

COMMODIFICATION OF RELIGION-BASED AUDIOVISUAL CONTENT ON THE YOUTUBE CHANNEL (CASE STUDY ON ISLAM POPULER YOUTUBE CHANNEL)

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Abstract

Technological developments have made it easier for people to consume and produce audiovisual content on social media, including through the use of the Islam Populeric YouTube channel which provides diverse information for its users. The channel owners monetize their content, making their content production practices profit-oriented. This article analyzes how Islam Populer commodifies Islamic-themed content to generate profits, as well as the exploitation of new media workers. The article shows that Islam Populer successfully commodifies the values and teachings of Islam in their content, generating profits for their media endeavors. However, Islam Populer remains a commodity for YouTube, as the account's performance attracts advertisers who benefit YouTube the most. This makes Islam Populer one of the parties that are exploited in the context of media work.

Keywords: *Islam, commodification, commodity, Islam Populer, YouTube*

INTRODUCTION

Changes in how people use and make information, including in Indonesia, are caused by advances in technology. This is because these service providers offer a faster and cheaper internet network. The social media platforms used by the community also vary. Several popular platforms used by the public to access entertainment include YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Based on data from Databoks (2020), YouTube will be the platform with the most users in Indonesia. This is shown through user data, which reaches 88% of the total social media users in Indonesia. This number shows that people in Indonesia tend to get most of their information from YouTube. Also, the spread of da'wah cannot be separated from social media, especially in the age of technology and information we live in now. This method makes it easier for people to access information about religious articles for themselves or others (Saputra, Susilo, & Harliantara 2021).

One party that takes advantage of the large number of social media users in Indonesia is YouTube users who have Islam Populer. It is a YouTube channel originating from Indonesia. This channel joined since June 21, 2017 ago. Based on data obtained from YouTube.com, this channel has been watched 467 million times by YouTube viewers. Meanwhile, the number of subscribers owned is hidden. However, based on the author's initial observations, this account already has more than 1000 subscribers, because this account has successfully monetized to benefit from the content being distributed.

Furthermore, the content produced by the YouTube channel, Islam Populer is related to the Islamic religion, such as the name of the channel it uses. This can be seen from the playlist list he made. The entire audiovisual playlist from the channel has an Islamic theme.

The data explains that Islam Populer is trying to commodify Islam in producing content on YouTube. This is seen as an interest owned by the owner of the channel to gain profit. In addition, it seems that there are other interests of the account owner besides obtaining economic benefits, namely the interest to spread Islamic ideology to further strengthen Islam in Indonesia.

The author uses Vincent Mosco's idea of "commodification" to see this case as a type of political economy. Commodification is the process of converting use value into exchange value in the form of products that can be marketed (Mosco, 2009: 127). This commodification makes all aspects or forms that are originally of use value, eventually modified into commodities that have an exchange value for economic needs. In this case, Islam Populer seeks to change the use-value of Islam as the religion of Muslims into a commodity for economic gain. Basically, the channel is produced with the aim of spreading Islamic values through internet technology. However, this content becomes a capitalist product to make a profit when each content is served by advertisements, which of course need to pay the channel owner and the platform.

Aside from looking at how YouTube is used to make money, the author also points out that content creators and YouTube owners sometimes take advantage of each other. At a glance, content creators on YouTube seem to be gaining big profits by uploading their audiovisual productions on the YouTube channel. These advantages are obtained from targeted online advertising that is tailored to the data and behavior of social media users (Fuchs, 2014: 105). Data from YouTube media users which are used as commodities by YouTube seem to provide benefits for the account owner concerned. But in the end, this also gives more benefits to YouTube as the owner of the platform. Apart from that, the exploitation of workers is very visible from the way YouTube and its content creators work in their efforts to make a profit from this digital business.

This study aims to discuss the commodification of content with Islamic nuances carried out by Islam Populer channel through their audiovisual production which is uploaded on YouTube. Furthermore, the author alludes to the exploitation of media workers that occurs on YouTube. Even though Islam Populer seems successful in commodifying Islam for the sake of making a profit, the owner of the channel ultimately becomes a media worker whose energy is "exploited" by capitalists, namely the YouTube platform itself.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method by analyzing audiovisual content from Popular Islamic channels as well as data related to the production and distribution of this content on the YouTube platform. The purpose of this study is to discuss the commodification of content with Islamic nuances and the exploitation of media workers that occur on YouTube, using Popular Islamic channels as a case study. First, the steps taken are data collection: Audiovisual content from Popular Islamic channels, such as videos and playlists produced by these channels. Statistical data related to Popular Islamic channels, such as the number of viewers and subscribers. The next step is data interpretation

to answer the problem formulation and research objectives, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of content commodification and exploitation of media workers on YouTube. Interpretation of the data will be presented in the form of a narrative description and research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Commodification and Power through Audiovisual Content

Islam is believed by Muslims to be a teaching that contains the teachings of tauhid, or the oneness of God, to the provisions that govern human life (Jamal, 2011: 283). Islam also teaches that this religion is the only one that is blessed by Allah, which ultimately leads to salvation in the hereafter for people who embrace this religion and practice what it teaches. As for those who deny it, they will be classified as losers.

This idea has been one of the things that Islam Populer has used to make videos with Islamic themes. People see the values and teachings of Islam as things that can be used to make audiovisual content. This is also supported by the fact that most people in Indonesia are officially Muslim, which is based on their religion.

The commodification of Islam, which makes Islam a commodity with a market price, is inseparable from human social needs. With the emergence of the capitalist industry, many commodification processes occurred, including the commodification of religion. This is seen by Mosco (2009: 129) as a form of human need to satisfy physical hunger, which is a form of social need.

The commodification carried out by Islam Populer is by producing audiovisual content with Islamic nuances for its channel. Content created by Islam Populer is not 100% sourced from the visual content it has. Islam Populer utilizes a variety of visual content that other industries have. This channel takes a variety of pre-existing visuals, and reproduces them so that the content they create looks new. In the end, the product used in the audiovisual is the result of a reproduction of the pre-existing visual, then packaged with audio in the form of an explanation related to the theme raised.

One example of the commodification of Islamic values and teachings produced by Islam Populer can be seen in its audiovisual content entitled *Ternyata Salat Malam Dapat Sembuhkan Penyakit*. The audiovisual takes one of the teachings of Islam regarding the recommendation of sunnah prayers, in the form of night prayers that can be performed by Muslims in addition to carrying out their obligation to pray five times a day. In this audiovisual, Islam Populer does not only frame it with the recommendation of sunnah prayers to get rewards, but also relates it to the concept of health, which is obtained through night prayers.

The use value of the evening prayer, which is related to the health that is obtained through the prayer, is then produced by Islam Populer as content on its YouTube channel. The uses and benefits of this evening prayer are then transformed by Islam Populer into interesting content to watch. Content that originally had a function as use value in the form of teachings and knowledge related to night prayers, turned into goods for "sale" when the audiovisual content producer uploaded the audiovisual to a YouTube account. In this case,

the YouTube account is seen as a transmission to change the use value into the exchange value for the audiovisual. This is because when Islam Populer started uploading its audiovisuals, it had the goal of profiting from the production of the content it owns. This is seen when viewers open and play the provided audiovisual. At the time before entering the intended content, viewers will be exposed to advertisements that have been pasted at the beginning before the intended audiovisual can be watched. Here, it is clear that the audiovisual production of Islam Populer is intended to gain profit and be commercialized. Because the audiovisual has advertisements, the owner of the channel has an interest in gaining profits in the form of popularity obtained through the number of viewers and subscribers, which has the potential to become an economic profit.

In addition, other interests that are related to the power you want to get. In this case, the power in question is a form of hegemony from Islam Populer through Islamic teachings, which are produced through audiovisual content. Hegemony is used to see that humans are not only controlled by force alone, but also controlled through the ideas that are built into their minds (Bates, 1975: 351). Content in audiovisual form uploaded by Islam Populer, apart from being profitable, is also intended to further expand information and teachings about Islam. This ultimately aims to influence viewers on the teachings of Islam, that Islam has values that develop and do not stop at mere religious issues.

As in the uploaded audiovisual, night prayers, which are teachings and recommendations for sunnah worship for Muslims, also have health benefits. These health benefits lead to humans trying to maintain their health. This kind of thinking is then used by Islam Populer to try to hegemonize its viewers, so that their view of Islam becomes in the direction that Islam also follows the times. It is things like this that later become the interests of Islam Populer. By instilling the notion that Islam follows the times and is current and popular according to the name of its channel, Islam Populer can utilize this thinking to commodify Islamic values that are produced in content on YouTube.

YouTube Creator Exploit

Islam Populer as a YouTube channel that has successfully monetized, has certainly benefited from the economy. This monetization also requires several conditions to be approved by YouTube. Based on an explanation from support.google.com, several conditions include that the account owner must have an AdSense account linked to a YouTube account. This account serves to manage incoming ads. In addition, Islam Populer must also have more than 1000 subscribers, and the content has been watched for 4000 hours. This requirement can be seen as the basis for the exploitation carried out by YouTube against channels that utilize the platform.

The work system as a content creator on YouTube can be seen in a hierarchy, where the platform owner himself is the capitalist and the channel owner as well as the content creator are laborers. In this case, there is a class system, namely the upper class and the lower class. Indirectly, YouTube employs content creators to provide benefits to the platform. In this case, YouTube seems to be promising content creators that they will make

a profit. The profits they get are basically from advertising, not from the monthly salary that capitalist industrial workers get in general.

Before arriving at how exploitation occurs for YouTube content creators, especially for Islam Populer, we can first look at it from a capitalist perspective. In capital accumulation, Marx (in Fuchs, 2014: 103) explains, capitalists buy labor and production facilities, such as raw materials, technology used, land used, and so on. From the owned capital, it is then turned again to obtain new production capital and get the rest, which becomes the profit from this production.

When looking at it from the capital side, it seems that there are problems that occur. YouTube as a digital capitalist industry spends capital limited to making a company, creating a YouTube domain, managing it, and the resources working in the company. However, YouTube content creators in this case are not considered laborers or employees who get a salary from YouTube. Content creators on YouTube need to get monetization approval first as well as approval from advertisers, who can then give them a profit from existing production.

In addition, in creating YouTube content, Islam Populer, the subject of this study, works without obtaining capital from YouTube, starting from network capital, production capital, and distribution capital, all of which are borne by Islam Populer. The absence of capital is one of the parts where, in this YouTube capitalism, the platform benefits, because it has workers and work tools without incurring any costs. This can be seen as the beginning of the exploitation felt by every YouTube channel owner, especially Islam Populer. He creates content with the idea of commodifying Islamic values and teachings, however, when this content is uploaded on YouTube, it belongs to YouTube and provides benefits for him, because it can attract consumers without having to produce commodities in audiovisual form.

In the media business, viewers on YouTube can be considered "audiences" or "viewers" in mass media. Dallas Smythe (1977 in Rigi & Prey, 2015: 393). argues that audiences are commodities for media that can be sold to advertisers. Audiences, or more often called viewers on YouTube, do not only act as spectators of the audiovisual content presented. However, they are also producers, so in this case the prosumer concept emerges.

Because of the change from mass media to social media, people who do both, called "prosumers," have grown in number. They act as producers of the content they create as well as consumers of the content they create. Web 2.0 made media users active users. They can produce content uploaded through Web 2.0, such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and online forums, and participate in open-source projects (Tapscott & Williams 2008). In this case, Fuchs (2014) argues that audience commodities have also shifted into prosumer commodities on social media (Rigi & Prey, 2015: 393). In this case, the prosumer is seen as statistical data in the form of YouTube account users, which are used as commodities to be sold to advertisers. It was here that advertisers began to be interested in placing their ads on YouTube.

Islam Populer, who is now seen as a YouTube content creator, is part of a prosumer commodity. This channel can get AdSense benefits as seen from the number of subscribers

and viewers it has. Of this amount, Islam Populer has succeeded in benefiting from its commodification strategy of Islamic values and teachings in the form of audiovisual content in contemporary packaging. Even so, in the end, the results of the creative work carried out by Islam Populer perpetuate the power of this digital capitalist industry.

According to Andrejevic (2009: 409), exploitation that occurs on YouTube is a form of interactive exploitation. Interactive exploits see that every action of a user, in this case a YouTube user, will be caught and worked as a commodity for marketers and advertisers in the industry. The user data then begins to be collected to see trends in user behavior on the internet. This behavior of theirs will eventually lead to a form of targeted advertising.

Then, when viewed based on Marx's theory of added value, YouTube can exploit its users, who become prosumers, on a large scale. Marx (in Magnis-suseno, 2016: 187) explained that the theory of surplus value shows that all profits achieved by capitalists are nothing more than the results of labor that are not paid to him. This can be seen from the case of Islam Populer. In producing content, Islam Populer requires capital tools to produce audiovisuals that will be uploaded. From this capital, it can be seen that Islam Populer needs to have its own capital in order to produce existing content. In addition, the human resources who carry out the creative process of this audiovisual also do not get paid from YouTube, so the capital of tools and workers must be thought of by Islam Populer themselves. In this case, YouTube does not incur any costs.

When Islam Populer starts uploading its audiovisual content, this is where YouTube gets commodities to promote to advertisers through videos from the Islam Populer Channel. YouTube is back to getting this content commodity for free. Islam Populer voluntarily and in its own interest provides this content which is actually to perpetuate the power of this digital capitalism. When the ads start coming in, YouTube starts to benefit from these ads. The benefits can also be seen without spending capital to produce the content targeted by the ad. In this case, the channel owner then gets a share of YouTube's profits. There is a very drastic gap in seeing this situation. Islam Populer needs to work hard without being paid to be able to benefit from its work. He needs to spend capital in the form of economics for tools and labor to carry out production. Meanwhile, YouTube as a platform provider, does not need to spend capital to create content and pay creators. They just have to wait for an audiovisual uploader on their platform. So that the added value generated by YouTube reaches 100% without spending the production capital.

There is also exploitation that occurs to users where users do not get economic benefits at all. This happens because of account monetization rules. Not all accounts can be approved by YouTube for monetization. In this case, YouTube has the power to determine which accounts can be monetized, so that they can receive advertisements and earn income through the economy. When accounts don't get approved for monetization, they become free laborers who don't get any benefits. The labor and capital they spend will be wasted. On the other hand, YouTube will still get the maximum profit, because when a user is registered on a YouTube account, they will immediately become a prosumer commodity that can be sold to advertisers.

In addition, commodities that can be sold by YouTube are not only limited to audiovisual content, but all data recorded on the platform, user data, personal data, actions from browsing behavior, to their communication behavior in the comment's column, which is made to be bid material in targeted advertising (Fuchs, 2014: 110). From this it can be seen that the prosumer from YouTube in the end only becomes a commodity to be sold. They are not seen as subjects, but seen as objects being sold. Even when they become creators, there is no guarantee for them to benefit due to the administrative problems that YouTube sets for monetization.

Advertising as YouTuber Income

It has been explained that the advertising targets on YouTube do not come from audience commodities, but come from prosumer commodities. Social media technology now that has utilized artificial intelligence makes it possible to group audiences according to their interests according to the results of their behavior on the internet (Rigi & Prey, 2015: 397). In addition, the development of the YouTube platform can also identify the tools used by users to access the platform, whether using a PC or smartphone.

This is what the author observes when using YouTube to open Islam Populer's content. When using a PC as media browsing, the advertisements that are presented in the initial appearance of YouTube are application advertisements that can only be used by the Windows system. However, when the author accesses YouTube using smartphone media, the advertisements that are served are related to applications that can be used via smartphones. In addition, there are also general advertisements, such as product advertisements that are deliberately placed in the content provided.

This shows that there are differences in how to advertise between mass media and social media. Social media with targeted advertising tries to touch consumers more by identifying their behavior to the media they use to access. This shows that targeted advertising tries to touch consumers to aspects of their behavior and social life. Consumers seem to continue to be the target of capitalist industries to be controlled and they seem to be unable to escape the bondage of the industry. On YouTube, this can also be seen from the ads which have a very short duration in the form of overlay ads where these targeted ads try to get viewers to click and enter into the product offer in the ad in question (Wasko & Erickson, 2009: 380).

In prosumer commodities that occur, advertisers do not buy the audience that is the commodity being offered (Fuchs, 2014: 113). The audience whose data is already owned by YouTube, is used as statistical data to measure the level of audience on the platform. YouTube, by offering a number of audiences that use its platform, is an attraction for advertisers to pay YouTube to serve their ads on content that has been monetized and according to the target market they want.

These advertisements are a source of income that YouTube earns by selling all of its commodities to advertisers. The more users who become commodities for YouTube, the greater the commodity that can be offered for profit. Advertisers are the main source seen from the availability of all YouTube content for free. Users do not need to pay for

production via YouTube. They can freely upload, produce, and consume anything via YouTube. Instead, the audience is made a commodity by this platform.

Fuchs (2014:114) says that audiences create the value of commercial media commodities, and that the price of audience commodities will be based on the number and average of certain samples of audiences. It shows that on YouTube, the audience is only seen as a mere commodity. They have no price when there are few. So that statistical data from the audience on YouTube will greatly affect the income earned. The bigger the statistics, the greater the profit.

Enter the case of Islam Populer, where this account has more than 1,000 subscribers with audiovisual views of 467 million times. This of course has exceeded the number of YouTube account monetization, so Islam Populer has become one of the channels targeted by advertisers to place ads on their content. The statistical data owned by Islam Populer here also determines the benefits it gets. The greater the statistical data, the more advertisers will place their ads. In the end, the content will be embedded not only with one ad, but several ads depending on the popularity of the channel.

For channels that do not have popularity and do not meet the monetization requirements, advertisers will not be interested in placing their ads. This then makes the creator of the channel in question will not get an economic profit, because no ads are coming in. Even so, this platform provider as a digital capitalist industry will still benefit from advertisers. Because the statistical data it has is a collection of global data. Meanwhile, the statistical data owned by channel owners, such as Islam Populer, is only part of the data that is sold by YouTube. So statistical data for digital workers like this is very important and determines their income.

CLOSSING

Conclusion

Islam Populer has been able to make money as a YouTube channel by turning Islamic values and teachings into content that can be sold. Such content can be seen as a commodity item sold by the channel. Islamic values and teachings originally had a use value to provide teachings to Muslims in order to obtain life safety in the world and the hereafter, according to the Qur'an. But in the process of commodification carried out by Islam Populer, Islam is no longer seen that way. Islam is used as a commodity for him to gain profits in the form of an economy from the results of incoming advertisements.

Even though the commodification done by Islam Populer has helped the owner of the channel, he is still the one who is being taken advantage of. This is because Islam Populer who is a YouTube user is also seen as an object, not a subject anymore. Islam Populer here is a commodity that YouTube uses to gain profits by attracting advertisers. With the success of Islam Populer in commodifying Islam, what happened was that the subscribers of this channel increased rapidly and many viewers were willing to watch it.

The audience of Islam Populer is then seen again as a prosumer commodity. They not only consume, but also produce. Production on YouTube is not only done when uploading content. However, when they provide comments and likes, it can also be seen as

a form of production. All data and behavior that occurs on YouTube eventually becomes statistical data. This data is used to attract advertisers. The greater the statistical data, the more interested advertisers will be, because advertisements offered through social media are targeted advertisements, which are considered effective because they are based on user behavior.

Apart from that, there are also forms of worker exploitation that occur on YouTube. Content creators such as Islam Populer eventually become exploited even though they get economic benefits. This is because the creative team from Islam Populer works without being paid directly by YouTube. They also need personal capital to be able to create content, as well as form human resources for free. The income that Islam Populer gets comes only from advertising. This income can be obtained if the channel successfully monetizes its account. Then if the account does not get monetization approval, then the owner will not benefit from the work done. Meanwhile, YouTube itself will continue to benefit, namely from incoming advertisers, free content creators, to content uploaded voluntarily by users. So that the added value or surplus obtained by YouTube without spending capital for its production. The only capital from YouTube is when building and maintaining the platform to keep it running smoothly.

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