 2019 #SelaluBersyukur*," and "*Wardah Travel in Style Europe Halal Trip with Dewi Sandra*." Data collection techniques were documentation through a screenshot process, while secondary data consisted of journal articles, news, and media. The data analysis technique was carried out through the Judith Williamson model analysis technique, which was carried out through seven stages, namely defining the object of analysis, collecting text, explaining the text, interpreting the text, explaining cultural codes, making generalizations, and drawing conclusions.

Result and Discussion

In this chapter, the author will elaborate on the research results based on the findings and data. The results of this study are divided into two sub-chapters, which explain the form of commodification in halal cosmetic advertisements and the process of forming meaning into the product.

"Halal" Cosmetics and the Islamic Market Segment

Wardah's advertisement opens with a scene of a woman wearing a hijab, Dewi Sandra, and Natasha Rizki dressing up and visiting an orphanage and the Ar-Rahman Learning House for children with disabilities. Simultaneously, the narrative, which discusses the importance of being grateful,

"Bersyukur atas berkah yang diturunkan dan nikmatnya berbagi pada sesama. Bersyukur bisa merasakan kebahagiaan orang lain dan hangatnya kebersamaan. Jalani Ramadhan lebih bermakna dengan bersyukur Wardah Cantik dari hati". I am grateful for the blessings passed down and the joy of sharing with others. I am grateful to be able to feel the happiness of others and the warmth of togetherness. Live a more meaningful Ramadan with gratitude. Wardah Beauty (from the heart).



Figure 1. Dewi Sandra with a disabled woman

Picture 1 shows a scene where Dewi Sandra has a close relationship with a disabled woman who uses a wheelchair. This scene shows how Islamic values are practiced through kindness by caring for others in need.



Figure 2. Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki

Furthermore, the scene shows Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki "breaking the fast together" with children with disabilities. This indicates that togetherness and mutual sharing are part of Islamic values in the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is known as a "holy" day. The month of Ramadan is considered the right moment to share happiness by giving alms. In addition to increasing happiness and strengthening friendship, sharing can also increase faith and piety. The researcher sees that the signs of Islam represented by the visualization of scenes of helping each other and caring in the month of Ramadan are associated with the meaning of Wardah products used in this advertisement as objects that can remind the public of the advertising products so as to support the goals to be achieved. Displaying advertising messages that are able to persuade, arouse, and maintain consumer memories of the products offered requires appeal to the target audience. The attractiveness of advertising is very important because it will increase the success of communication with the audience (Sutisna, 2003). In this case, Wardah is positioning itself as a halal cosmetic product in Indonesia to raise consumer awareness. Islamic discourse that is in line with the Muslim community in Indonesia supports the commodification process in Wardah advertisements. Islamism is used as an essential means to realize the purpose of advertising, namely selling products.

This is relevant to the concept of commodification. Mosco (2009) states that communication is a potential arena where commodification occurs. This is because communication is a commodity that has a very big influence because what happens is not only commodification to get a surplus value but also because the message conveyed contains symbols and ideology that can be used to sharpen the awareness of the recipient of the message. Thus, commodification refers to the process of transforming products or commodities that meet individual and social needs into products whose value is determined by market mechanisms.

Wardah Ads, Artists, and Sign Transfers

In this chapter, we will elaborate on the findings of the research object of Wardah's advertisements. These, namely several scenes, represent how advertisements form new meanings through artists who play advertisement scenes. The selection of artists in advertisements is also understood not as something natural but as artists with specific meanings, namely working in the context of all the signs that live in Islamic society. Both artists are described as a picture of the ideal life that is close to everyone. This is an attraction for these products, which indirectly invites the young segment to use Wardah products by instilling good values in Islamic dress. This is also supported by the appearance of syar'i clothing and the lifestyle of young people, the upper middle class, and urban areas as products of modern industry.

Dwi Sandra and Natasha Rizki are positioned as borrowed artists whose meaning is transferred into Wardah products, namely the "myth" of kindness, achievement, and talent. Therefore, the transfer of meaning from the celebrity to the product is complete and one. So, Bank Mandiri Products makes the two celebrities a reference system. Audiences can then make connections between Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki with talented and accomplished products in accordance with the goodness of Islam.



Figure 3. Artists Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki are smiling for the camera.

Figure 4. Wardah Travel In Style Europe Halal Trip with Dewi Sandra

Wardah has worked with Indonesian artists such as Marissa Haque (2001–2002), Inneke Koesharawati (2002–2018), and March 2002–April 2018. Since 2002, Wardah has appointed Inneke Koesharawati as Brand Ambassador until 2018, Natasha Rizki, Tatjana Saphira, Amanda Rawles, and Ayana Jihye Moon (2018–present), replacing Inneke Koesharawati, Dewi Sandra (2015–present), Raline Shah, Hanggini, Yasmin Napper, and Cut Syifa (2021–present).

Wardah uses advertising media instruments to encourage subjects to become capitalists by collaborating with artists Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki. Wardah positions the popularity of these two accomplished artists as a part of Wardah that is closely related to the image of its products. All of these things are done to attract more consumers and maintain the Muslim market segment in Indonesia. This is in line with the interests of the industry, where shopping for cosmetics is a "democratic" thing and is justified by Islamic discourse.

Conclusion

Wardah's TV commercial, as one of the active beauty products, constructs the relations of signs through two levels, namely the denotation level and the connotation level. Both provide an understanding of the ideology that works in persuasive communication media. Furthermore, all signs form mythical aspects in Barthesian terms as normalized awareness and are considered normal in building Islamic discourse in the contemporary era. Through the process of selecting, adding, or removing the elements that make the advertising narrative, Thus, advertising is not a neutral medium but instead builds dominant discourse for the benefit of the industry through Judith Williamson's reading of semiotics. This research shows that Wardah's advertisements reproduce awareness by creating an Islamic discourse aimed at the role of artists who wear the hijab, Ramadan holidays, and Islamic narratives. Furthermore, Wardah's TV commercial also chose the ad actors Dewi Sandra and Natasha Rizki, who are known as famous and accomplished artists in Indonesia. Wardah "borrows" the meaning of popularity, youth, and achievement so that the product acquires a significant meaning based on the artist's reference system.

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