

SPIRITUAL IMAGERY: FRAMING SPIRITUALITY IN MEN'S BODYCARE ADVERTISEMENTS

Imara Al Hamani

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Sidoarjo,
Indonesia
Imara.19080@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Pratiwi Retnaningdyah

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya,
Indonesia
pratiwiretnaningdyah@unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This article investigates the utilization of spiritual imagery in Kahf's advertisement that continuously uses spiritual imagery in their advertisements. This article aims to reveal the utilization of spiritual imagery in advertisement that can attach and represent the brand's identity to the audience. The authors gained the data by selecting textual and image components inside Kahf's advertisements. The authors elaborating the findings using the theory of Popular Culture and Cultural Studies connecting them to previous studies. This article focuses on discovering the use of spiritual imagery in framing spirituality in advertising to attach the audience. The result of this study shows that spiritual imagery such as the use of spiritual words, symbols, also the selection of images, and models in Kahf's advertisements play important role in framing spirituality. The utilization of all of the spiritual imagery effectively leads Kahf's advertisements to attach specific audiences and represent their brand's identity.

Keywords: *advertisements; audience reception; spiritual imagery*

As a part of life, every human being requires information. Information can be obtained in a variety of ways, including by connecting with individuals or by searching the internet (Ali, M. & Shoaib, M., 2018). The role of media to persuade people is very huge nowadays because it can easily encourage people about something and people flexibly can be found anywhere, for instance, advertisements as a media to spread awareness about a product to the customers. As stated by Fialová (2017), advertisements become included in people's daily lives. According to Naseri & Tamam (2012), the power that an advertisement hold can make the audience react depending on the meaning given to the commercial, which is determined by the advertisement's and the audience's qualities. Advertisements appear in a variety of media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and even on social media that are used every day. Producers employ these media and techniques to communicate specific messages about their products. Advertisements must cater to several types of customers in order to persuade them. Furthermore, the Internet and the media may be considered important advertising platforms. It means that advertisements fill every available space in which people see them almost every day. In basic terms, it appears to be a part of our daily life. Advertising's goal is to not only inform consumers about a product or service but also to persuade them to buy it. The connection between spiritual imagery and advertising revolves around the creation of identity, attitude, and behavior that the brands want to present to the audiences or the customers.

The use of spiritual imagery in advertisements indirectly leads the audience or the customers to have a brief perception or reception of the brand's values, identity, and representation. The objectives of this study are to elaborate on the relation of spiritual imagery in an advertisement, to discuss the roles of spiritual imagery used in advertisements to represent the identity of the brand to attract customers, and also to determine the audience's reception toward the spiritual imagery applied in the advertisement. The significance of this study is it will provide new insight into the connection between religious imagery in Indonesian advertisements inframing spirituality that can represent the brand's identity and values to attract the audiences or the customers' intention of the products. Through this research, the audience can discover that the placement of continuous object inside an advertisement can form audience reception. The aims of this study do not only focus on spiritual imagery but also revolve around the popular culture aspects. As stated by Waller & Casidy (2021) that the subject of religion and spirituality in advertising is still relatively unexplored. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of studies that investigate spiritual imagery in advertising, particularly in Indonesian advertisements. In order to collect data, the authors identified and highlighted textual and visual elements from *Kahf's* brand advertisements. They then elaborated their findings using Popular Culture and Cultural Studies proposed by Stuart Hall theory and connected them to related previous studies.

METHOD

The main data sources are taken from Kahf's Instagram page, website, and Youtube screentime through its advertisement pictures, symbols, and captions that use the English Language. Kahf is a brand that comes from Indonesia and mostly uses its Instagram page to raise and promote its products with social media advertisements. The selection of the brand is based on the consideration that Kahf is the leading brand of Indonesian Muslim Men's body care products. Another source of the data is gained from a questionnaire that consists of several questions to have the respondents' judgment towards the audience's reception of the topic. The respondents were taken from 20 social media users from teenagers to adults (age 15 – 30), male and female, and also Indonesian residents.

In compiling this study, the author later selected several pictures, textual headlines, hashtags, and captions taken from *Kahf's* Instagram page, website, and Youtube video. Firstly, the author defined the connection between advertisement and spiritual imagery that is being used to attract the audience's attention using Popular Culture and Cultural Studies "circuit of culture" by Stuart Hall (1997). Secondly, since the data of the study are in the form of pictures and captions, the information that is accomplished is focused on the visual, gestural, and colour unity of the advertisements. Thirdly, the author categorized each data result from the questionnaire into charts and record the dominant answers from the respondents to support the findings. As a result, the data that has already been gained will be discussed using "Circuit of Culture" by Stuart Hall to reveal the important role of the use of spiritual imagery in Indonesian advertisements to show the brand's identity and representation to attract customers.

Finally, the author combines the results of the questionnaire and the analysis to answer the research questions. This process also certainly takes various perspectives and statements taken from several journals related to the topics. Following the completion of the required data, the author used Popular Culture Studies, especially the identity and representation side to examine the data. After selecting several online advertisements through *Kahf* (@kahfeveryday) official Instagram pages in the form of pictures, the author examines the selected data using the cultural approach taken from several previous studies with descriptive analysis to define the result of the study. To support the analysis, the author also added the questionnaire results that contain the respondents' answers and elaborate on the audience reception using the respondents' answers. To sum up, the author made a conclusion based on the results and findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Utilization of Spiritual Imagery in Advertisements

In general, advertising is a media or platform that consists of information about an item that will be presented on a large scale. Advertising is also described as the structured and composed non-personal conveyance of information about things (goods, services, and ideas) by identified sponsors through various media, which is usually paid for and usually persuasive to the audience. Muthmainnah (2016) stated that the definition of advertising is any paid, non-personal communication through various media by businesses, non-profit organizations, and individuals who are in some way associated with the advertisement message and intend to enlighten or persuade a certain audience. The message can be aural, as in a radio commercial, or visual, as in a television or movie commercial. Another study conducted by Ali, M. & Shoaib, M. (2018) stated that advertisements are non-personal communications about a company or its product to a target audience by an advertiser using a mass or broadcast medium. It is, in reality, the process through which businesses raise awareness of their products and introduce new products to new and potential customers. In other terms, advertising is the skill of providing special information messages to the general population at a low cost.

Advertising also handles an important role to influence people about their products or brands, and advertisement also can help companies to spread the product's awareness so that customers want to buy it. Another study proposed by Zhafirah (2019) shows that companies generally employ advertising to enhance awareness of their products or services to improve sales. The statements and opinions before depicted that advertisements play an important role in introducing and spreading information about products. In today's world, social media channels have evolved into platforms that allow consumers to be more in touch with brands by sharing, commenting, and liking. The appearance and the flexible functions of social media platforms, make brand-consumer relationships have become more effective and dynamic, and brands can reach consumers much more readily and frequently through social media marketing Dulek & Saydan (2019). Those statements above strengthen the idea that advertisement holds the power to influence and persuade the audience through the audio, visuals, and text that are commonly used to show information about a product. This process, later on, can stimulate audience reception and perception of the products and the brands. The use of spiritual imagery and symbols in advertising stimulated the religious values in consumers, producing favorable feelings toward the advertising message and a greater intention to address customers' needs Waller & Casidy (2021).



Figure 1. Kahf's Ramadan Hampers Package Instagram post.

The figure above shows implicit elements of spiritual imagery that pointed to certain audiences. Figure 1 contains a moon and star with the use of #MultiplyYourGoodness for the hashtag in their advertisements. The placement of the moon and star for the background portray a symbol of Islam that strengthens by the use of #MultiplyYourGoodness as the hashtag that interprets if the customers intend to buy the products, they will have better deeds. The title uses “Ramadan Hampers Package” and the headline of the packaging “Goodness Carrying Devices” can also indirectly describe the target of the advertisement as mainly Muslims which leads to an interpretation that the package will make the audience become or identify themselves as ‘good’ Muslim. Another example of the utilization of spiritual imagery in Kahf’s advertisements is the use of several spiritual symbols and elements.



Figure 1. Kahf's daily post on Instagram during Ramadan

The spiritual imagery found in Figure 2 is portrayed by the appearance of prayer beads and a prayer rug inside the picture and the use of it to increase the spirit of friendship (silaturahmi in Islam) inside the caption. The use of all of these spiritual symbols, spiritual elements, or spiritual words inside Kahf’s advertisements is indirectly intended for specific audiences which are Muslim men. As explained by Ali, M. & Shoaib, M. (2018), the statement above correlates to the function of advertisement as a marketing tactic used to stir consumers' interest in a specific activity regarding a product or service.

Framing Spiritual Imagery to Represent Brand’s Identity

People’s daily lives are influenced by popular culture, whether they are conscious of it or not. It includes anything from books, movies, and music to brands, things, and events in their life. With popular culture and its widespread impact and significance, it is only natural to suppose that these significant cultural phenomena will be influenced and used, not only by individuals on various occasions but also by businesses (Fraculj & Lekaj, 2019). Advertisement not only becomes the common step to share awareness and information about a product to make potential customers want to buy the product but also influences people in society. Advertisements appear in a variety of media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and even on social media that nowadays have been used every day. The idea of advertisement that already becomes a part of our daily lives and is related to popular culture in shaping society. The definition of popular culture is when society and their regular communication encounters, people choose, modify, and circulate media representations and

other cultural forms, producing meaning and popularity in the process (Secmeer, 2006). When confronted with new ideas, systems, communication tools, technology, and media, the acculturation process continues, and as a result of our nature, capacity, and capability, we attempt to adapt to changes and become a part of the current environment. The study accomplished by Waugh (2011) also stated that advertisement and popular culture have a connection in influencing people to interpret something. Popular culture is a culture - the active process of creating and distributing meanings and pleasures within a social system, that is indirectly connected with the power of advertisement as a tool to deliver information to the audience about certain products or brands. According to the result of previous studies written by Fraculj & Lekaj (2019) popular culture has the potential to have a large beneficial impact on marketing communications.

Furthermore, the Circuit of Culture proposed by Stuart Hall is the great implementation of the culture applied in our societies nowadays. He mentions about 'circuit culture,' that is a circulation of how culture is regulated in society through language, which then he argues that it operates as a representation system. Representation, according to Hall, is a system by which language works by using 'sign' and 'symbols' to stand for or to represent ideas, thought, feeling, expression and emotion. However, the term is not limited to spoken or written language only. It is more to stand for or to represent something (Hutasuhut, 1997). This explanation supports the idea that advertisement can be a good media to "represent" something to the society. The representation through advertisements can be in the form of several media such as language style, symbols, and even the selection of advertising models can give impacts to the brand itself. Advertisement in social media has the advantage of being able to reach a huge number of people but advertisements still need to focus on persuading the target audiences or customers by specifying their content.

In society today, people are very aware of their social status and choose to wear a specific brand or product to represent and show themselves (Jaulkar & Mohit, 2013). Audiences or customers tend to recognize and pay attention to a brand that has its own identity so that it can pop up among other brands. Brand identity and image represented inside an advertisement have a positive impact on the audience's awareness of the brand (Saad et al., 2012). The use of spiritual imagery inside an advertisement plays a big role in differentiating brand identity from others. As stated by a study conducted by Nardella (2014) that, over the past few decades, researchers' interest in religious marketing has grown. Since the start of the 1980s, more focus has been placed on issues including the employment of marketing strategies by religious organizations and their usefulness. In addition, brand image or brand identity are described as how consumers view a brand with the characteristics or services it provides. It makes the audience able to differentiate what is the specific characteristics of a brand.

The implication of spiritual imagery in framing spirituality for brand identity inside Kahf's advertisement can be seen down below:



Figure 3. Kahf's advertisement at instagram



Figure 4. Kahf's advertisement video on youtube



Figure 5. Kahf's daily post on instagram

The figures above are taken from Kahf's official Instagram page (@kahfeveryday) and Kahf's official Youtube channel and shows the same appearance model for the slides advertisement, which all of them have beards. The depiction of Muslim men in this advertisement is by showing that the model has a beard. The appearance of bearded men not only depicts Muslim men but also brings masculine and mature vibes which affect the brand values and identity. Adding a brand's identity is a crucial part of advertising since marketing activities are intrinsically tied to the brand placed on products, displaying how the brand differentiated one product from another as stated by Jaulkar & Mohite (2013). The constant appearance of spiritual symbols, spiritual words, and most importantly the use of men with a beard as models that indicate them as Muslim men make Kahf's brand identity looks spiritual.

Another example of the application of spiritual imagery inside Kahf's advertisement can be seen down below:



Figure 6. Kahf's article promotion on their website

The figures above show that Kahf intentionally put spiritual imagery in their advertisement. In the Figure 6, the implication of spiritual imagery is spotted in the model who held the holy Al-Qur'an and wear long-sleeved shirts that represent Muslim men. The placement and utilization of these spiritual elements portray that Kahf shows and displays their brand as a spiritual brand that targets their products for religious men, especially Muslim men. According to Dulek & Saydan (2019), brand identity is how consumers view a brand in relation to the characteristics or services it provides which Kahf display through their advertisements by putting spiritual imagery on their advertisements continuously.

The Audience Reception towards The Use of Spiritual Imagery in Advertisement

The term spiritual imagery according to Naseri & Tamam (2012) is a term that portrays beliefs, attitudes, or values of a religion that are presented in a visual image or visual symbolism. Similar to an advertisement that is used to influence people about a product, spiritual imagery also presented symbols so that the audience has a certain reception of the product. Religion and spirituality have a significant impact on people's beliefs and behavior. To put it another way, religious ideas are expressed in everyday life. As stated by Waller & Casidy (2021) that our understanding of the effects of religion and spirituality on advertising is still limited. This is because the majority of previous research has focused on the problem from a cultural standpoint, ignoring the complexity of religion and spirituality in the context of advertising. The utilization of spiritual imagery and symbols in advertising- triggered religious values in individuals, resulting in positive sentiments toward the advertising message and a larger intention to report customers' needs, according to the study. Spiritual imagery holds the power of marking the customers' beliefs towards something which in this context is the products of an advertisement. Advertising uses our emotions, feelings, belief systems, and symbols to play games with us. To comprehend how it affects us and marketing in general, we must first determine the role of symbolism in religion, specifically in Islam. Waller & Casidy (2021) also stated that the influence of religion and spirituality on consumer behavior in an advertisement is owned a crucial position in today's society. In another study from Naseri & Tamam (2012), spiritual imagery in advertising is shown to have a strong role and positive influence on the advertisement evaluation, such as the attitude towards the advertisements, the reception towards the brands, and lastly, the influence of purchase intention from the audiences.

In order to deliver messages from advertisements, a brand that includes spiritual imagery inside its advertisement obviously has a certain targeted audience. The targeted audiences have different perceptions of the message inside the advertisements. According to Oktayusita et al. (2020) audience reception is a method that focuses on how a media's messages are interpreted by the audience. Reception analysis aims to demonstrate that the audience is engaged in the production of meaning from media messages or code. Additionally, a study by Waller & Casidy (2021) explained that the employment of spiritual imagery and symbols in advertising sparked consumers' religious values, triggering positive feelings toward the advertisement's message and a stronger desire to satisfy customers' needs. Therefore, the second data source is gained from the questionnaire consisting of 30 respondents answering their opinions on the topics. The respondents

consist of males and females aged around 15 – 25 years old who frequently use social media to see advertisements.

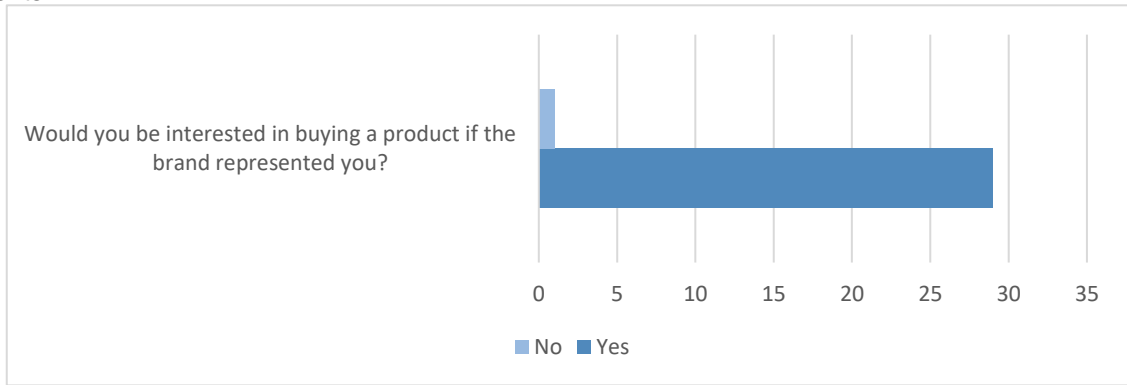


Chart 1. Audience reception in brand's identity used inside an advertisement

Chart 1 shows that 29 of 30 respondents are interested in brands that differentiate themselves with their identity, which makes the respondents more likely to want to know more about the brands and their products. Additionally, a study written by Zhafirah (2019) explained that purchase intention can be well achieved if the audience can decide to buy a product or service after seeing an advertisement in a media that consists of the brand's awareness and identity.

The use of spiritual imagery can also affect how consumers react to the advertised products. It also provided symbols in the form of logos, specific words, hashtags, and even the selection of the model inside the advertisements. For the audience to have a specific reception towards the products, spiritual imagery is also used inside advertisements to persuade people about a product. The result of the questionnaire regarding the audience's reception towards Kahf's advertisement that uses spiritual imagery can be seen down below:

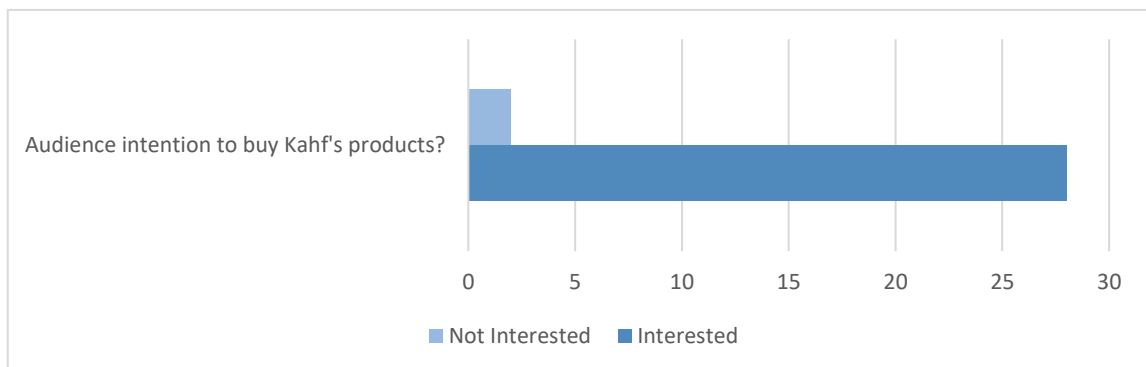


Chart 2. Audience intention to buy Kahf's products.

Chart 2 shows the audience's attention to buy Kahf's products, and there are 28 of 30 respondents are interested in buying Kahf's products that have spiritual imagery inside its advertisement. This result supports the explanation that the use of spiritual imagery inside an advertisement plays an important role in attracting the audience's attention. As stated by Waller & Casidy (2021) highlighted how using spiritual imagery and symbols in advertisements stimulated consumers' religious ideals, causing them to feel good about the message of the advertisement and making the audience more interested in seeking their needs.

In addition, Hall argues that culture is about 'shared meaning'. Culture involves the practices of giving meaning to people, objects, and events. They carry meanings and values that need to be interpreted by others. Culture produces meaning or a sense of identity for different groups in society, and these groups exchange meaning through social interactions (Hutasuhut, 1997). The statement before supported the idea that using religious elements constantly can lead the targeted customers to have some interest in the brand. The targeted customers, which are mainly Muslim men also feel 'represented' by using Kahf products that successfully differentiate themselves from other brands in the same fields.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The utilization of spiritual imagery employed in advertising plays a big role in increasing the brand identity's awareness and also the purchase intention from the audience who feels represented by the brand.

The continuous placement of spiritual imagery or religious elements in Kahf's advertisements also successfully shows that frequently putting spiritual imagery in advertisements can lead to framing the brand's identity. The continuous placement and utilization of several religious symbols, religious words selection, and also the selections of the advertising models can make Kahf as a men's body-care brand differentiate and create a different distinct identity from other brands in the same fields. Kahf successfully differentiates its brands by constantly placing religious elements in its advertisements and intentionally targeting Muslim men as its future customers. The statement above is also supported by the data that had been taken by the respondents presented in Chart 1 and Chart 2; it can be concluded that 94% of the respondents are interested in a brand that has identity, and they want to know more about the brand's products. The results of this paper are still far from faultless, but it is known that spiritual imagery inside advertisements can help spread a product's brand identity and increase purchase intention from the targeted audience.

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