

Commodifying piety and styling masculinity in "Kahf's *Jalan yang Kupilih*" campaign

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Abstract This study investigates the commercialisation of religion and masculinity in the Indonesian men's grooming campaign Kahf: *Jalan yang Kupilih*. The statement considers two key issues: (1) the Islamic symbols utilised in advertisements and their purpose in branding, and (2) the model of Muslim masculinity constructed through those symbols. The analysis relies on Roland Barthes' semiotics to interpret denotation, connotation, and myth as naturalised ideology, and it utilises Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry to understand standardisation and market forces driving representation. The study employs a qualitative semiotic analysis of eight video commercials on Kahf's official YouTube channel, which involves coding visual elements such as setting, gesture, and costume, and auditory elements including voice-over, dialogue, and music, and triangulates this with existing literature on Islamic advertising. Research suggests that ritual symbols such as ablution, prayer stances, Qur'anic/hadith verses, and Middle Eastern architectural settings are reinterpreted as markers of personal style that link devotion to consumer goods and company values. The campaign promotes a uniform masculine ideal characterised by cleanliness, composure, discipline, a global outlook, and a focus on family, while limiting the scope of acceptable religious and gender identities. Scenes of ablution, facial cleansing, and prayer among Qatar's iconic landmarks, and hadith panels in modern public areas, juxtapose spiritual purity with consumer preference and portray faith as a desirable lifestyle. This study enhances advertising semiotics by describing the way Islamic symbolism is utilised in narratives about men's grooming, and it also clarifies the empirical connections between visual representations of piety and branded masculinity.

Keywords: advertising; masculinity; religious commodification; semiotics

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INTRODUCTION

In modern times, the distinction between religious expression and capitalist goals is becoming increasingly obscured. What was confined to the private and sacred spheres is now driven by market principles, repositioned, and sold as cultural commodities. Religious symbols now serve a dual purpose, representing spiritual identity and being disseminated through various media and commercial outlets. The phenomenon is clearly visible in a television advertisement for Kahf, a men's personal care brand created by Paragon Corp, which is widely recognised for its halal cosmetic products in Indonesia. Kahf develops and markets a contemporary image of the Muslim man, characterised as clean, devout, self-assured, and fashionable, while still embodying traditional masculinity despite participating in activities typically associated with females.

The Kahf advertisement incorporates a variety of Islamic elements, including ritualistic phrases, prayer scenes, Arabic calligraphy, and Middle Eastern environments, into its marketing strategy, which results in a distinctly religious ambience. These symbols serve a commercial purpose rather than being genuine expressions of devotion. In its #JalanYangKupilih campaign, Kahf links Islamic principles with its skincare products, depicting piety as a lifestyle that can be adopted through branded goods. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (1944), the culture industry's theory asserts that cultural expressions, including music, fashion, and advertising, are stripped of their original significance and are mass-produced to cater to capitalist objectives. Within this framework, religion is viewed as a commodity. Ablutions, or Wudhu rituals, are being reinterpreted to move beyond their traditional purpose as spiritual preparation and are now being associated with facial cleansing practices that incorporate Kahf products. The visual contrast suggests that a contemporary Muslim man prioritises both cleanliness and devotion, exemplifying this through his choice of personal care products as well as prayer.

The commercialisation of faith has substantial repercussions, encompassing the transformation of spirituality into a marketable commodity. According to Lelwica (2011), spiritual hungers involve seeking spiritual fulfilment to satisfy consumer desires, rather than for personal transcendence. The Kahf commercial, for instance, conveys a message that extends beyond a skincare advertisement; it promotes the idea that Muslim men who use these products are more socially accepted, particularly within global Islamic communities. This framing allows men to engage in grooming activities without jeopardising their masculine image, as they redefine personal care as a commendable Islamic practice rather than a typically feminine pursuit.

Roland Barthes' semiotic framework serves as a powerful tool for deciphering the imagery with religious connotations in this advertisement. At a basic level, wudhu essentially involves washing before prayer. In the advertisement, it takes on connotations of purity, order, and a modern aesthetic. This spiritual intent is thus reinterpreted as an indicator of a life lived with aspirational goals. This phenomenon, as stated by Barthes (1972), involves the transformation of cultural symbols into perceived facts that conceal their fabricated origins. In this context, piety evolves from being about intellectual understanding or spiritual devotion to being more about personal image and self-imposed organisation.

This reframing of religion is also part of a larger initiative to redefine traditional masculine roles. These pursuits are often connected with skincare and grooming. Kahf reconfigures traditional notions of masculinity, presenting it as a blend of devoutness and fastidious grooming. It is expected that the ideal man will take care of his appearance, motivated by a sense of religious duty, rather than by vanity. In accordance with the Islamic perspective, being clean encompasses both hygienic and spiritual aspects, with cleanliness being a fundamental element of faith. The commercial promotes soap, but it also tells a visual narrative about the contemporary identity of a Muslim man. This revised form of masculinity is further developed by emotional depth and a feeling of social responsibility. Individuals like Ricky Harun, who embody the Hijrah movement, are portrayed as reflective, composed, and morally upright. This aligns with the emergence of soft masculinity in Indonesian popular culture, which is an image influenced by Korean dramas (K-Dramas), in which strength is reinterpreted through sensitivity and emotional comprehension. From a business perspective, these portrayals allow companies to access previously untapped male markets and also contribute to shifts in gender attitudes.

Advertising transcends commercial purposes, serving as a cultural platform where the boundaries of religion and traditional masculinity are debated, reinterpreted, and exploited for commercial gain. This study investigates these processes within the Kahf advertisement, exploring whether the representations presented improve public understanding of Islam or

instead reduce faith to a lifestyle choice. With these, the research study proposes two principal areas of investigation: (1) In what way are Islamic symbols employed in the Kahf #JalanYangKupilih advert to influence men's grooming practices? (2) How does the commercialisation of Islamic values manifest in the visual representation of the advertisement?

This occurrence takes on importance within the context of advertising as representation, an idea supported by Stuart Hall (1997), who argues that representation is not merely a reflection of reality, but rather a deliberate creation of meaning. Advertising employs language, images, and cultural allusions to create and disseminate connotations that shape viewers' comprehension of social identities and their associations with them. Representation is at the heart of redefining masculinity in Kahf's case. The visuals are characterised by bright tones, healthy and confident male figures, and narratives that promote energy and vitality, aiming to connect masculinity with self-care and refined aesthetic sensibilities. This shift indicates a departure from the conventional portrayal of men as solely physically robust and unemotional towards a more inclusive depiction that recognises vulnerability, spirituality, and self-care (Handayani et al., 2025).

The relationship between religion and advertising has demonstrated for a long time how symbols of a sacred nature can be utilised for financial gain. Research conducted by Ramadhan et al. in 2021 on advertisements for Marjan syrup during Ramadan reveals how Islamic imagery—such as takbir chants and traditional attire—are employed to evoke emotions and foster consumer trust. According to Kholqiana et al. (2020), halal cosmetic advertisements employ three primary strategies of religious commodification, namely the incorporation of Islamic imagery for aesthetic appeal, endorsements by prominent religious figures, and the inclusion of faith-based messages that often fail to provide practical value to the product. It illustrates how religious beliefs are reinterpreted in the marketplace by linking spiritual values with consumer purchasing decisions.

A shift has occurred in the depiction of masculinity in advertising campaigns. Masculinity is seen as a concept shaped by society, rather than something predetermined by biology, and is expressed and communicated through symbolic media portrayals (Hanke, 1998). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out that hegemonic masculinity is capable of adapting across diverse social and cultural settings. In Kahf adverts, the male Muslim character represents these traits: clean, spiritual, and socially responsible. True strength is best determined by self-control, spiritual commitment, and cultivated sensibility.

The impact of advertising on cultural trends ought to be taken into consideration. In 2005, Aprilia suggested that its activities amounted to cultural engineering, generating new identities and consumer desires. Studies by Lawono et al. in 2022 discovered that overexposure to advertisements impacts both purchasing choices and societal cultural norms. Adiyanto and Saptiyono (2022) propose that advertising either reinforces prevailing social norms or promotes novel ideologies disguised as lifestyle fashions. These processes turn consumption into a form of cultural participation.

Research conducted prior to this has provided insight into these dynamics. According to Handayani et al. (2025), Kahf's 'Wajah Cerah dan Berenergi' campaign differs from traditional masculine norms by emphasising maturity, emotional intelligence, and personal well-being. Kinasih and Azwar (2025) utilised Barthesian semiotics to find that male religiosity in #DetikDetikBerkahf is evident through environmentally conscious actions, well-organised worship, and personal cleanliness. According to Pratami and Hasiholan (2020), men's Biore advertisements mythologise cleanliness rituals as symbols of masculinity, consistent with Barthes' (1972) theory of myth. Koirudin et al. (2020) investigated the Resik V Keluarga Sakinah advertisement, finding that it reduced complex religious concepts to superficial depictions of purity. Ma'rufah (2023) examined the web series Miracle of Hijrah, highlighting how Islamic values were being commodified via symbols, influencer endorsements, and romantic storylines, which integrated spirituality into a brand-driven middle-class lifestyle.

Research collectively supports the notion that faith is fundamentally linked with consumer capitalism. Religious values are often presented selectively, reimagined as motivational concepts, and combined with business interests. Only a limited number of studies have examined the intersection of religion and masculinity within Indonesian advertising. The current study aims to close this specific knowledge gap. This study examines the Kahf #JalanYangKupilih commercial through analysis, investigating how Islamic symbolism

legitimizes male self-care and reinterprets modern Muslim masculinity in line with both religious and consumerist beliefs.

The study makes a significant scholarly contribution to critical media and cultural studies by examining how religious values are adapted into marketable symbols and how masculinity is redefined in commercial contexts. The publication provides advertisers with practical advice and encourages a more critical view among viewers about the commercialisation of faith in the media. This research not only expands our knowledge of Islamic representation in advertising but also exposes the broader implications of merging spirituality, consumerism, and gender identity in modern Indonesian culture.

In modern times, the distinction between religious expression and capitalist endeavour is becoming increasingly obscured. Religion has transitioned from being a private and sacred institution to being integrated into the framework of commercial practices, rebranded, and marketed as cultural goods. Religious symbols have taken on a new meaning and are no longer just a representation of spiritual identity but are also often stylised, commercialised, and widely disseminated across various media platforms. This phenomenon is clearly visible in a television commercial for Kahf, a men's personal care brand created by Paragon Corp, which is renowned for its halal cosmetic products in Indonesia. Kahf not only advocates skincare but also projects an idealised image of the contemporary Muslim man: a man who is clean, devout, self-assured, and fashionable, yet undeniably masculine, despite participating in practices commonly linked to femininity.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative-descriptive approach to uncover and interpret the underlying layers of meaning in media texts. In qualitative research, interpretive analysis is prioritised for achieving a deep understanding, rather than focusing on measurable variables or generalisable conclusions. Qualitative research, as stated by Kriyantono (2006), focuses primarily on descriptive data consisting of words, visual components, and narratives that unveil the underlying frameworks and ideologies at play. Conducted within a critical framework, the research is founded on an understanding of the power dynamics that influence how meanings are generated and sustained in media communication (Ardianto & Q-Anees, 2009). The research sought to investigate how masculinity and sharia imagery are represented and commodified within the framework of cultural industry practices, particularly in the area of commercial advertising.

The main source of the primary data is Kahf's television commercials, #JalanYangKupilih, which are available on the company's official YouTube account (@kahfeveryday). Researchers thoroughly collected and re-checked every advertisement uploaded with the keyword Jalan Yang Kupilih, ensuring that there were no duplicate or repetitive entries. Eight distinct commercials were identified in total through this process. Each of these videos features distinct visual or narrative elements in addition to their similar themes, which aids in their analysis. The #JalanYangKupilih advertisement was selected as the primary subject of analysis due to its prominent position, straightforward narrative, and successful integration of sharia principles with men's grooming practices. The remaining seven advertisements offer contextual reinforcement and comparison, thereby ensuring that the interpretation is grounded within the broader marketing campaign. This foundation is supported by scholarly articles, official reports, previous studies, and other relevant publications.

The focus of the analysis is on pinpointing visual and auditory cues that give rise to meanings associated with masculinity and Sharia religiosity. The visual aspects are considered through various elements, including gestures, camera angles, lighting, settings, costumes, and symbolic actions such as wudhu (Muslim rite to purify themselves using water before salah) or salah scenes. This includes dialogue, monologue, and background music within its scope. The study investigates how an advertisement constructs a storyline by integrating these multimodal elements, thereby equating self-care with devotion and legitimising consumption as a practice consistent with Sharia principles.

This study employed Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to break down these intricate meanings, which comprise three distinct levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth as outlined by Barthes (1988). The immediate meaning of a sign is its literal interpretation, commonly known as its denotation. Connotation involves secondary meanings that are often

shaped by cultural codes, emotions, and associations. Ideology begins to operate here by subtly integrating prevailing values into seemingly neutral presentations. At the mythic level, signs become embedded in what Barthes refers to as 'false consciousness', narratives that seem universally true but are in fact culturally created (Sobur,2006). These prevailing ideologies are often supported by myths that give a commonly misleading and overly optimistic portrayal of reality. The Kahf commercials exhibit manifestations of myths, conveyed through textual components such as characters, settings, visual codes, and perspective, as pointed out by Sobur (2009). Barthes' semiotic theory is particularly well-suited for analysing and interpreting how meaning is strategically encoded within advertisements.

Due to the study's text-based nature, the researcher acts as the principal tool for both data collection and interpretation throughout the investigation. The interpretive act is viewed as encompassing subjectivity, which is in line with the philosophical viewpoint of qualitative research methodology. Authentication of the findings through triangulation depends on referencing existing research on the commodification of religion, gender representation in advertising, and cultural analysis of media content. The researcher's interpretive perspective can be reinforced by placing it within a wider context of academic discourse, thereby ensuring analytical clarity. This framework facilitates a critical examination of how visual culture affects the relationship between Sharia values, gender identity, and consumerism. The #JalanYangKupilih advertisements by Kahf are analysed through the lens of Barthesian semiotics, showcasing that they transcend mere promotional tools and function as cultural artefacts that shape contemporary perceptions of sharia masculinity and lifestyle in a postmodern capitalist society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Barthes (1972) argued that advertising conveys information beyond the product, functioning within an 'economy of signs' that generates unique cultural meanings via mythological processes. In the commercial 'Jalan yang Kupilih', religious symbols are not used separately; instead, they are an essential part of a narrative that encourages virtuous and pure life choices, a moral contrast that leads to the creation of a myth about the ideal Muslim man, described as devout, intelligent, and aesthetically pleasing. During the naturalisation process, a cultural concept - namely religious self-care - is depicted as an inherent and universal value (Barthes, 1972).

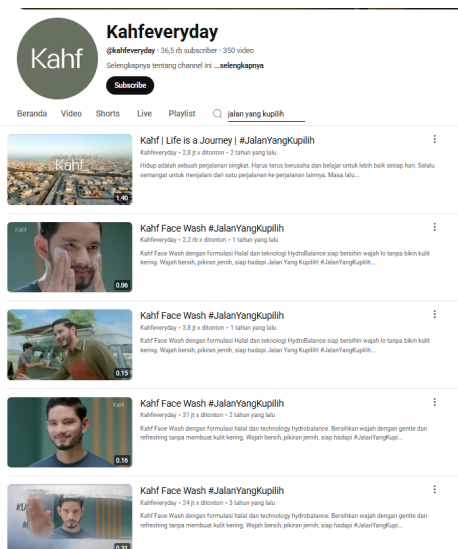
The advertisement exemplifies the commercialisation of spirituality, showing how spiritual values are diminished to symbols that can be bought, traded, and consumed through merchandise. Heryanto's study in 2011 discovered that Islam is not only deeply ingrained in the faith, but also widely practiced as a lifestyle within Indonesia's urban middle-class Muslim communities, a phenomenon that companies like Kahf are strategically incorporating into their marketing efforts. This advertisement assumes greater importance for semiotic analysis because it includes signs that convey both ideological influence and commercial appeal at the same time.

The researcher monitored advertisements on the official @kahfeveryday YouTube account (See Figure 1) by using the keyword Jalan Yang Kupilih and subsequently cross-checked them to ensure that no duplicates were included. The process yielded eight advertisements, which were subsequently selected for more in-depth analysis using Barthes' semiotics and examined from the perspective of the culture industry. Barthes identifies three levels of semiotic analysis, consisting of denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural significance), and myth (ideological narrative). The summary of Bathesian Application on findings available in Appendix A.

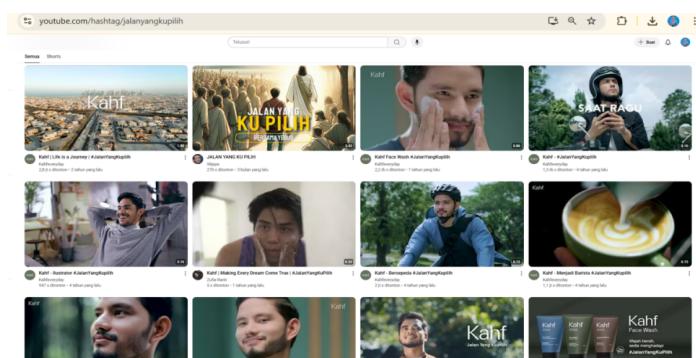
Theodor Adorno's views on the commercialisation of religion

Theodor W. Adorno's theoretical work on mass culture within the critical framework of the Frankfurt School was heavily influenced by sociological theories developed by Max Horkheimer. Adorno provides significant insight into the relationship between capitalism, culture, and religion through the concept of the culture industry. Adorno criticises how culture, which includes religion, has been reduced to homogenised mass commodities for public consumption, thus forfeiting its autonomy as a space for spiritual or ethical contemplation. When faith enters the commercial sphere, sacred customs such as ablution, prayer, and growing a

beard are reinterpreted from manifestations of piety to symbols of individual character and way of life, as exemplified by the Kahf advertisement Jalan yang Kupilih.



<https://www.youtube.com/@kahfeveryday/search?query=jalan%20yang%20kupilih>



<https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/jalanyangkupilih>

Figure 1. YouTube Channel of Kahf.
Source: YouTube Processed by Author (2025)

Adorno notes that initially useful items in advanced capitalist societies are transformed into exchangeable commodities (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1972). This process involves turning a force meant to promote freedom and self-awareness, like religion, into a means of maintaining the existing social order, often presented in an attractive and emotionally appealing manner. Barthes's semiotic analysis reveals that the Kahf advertisement incorporates Islamic symbols, encompassing literal interpretations like a man praying in the forest and performing ablution, as well as idealised representations of the Muslim man as independent, spiritual, modern, and masculine. Mass-produced cultural items may appear to be tailored to individual tastes, although they lack diversity, as stated by Adorno (Adorno, 1938/1991).

This advertisement employs religion not solely to endorse a facial wash or men's perfume, but rather to promote a carefully curated lifestyle that embodies the ideal Muslim man and caters to consumer aspirations. Spiritual contemplation is no longer the primary factor in determining religious fanaticism; it is now the aesthetic appeal of religious symbols that is used to boost commercial appeal. According to Barthes, this process demonstrates mythologization - the ideological transformation of cultural signs into something perceived as natural and universal (Barthes, 1972). A photo of a bearded man washing in a natural setting not only symbolises spiritual purity but also embodies a masculine perspective on spiritual cleanliness that is consistent with Kahf's brand identity.

Adorno viewed the culture industry as perpetuating societal acceptance by idealising consumer goods, thus concealing the underlying mechanisms of production, as noted by Morgan (2013). In the context of the Kahf advertisement, prayer and ablution are employed as style and identity markers, rather than being interpreted in their more nuanced meaning. Adorno's idea of a regression of listening arises from individuals relying on passive acceptance of visually appealing symbols rather than interpreting their meaning (Morgan, 2013, pp. 46-48). In his work *Selling God/Saving Souls*, Thomas (2009) observes that the contemporary world has witnessed religion transform into a highly organised system for the distribution of symbols and commodities. The author shows how the media and the industry incorporate religious values into formats that are both appealing and commercially successful. The Kahf advertisement showcases a blending of Islamic principles on simplicity and spirituality with capitalist values such as living an active lifestyle, maintaining physical cleanliness, and achieving personal success.

The culture industry manipulates people's spiritual needs to align them with its commercial objectives, Adorno argues. Religiosity that challenges social inequalities or material oppression is frequently utilised in marketing and branding campaigns. Boccuzzi's research (2019) on Evangelical Catholicism supports the notion that faith is commonly promoted as an emotional experience and a way to define oneself rather than a path to genuine freedom.

Adorno's critique demonstrates that commodification is not only a physical phenomenon but also an ideological issue. Initially a means of liberation, religion is eventually transformed into a new instrument of social oppression. The Kahf advertisement equates religion with a lifestyle preference by combining it with neoliberal values that include individualism, competition, physical appearance, and conventional masculine norms. The portrayal of men as brave, clean, spiritual, and strong suggests that being Muslim is associated with qualities such as style and resilience. Fauziah and Puspita (2022) also note that symbols of religion, like the hijab, have been reinterpreted as fashion items that help market beauty ideals.

In *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno portrayed such developments as a form of liquidation of religion, or "racketeering in religion" - where religion no longer fosters critical awareness but becomes a means of escape and pseudo-identification with unjust power structures (Brittain, 2018). In the Kahf advertisement, the slogan "the path I choose" translates as "jalan yang kupilih", which seems to suggest a genuine spiritual choice, but in reality, the available options are pre-determined within consumerist ideologies.

A critique of commodification by Flatschart (2012) suggests considering the commodity and its opposing value, which includes values like solidarity, authentic spirituality, and uncommodified spiritual experiences that commodities typically exclude. Kahf's advertisements function within visual capitalism, concealing the disparity between the spiritual and material by portraying them as harmoniously integrated in a narrative that equates self-grooming with worship.

The Kahf advertisement is viewed by Adorno as embodying forms of religious commodification motivated by the underlying logic of the culture industry. The campaign employs Islamic symbols to create an emotional and visual connection, thereby marketing a lifestyle that is rooted in faith but also compatible with consumerist capitalist values. This analysis, informed by Barthes' semiotics, demonstrates how myths emerge from religious symbols and are commonly accepted as normal, thereby transforming religiosity into a passive form of spiritual consumption that substitutes transcendental awareness with a desire for aesthetics and commercial identity.

The promotion of traditional masculine ideals in standardised advertisements

In contemporary society, masculinity has shifted from being exclusively a gender identity to a widely traded commodity that is mass-produced, disseminated, and bought. The phenomenon is clearly apparent in the Kahf campaign "Jalan yang Kupilih," where it depicts the Muslim man as clean, spiritual, and masculine in natural environments and public spaces. Barthes' semiotics suggests that the advertisement represents symbols such as prayer, ablution, and the beard as signifying not only rituals but also connotatively associated with strength and masculinity. These symbols are subsequently mythologised into an idealised image of the modern Muslim man: spiritual yet physically robust.

Adorno's view of the culture industry acquires particular importance at this point. According to Adorno & Horkheimer (1972), in advanced capitalism, culture is considered an

inauthentic expression of individuality and is instead seen as a manufactured product meant to preserve the current social hierarchy and limit society's capacity for critical thinking. In the Kahf advertisement, masculinity is portrayed as a product of market forces, rather than a natural aspect of male identity.

In this context, Adorno highlighted pseudo-individualisation, where consumers are given the illusion of freedom of choice, while the available options are actually uniformly standardised (Morgan, 2013). The male figure in Kahf's campaign appears authentic, but in reality, he represents a deliberately constructed ideal of masculinity: neat, bearded, physically fit, and spiritually dignified. Islamic values of piety and modesty are reimagined as attractive masculine ideals. Adorno's critique of symbolic domination through commodification is reflected here (Adorno, 1938/1991).

Barthes describes this myth as portraying the 'real man' as both devout and resilient. In the image of a man performing ablution in the forest, as in the case in question, spiritual closeness is contrasted with natural virility—two qualities that are presented as inherently natural, despite being socially constructed (Barthes, 1972).

Adorno warned that this naturalisation conceals a potentially hazardous standardisation process. The culture industry markets images and simultaneously sets the boundaries for what is viewed as acceptable forms of masculinity. Franks (2016) argues that the culture industry reduces humans to passive consumers of sensationalised representations, thereby diminishing their critical and political capabilities. The Kahf man is a part of capitalism's narrative, rather than an autonomous entity, in which spirituality is intertwined with physical appearance and personal empowerment.

According to Schlipphacke (2001), Adorno's more severe criticism is marked by symbolic emasculation, in which masculinity's independence is undermined and presented as a visual display controlled by the industry. In their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) described people in late capitalism as 'smiling eunuchs', who are conforming to consumer patterns that restrict genuine self-expression. The Kahf figure can thus be seen as a 'spiritual eunuch', outwardly devout but internally having an identity that was previously commercialised for the sake of visual appreciation.

Adorno envisioned a form of masculinity defined by autonomy, cultural refinement, and a critical perspective, contrasting it with the passive, commodified masculinity he condemned in popular culture, as noted in Schlipphacke (2001). This passivity is also exemplified by Kahf's depiction, which portrays men as consumers of religious values rebranded by capitalism. Spiritual practices are becoming more closely linked to physical appearance and consumer culture.

Barthes' concept, as outlined in his 1972 work, holds that myth transforms societal constructs into perceived natural facts. The prevalent notion is that Muslim men must practice ablution in isolated areas, pray individually, and use specific personal care items to embody masculine religiosity. The culture industry manipulates human experience for commercial purposes, claims Adorno, through such narratives.

Adorno asserts that the culture industry supports patriarchy by hiding domination behind aesthetically pleasing facades (Franks, 2016). The Kahf advertisement upholds patriarchal values by presenting a contemporary, polished, and commercially appealing representation of masculinity. The male figure persists in symbolising spiritual authority and control over himself and his environment, exemplified by his connection to nature, ceremonial practices, and personal cleanliness.

Research conducted by Iida in 2005 on the feminisation of masculinity in Japanese culture suggests that changes in masculinity can serve as a way to achieve freedom from the dominance of gender. In Kahf's case, the use of religious symbols and idealised masculine ideals limits alternative modes of expression. The model establishes a single market-driven representation of the 'proper' Muslim man: religious, attractive, clean, and a Kahf consumer.

Adorno's critique remains a highly relevant contemporary issue. In this advertisement, masculinity is presented as neither self-sufficient nor freeing, but rather dominated, commercially used for gain, and promoted. It has developed into a commodity and, more fundamentally, a system of thought that obscures power structures. In a world where visibility and markets are increasingly influential, Adorno's caution to develop critical thinking towards aesthetic forms, including those obscured by religiosity and heroism, remains pertinent today.

An analysis of Kahf's Jalan yang Kupilih campaign reveals the intersection point within the culture industry where the commercialisation of religion and the promotion of traditional masculine norms overlap. Masculinity is depicted as an ideal that can be consumed, blending piety and strength, while religious fervour is being idealised romantically. Reducing faith to a style and masculinity to a spectacle results in the erosion of authentic spirituality and diverse forms of masculinity. Adorno cautioned that cultural items not only provide entertainment but also help normalise social control by portraying it as an embodiment of freedom and personal preference, as argued by Adorno & Horkheimer (1972). The Kahf advertisement functions as both a marketing tactic and a cultural symbol that reflects and reinforces the core values of neoliberal consumer culture. A more discerning public awareness is therefore necessary, one that can resist passive acceptance of these myths and reimagine religiosity and masculinity beyond the confines of commercialisation.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Kahf: Jalan yang Kupilih campaign reveals that religious symbols such as ablution, prayer, and the beard are reinterpreted as commercial symbols, transforming them into myths about the 'ideal Muslim man'. This model of masculinity conceals the ideological underpinnings of consumer capitalism by perpetuating myths that are spiritual, stylish, and powerful. This campaign illustrates how advertising uses multiple layers of meaning—denotation, connotation, and myth—to turn sacred rituals into saleable images that promote market values. This research, guided by a combination of Barthes' semiotics and Adorno's critique of the culture industry, finds that Kahf advertisements convey pseudo-individualisation by representing grooming as a personal, religious choice that is standardised within the context of neoliberal consumerism. Masculinity and religiosity are reduced to mere spectacles that serve to maintain capitalist and patriarchal systems. The result is a limited and idealised portrayal of Muslim identity that excludes other forms of spiritual expression and masculinity.

This research delivers a considerable impact to the study of advertising semiotics by illustrating how commercial advertising can function as ideological texts that promote products while also shaping cultural perceptions of faith and gender. The research aims to address a gap in current studies by examining how Islamic religiosity and masculinity are combined in contemporary advertising campaigns, a field that has received relatively less attention than the commodification of femininity. In the Indonesian and broader Muslim-world context, the findings have a special importance, as halal branding and religious symbolism in consumer goods have become a significant platform for negotiating identity, modernity, and market influences.

The analysis underscores the importance of critical literacy when engaging with media that depict religion and gender in a positive aesthetic context. As Adorno warned, the culture industry caters to two functions, offering entertainment while covertly reinforcing the supremacy of particular values by masquerading as liberty and selection. The Kahf case highlights the vulnerability of sacred customs to being reduced to commercial endeavours, whereby devotion is redefined as a marketable and consumable commodity. Those involved in these campaigns, including scholars, practitioners, and consumers, must consequently remain watchful about their moral undertones. Future research could expand on this study by investigating the commercialisation of masculinity in Islamic advertising in comparison to equivalent trends in other cultural or faith-based contexts, thus highlighting both similarities and differences.

The Kahf campaign can be viewed as a substantial cultural item that not only represents but also shapes modern Muslim identities. This example serves as a caution about how consumerism based on neoliberal principles can encroach on areas traditionally considered off-limits, and it also provides a rich context for critical examination of the interconnections between religion, gender, and the media in the Indonesian media environment and beyond.

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Appendix A:

