

THE EFFECTS OF RELIGIOSITY IN ADS TOWARD BRAND IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

Religious beliefs play a significant role in actions and attitudes of their followers – including brand preference. These symbolic reference group associations are employed to motivate better engagement, and hopefully would respond more favorably to something that reflects the audience's personal behavioral dimension. Hence, audience preferences background including their values and beliefs are being adapted in marketing activities. The key element could be religion. However, religiosity's role in the development of a brand image by religious visual communication design is rarely discussed, even though there are emotional connections in the marketing activities. This study's objective is to understand how culture, specifically religiosity, could affect the brand image through local ads' appeal. Five different brands from outdoor advertisements were selected as a case study for this research. In generating a deep and nuanced understanding of the case study, qualitative research was employed to obtain an in-depth appreciation in sociological context. Thus, seven informants of expertise participated using semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool, allowing insights with an open dialogue. Thematic analysis assisted by Atlas.ti helps identify patterns across the collected datasets. Three main themes were discovered – offering insights on the issue: commodification, *halalness* and trustworthiness. Religiosity is said to be positively affected by religious visual communication design in ads. These emotional strategies in marketing easily gain attention from their values, which are later translated into trustworthiness – encoded by a unique set of religious preferences which are transferred into the advertised products. The ideology of religious cues in ads, and the assumptions of the products being *halal* or Muslim-made are easily associated by influencing the consumers' perspectives as the products' brand image. On the other side, these ads are also considered as misleading or misled ads when the important details of the products including the *halal* logo are not outlined. The manipulation of religion as an emotional appeal that is applied to obscure the users is called commodification; especially when all the products are not associated with the religion's needs. Therefore, even though the ads come with 'Islamic brand image' it is not aligned with the Islamic marketing practice through advertising. A fine line between marketing and religion needs to be drawn by the marketers or advertisers to avoid it being exaggeratedly used before becoming a norm for promotional appeals in local ads.

Keywords: *Advertisement, brand image, Islamic ads, religiosity, visual communication*

INTRODUCTION

In short, religion can be defined as an organized belief system, practices, rituals, or symbols designed to facilitate closeness to God which later influences someone's system of life as mentioned by Farah and Samad (2014). Meanwhile, religiosity means the degree of an individual's commitment to uphold religious values and beliefs that later affects their daily activities including assessing their daily consumptions. Religious associations have a great tendency to influence the ways people live from the selections they make, and to whom they relate with (Niazi, Ghani & Sadia Aziz, 2019). This influence is apparent in many levels such as ethics, socials, and most of the time influencing the actions and attitudes of its followers. Einstein (2011) mentioned that religious branding has become increasingly evident – being blended with the commercial world in a series of interdisciplinary volumes. The increasing attention on religion and marketing has been directed to the growing interest for researchers over the past decades to understand the concept. Prior studies by Soumaya, Ines, Ines et.al (2015) explained that religion status as a culture explicitly determines the behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals in their relationships with others. Thus, religion is even the core of certain local ads' campaign to gain believability and attract maximum audience attention. Now, religious values are also considered as in trade activities – a factor that would affect many consumers' behaviors (Attia, 2017). The involvement of consumers in their social causes by making use of their cultural and religious values make a better engagement program which eventually translates into positive changes in consumers' behavior.

The application of religious cues in ads is a part of communication process which was mentioned by Hashem (2016) as transferring thoughts, ideas, words, meanings, and suggestions through various means. This informative process aims to deliver a particular idea to another party in a suitable, understandable, and vivid way. Consumers depend on the ideas of marketing and advertising to identify a certain idea or to be convinced with the association created to them. According to Mooij (2019), this 'association network' is known as a brand image that is created in consumers' minds from the brand name itself, visual images, product attributes, benefits and values, as well as occasions of usage. Stolz and Ususnier (2019) stated that the sense of belonging commonly creates a strong component of any religion which influences consumer consumption, shaping behavior, and the importance of catering to their needs. Through branding, consumers will easily see who you are, what your purpose is, and ultimately determine their trustworthiness in your message. Any ad represented by a specific brand image plays an important role in the development of the brand itself, because it represents the

customer's emotional brand of a particular service or product (Idris, Kadir, Hidayat et al., 2018). However, the translation of experiences, perceptions, beliefs or even feelings toward the brand image is rarely discussed specifically in local ads. Therefore, this study is expected to add to the existing knowledge by exploring a deeper understanding of how culture, specifically religiosity, could affect brand image by the local ads' appeals.

⁸ The use of context, the interplay of interpretations with many other forms of symbolism, intuition and even imagination play an important role as a reflection of the visual communication design used. In this regard, this paper contributes to this area by exploring religiosity's effects as a moderating factor in the formation of beliefs toward brand image – the existence of Islamic signs as religious symbols has been transformed into a commercial entity allowing a different relationship of image and message. Significantly, religion as a source of reference creates a complex interaction of codes on brand image, making it valuable to conduct this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Image

To be different in the market, distinct features are needed for any product to be noticed and this is where branding takes place. Ahmed and Jan (2014) mentioned that ⁹ brand is a popular term in the field of marketing and is defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or any other features that identify a seller's goods or services as distinct from those of other sellers”. To distinguish a differentiation, all kinds of signs from names, shapes, words, letters, numbers, the forms of the products, pictures, or combinations of any of these are applied as a 'brand' (Durmaz & Yaşar, 2016). This includes a promotional content in advertising (Heizer, Jay & Render, 2019) and visuals are an important element in delivering it (Wu & Chen, 2019). Consumers' total perception of a product on the market is referred to as brand image. It is the consumer's point of view toward a company or product, with the goal of guaranteeing that customers have a positive perception of the company (Gavurova, Bacik, Fedorko et al., 2018; Indarto, Suroso & Sudaryanto, 2018; Kim & Chao, 2019). The basis definition on brand image by Keller is the basis development of the definition, and it is widely used – a belief reflected by a particular brand association held in consumer memory that is usually organized in some meaningful ways as stated by Ansary and Nik Hashim (2017).

The concept of brand image is to garner attention, trust, and change consumer perceptions (Świtała, Gamrot, Reformat, Bilińska-Reformat et al., 2018; Wu & Chen, 2019). Every uniqueness and privilege found is very important to gain recognition whereby brand

image includes the customer's judgment of the image created, carrying an impact on consumers' decisions and actions (Durmaz et al., 2018; Išoraitė, 2018). This will also affect purchasing power (Adenan et al. 2018) as consumers buy what the brand stands for; trust, ideas, and how a product is seen by them, among other factors. As one of the huge impacts on users (Durmaz et al. 2018), it plays a vital part since it reflects a product and fosters product loyalty too (Taiwo, Ucheaga, Achugamonu et al., 2017). It also shows the unique qualities or properties of a brand that distinguishes it from other competitors and assure its identification in a highly competitive market (Świtała et al. 2018). There are three main components of brand image consisting of (i) corporate image – a form of identity for a product or service, (ii) user image – involves the users that use the products or services, and (iii) product image – the description of the products, including their advantages and benefits (Heizer, Jay & Render 2019). Świtała et al. (2018) further stated that brand image consists of four elements: (i) verbal identification, (ii) visual identification, (iii) brand promotion in the form of marketing communication, and (iv) behavioral system of people (workers) linked with a particular brand. These elements create a consistent system of activities and therefore encompass both visual elements and brand associations like reliability and quality. Thus, the construction of a positive reputation for a product or service is evaluated by the consumers throughout every interaction as a part of consumer assessment to form a perception in the user's mind (Indarto et al., 2018).

Islamic

Ads

The concept of Islamic marketing is different from the concept of contemporary ads headed by capitalism, that fulfils the purpose of earning more by any means such as exaggerating product features or using emotional elements and sexually appealing visuals (Bari & Abbas, 2011), which motivated them to spend their money on. The most distinguished difference of Muslims from other followers of faiths is that the influence of religion is very clear in every aspect governing the duties, morals and behaviors of all Muslims that encompass social, political, and economic (Embong, Salleh, Wan Yusof et al., 2017). This consequently influences advertising and marketing activities from content to execution. Parente and Strausbaugh-Hutchinson (2014) mentioned that advertising practices are constructed on the basis of marketing that needs to be integrated by alerting consumers to the products or services being sold. Thus, having the right positioning in the media is important in defining a brand image because of the experiences, perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge of consumers related to the promoted products. Campaign is not conducted for product sale, but it is also a pervasive societal activity that contributes to the development of the marketing concept which includes the aspect of religious-

based brand image (Idris, Kadir, Hidayat et.al, 2018). The ground concept is designed to adjust the environment or personality of the consumer in Islamic marketing. Wearing *Hijab* by covering the *aurat* (i.e private body parts) especially for women is an example of religious affiliation (Maghfirah, 2020). It reflects a strong presence of an individual's religious identity. However, there is a crucial need to understand the ethical aspects as well, as highlighted in Islamic marketing. Emotionally, they engage a spiritual attachment between the brand in relation with the customer.

Alserhan (2011) and Shafiq, Haque, Abdullah et.al (2017) outlined general rules coming from the basic principles pertaining to *halal* and *haram* as a boundary line for Islamic advertising which are: (1) it shouldn't exploit basic instincts of consumers, provocation should be avoided, and knowing that desires that can never be fulfilled, (2) it should be based on truth and completely reveal all product attributes, (3) the product shouldn't be *haram* neither should it be harmful, and lastly (4) ads should advocate consumption as a form of devotion and encourage moderation at the same time. Moreover, the application of these Islamic laws is able to help maintain a balance between the marketers or advertisers' responsibilities toward their companies in terms of profits, and providing safety toward the customers (Saeed & Baig, 2013) The understanding of advertisements that follow Islamic guidelines ensure the welfare of the society, or showing a sense of justice to them that helps prevent the ads from being offensive, even seditious, gratified, or manipulating information. Ethics from the viewpoints of Islam are standards that prescribe what a man is ought to do, address virtues, responsibilities, and attitudes of the individuals, and the society. Even in many Muslim countries, ads campaigns are away from these marketing and advertisement practices which later create a social dilemma (Bari & Abbas, 2011). It is because the gist of Islamic ethics in running businesses is through honesty, which encourages a fair communication.

Visual Communication

Visual communication is a nonverbal sign in communication that is very significant in the present era. Daily, people rely a lot on visual communication, which is in line with the advancement form of communication medium. In the contemporary world, visual communication can be displayed in many forms such as paintings, signals, illustrations, graphics, books, animations, advertising, web designs, films and much more (Ijaz, 2018). Just like conventional communication, people receive information from the source and then make an action based on that. However, visual communication is more than entertaining the audience

through images and texts. It is a complex system that is important in helping people understand each other and make people's lives easier by having more effective communication using signs and symbols as cues (Yazar, 2012). It uses a variety of visual elements to develop a narrative and employs multiple formats that can achieve specific goals and reach key audiences. According to Zhang (2021), advertising through visual communication effectively helps increase the effect of publicity by influencing individuals' visual recall which in turn improves advertising messages and inspires the targeted consumers to buy the products. This can be done by showing a certain living style, environment, or even with the right language as codes that resemble information contained in visuals (Fahmy, Bock & Wanta (2014). Thus, it is suitable to identify a seller's goods or services that differentiate each product or an organization from its competitors' that is called branding – a marketing concept that is defined by a name, sign or symbol (Slade-Brooking, 2016). However, signs can have various facets of meanings as there are many factors that affect how respondents interpret visual stimuli especially on the issues of culture; ethnicity, age, gender, socio-economic status, work, location, education, religion and many more. According to Maghfirah (2020), visual communication design produces signs containing signifiers and signified, which then form denotative meanings (explicit or literal meanings) and connotative meanings (implicit meanings that involve emotions, feelings as well as culture).

Daimin (2014) stated that the process of creating meanings starts by identifying the signified, which is the concept, based on the cues given by the signifier, the sign in semiotic theory. The current advertising trends demand new and richer experiences toward consumers which visual communication can offer to give a maximum impact and convince them to act (Tilak, 2020). Emotional strategy can also be achieved by transforming visual communication into a sensation which triggers consumer memories and certain models of perception. Yet, effective communication is not always achieved in any communication that is called semantic noise – the type of disturbance in the transmission of a message that interferes with the interpretation of the message due to ambiguity in words, sentences or symbols used in the transmission of the message, especially in in an intercultural interaction (Jandt, 2010). In fact, humans have the capability of responding in different ways, and they do that most of the time, until there is no single objective of "reality"; there are only (possibly multiple, possibly conflicting) interpretations of a situation.

METHODOLOGY

To emphasize an individual's perspective on the investigative situation, case studies as a research method were selected as the center of this social science research. This interpretative paradigm and phenomenological approach is considered as a form of descriptive method with in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, governed by an interview guide, which served as a framework for the interview as it was not too formal in term of conversation. Flexibility is the key in semi-structured interviews that ¹³ allow researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest, necessary for further discussions that may diverge (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). This is unlike the structured interviews where the respondents are asked the same questions in the same manners, as they are unsuitable for a qualitative study. Seven informants from a purposive sampling were chosen to look out and to ¹² collect a wide range of information about the research's subject. Purposeful sampling helps to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest which is widely used in qualitative research (Alinkas, Horwitz, Green et.al, 2015). Therefore, lecturers from the design and communication field, marketers, advertisers, and designers willingly participated in this study. They are important as a mix of persons interviewed, reflecting all possible sides of the study's issues. Their participation was relevant due the ability to communicate about their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and thoughtful manners, alongside the reviewed literatures.

The prominent scopes and limitations of this study included the subjects of artwork – outdoor media that are only as shown in Figure 1.0 below. The focus is from the experts' perspectives as informants in giving a considerable depths and insights to be analyzed. These five brands are Jus Al Sunnah (juice), Masyhur (drink), and cosmetic brands which are Ellhaj, Imanni and Nuraysa.



Figure 1.0: Five brands for this research's case study.

Billboard being an outdoor medium was chosen to be researched in this study, since many consumers are easily exposed to it in the context of Islamic commodification in ad, other than this being wide-open to various backgrounds of audiences. It's easily seen these days and they have become a part of the environment, not just in highways but urban areas as well. Some notable features about billboards include its wide-openness to various backgrounds of audiences, allowing them to see the ads through an interpretive frame of their own. These five selected brands were chosen from a total of 34 brands that were photographed along Ipoh to Ayer Keroh, Melaka. All these brands had more than one billboard along the highway as well as their own social media platforms to remind the viewers about their existence and increase the frequency of consumer exposure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Atlas.ti were operated in managing the data analysis for the trustworthiness and auditability of the qualitative research, specifically in conducting the thematic analysis – generally described as a nonlinear, iterative process (Saldana, 2016). It starts by combining both transcribed data from digital records and field notes to understand the information that was collected before. Before the data was uploaded to Atlas.ti, a clean data transcript was prepared by removing and modifying incorrect, irrelevant or duplicated data. Thematic analysis was done by coding the selected text and later searching for themes with broader patterns of meanings. This process helped to reduce the transcript data to become more manageable to achieve a simple conceptual schema. These data were conceived as sharing some perceived commonality that was later indexed, consisting of several codes, and linked for more in-depth analysis to form a meaningful and interpretive analysis. Relationship model constructed on Atlas.ti was useful to illustrate the inter-relationships or dependencies between the data highlighted. Islam already outlined a clear guideline in Quran and Hadith, regarding the operation of any businesses by promoting a set of fundamental principles to maximize values via effective marketing strategy. However, the lack of understanding about Islamic ads had a significant impact on the visual communication design in marketing campaigns specifically outdoor media, even for Muslim-owned brands.

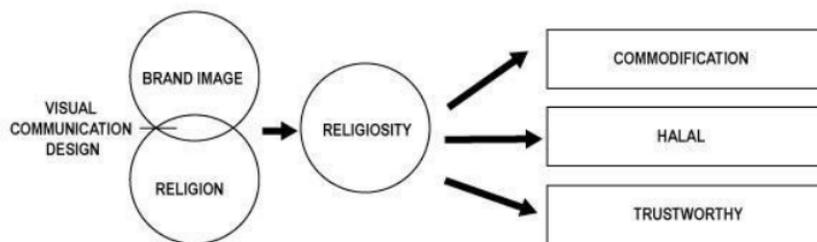


Figure 2.0: Framework of the findings that coded three main themes based on the analysis

Religion does have a significant application of visual communication design in advertising activities. It is believed to be the most efficient marketing strategy within a short time. Commodification, *halalness* and trustworthiness as shown in Figure 1.0 above are the three discovered main themes based on a detailed description and interpretation in the process of analysis. Moreover, the displayed color and size of elements are said to be the keys in capturing the audience's attention other than the images and texts alone, to enhance the message that emphasizes the association of Islam in their storytelling.

Commodification

According to Ornella (2013), religion commodification refers to religious symbols that transform into commodities which involve the process of recontextualization of religious symbols, language and ideas from their original religious context to the media landscape, consumer culture and economic life. It is the process of transforming values into a commodity, turning it into an object of trade and economic value. Islamic features' symbolic meanings are easily associated to Islam in the billboard ads. The Islamic features projected in the signs are much highlighted since they are regarded as image-making to religion purposes from the eyes of the non-Muslim receivers. This persuasive strategy using Islamic value is used to ensure the effectiveness of the ads that are relatively related to commodification. The obvious one was the attachment of religious values through a religious aesthetic in the images, terms and writings used to promote the products. Advertisers highlight the distinctive symbolic interactionism of the Malay-Muslim culture, from social customs to presenting characteristics or behaviour of people such as through their attire, language and term, as well as shown gestures. The terms such as *haji*, *umrah* and *wudhu*' are regarded as words that have a high degree of symbolic meanings to Islamic values, and the same goes to images of talents in *jubbah*, *niqab* or even gesturing *doa*. All these become the key ideas of representation in understanding the production of meanings for the brand ads that stand for something they represent - the ideas or concepts that are presented in the Malay-Muslim local culture. This particular sign emphasizes the emotional involvement to the meanings, on the fact that the development is built by embracing a symbol that the consumer uses to build his or her identity and interact with other people.

¹ The consistent and frequent use of these symbols as social interaction in their ads, exhibit the relative importance of these symbols to the prospective group members. This repetition of ads drives the message to top-of-the-mind awareness and establish familiarity as well as credibility of the brand. It makes the consumers to become further reinforced to believe the story, even though puffery which results in deceptive information may arise on the real message of the ads. The commercialization of religious signs is subjectively being adapted to compete in a marketplace in the sphere of economic consumption. The chosen visual communication design strategies ¹ with high social value context helps the advertisers decide who to interact with. This interaction is the foundation of the selling point of the targeted audience, other than making significant interactions among people in the construction of social order. With religion-centric cues in brand image, they simply focus on creating a sense of belonging among their multi-racial audience. Commodification in mass media including ad platform is also good for *da'wah*. However, at the same time, it brings harm to the image of Islam if not regulated properly. Most of the time, this kind of ad hides the real product attributes, showing unclear descriptions, and even exploit other values as their commodities, since they are not used in a proper and ethical manner. The visual communication design is only used for sensational and hyperbolic scenes to attract audiences and bring benefits to the advertisers. It is worthy to use Islamic elements in ads if the products being promoted are related to Islam. But if otherwise, they are just misusing the Islamic images to gain attention about their products in the market. The findings also suggest that women with hijab in ads, in a Muslim-majority country is not a problem since it denotes Muslim identity – but this being more toward how it is being presented. Connotation wise, it can only be meant differently other than cultural meaning with the presence of other possible sign cues that may change the ideology. In short, through this concept, the role of religion is extended to consumer behavior and practitioners have used it as cues to help them market their products.

Halal

⁷ *Halal* is derived from the verb '*Halla*', which means lawful, legal, or permitted for Muslims (Borzooei & Asgari, 2013), and *halal* brands give them a signal to purchase and consume permissible products (Ismail, Othman, Abdul Rahman et.al, 2015). *Halal* brands that are defined by consumers are not mainly on *halal* logos, but they can be easily influenced as Muslim-made products. Thus, these deceptive ads that use religious symbols in texts and images obscure their interpretation in giving a uniform definition. The visual communication design traits that reflect the Muslim preferences make them believe so that the product is *sharia-*

compliant and categorized as lawful. In fact, Islamic values that were highlighted in terms of words used or image representation also play an important role as a mediator in projecting a strong Islamic brand personality. These elements produce a favorable feeling among Muslims toward the brand in a short time. This personality shapes a specific place in the consumer's mind that makes a strong connection that is closely related to the targeted consumer's personality – the Muslim audience; specifically those who uphold great religious commitment (behaviour or cognitive). It is one way to inform their target consumers that their products are consumable, made by locals specifically Malay-Muslim and meet the Islamic standard versus its competitors. The findings show that such application may be perceived by the consumers as brand origin (made by local Muslim) and form an immediate impression about the company. Brands have transcended the commodity trap by convincing consumers that the brand is acceptable and inspired by the cultural underpinnings of the society. In contrast, it is a good representation of branding in being able to effectively compete with many global brands that may face challenges in catering to local tastes and preferences. Furthermore, Muslims in these days have a great awareness regarding the importance of consuming products or engaging in services that follow Islamic guidelines and principles. Thus, either the marketers or advertisers are taking advantages of this scenario in building a strong connection, whereby purchase decisions are mainly influenced by their (Muslim) religious identity – portrayed in the ads. It is significantly one of the key social actors that reproduce existing cultural meanings and transform discourses and beliefs. Despite the growing global economy, consumers are becoming integrated into the mainstream by building strong preferences and identity as a process of being culturally sensitive. Besides, Islam is an important cultural factor of influential social institution that has a significant influence on the Muslims' attitudes, values, and behaviors. Thus, making signs selected by marketers that are instilled in the ads are done more than to facilitate communication through symbolism, because it is a process that links the product to a symbolic value of Muslims' lifestyles. Performing a significant role in enhancing the customer's satisfaction is important rather than focusing on the product alone.

In Islam, the consumers are regulated by religious injunctions. Thus, religion cannot be separated from the cultural framework, and it is easily associated with a positive image, despite the reality of not all of the products were made by Muslims. However, religion and social approval cue combinations in the visual and textual presentations have increased the consumers' brand evaluation, making the selected signs as a visible element to camouflage *halal* brand identity, or at least make the audiences to believe so. Thus, Islamic values as the fundamental

elements reinforce the identity that is instantly recognizable, as well as memorable in strengthening the brand communication (*halal*) especially in a multicultural environment.

Trustworthy

The Islamic features' characteristics are decoded based on the audiences' observations of their own practices, social environments, or experiences, which make the visual communication to be relevant to them. The aim is to embody the characters of the consumers' beliefs, which hopefully makes the targeted customers become easily attracted and comprehended. As an outdoor media, the religion sign cues can be forceful yet persuasive within a short time frame when reading the ads' contents. Religiosity might not be a great influencer in determining the trustworthiness of the brand, but it is more toward the part of obligation of being a Muslim, especially when it comes to what they can or cannot consume/use. Thus, when religious values are used as a part of trade activities, it attracts consumers' attention effectively as a symbolic interactionism that holds reference that the product is safe, contain consumable ingredients, or even made by Muslims too. It is clear that they are building their brand recognition on a deeper level with something that is significant to the consumers. The difference of high religiosity levels might be influenced much sooner as it is something that is identically and exclusively communicating something about themselves. The religion sign attributes get transferred into the brand, exhibits the intended 'religion value' brand image as a significant dimension of credibility to improve trustworthiness of the advertised product. Therefore, the consistent and frequent use of these symbols as a social interaction in their ads will emphasize the relative importance of these symbols to the other prospective group members of the Muslim-Malays. In contrary, the ads can also be an avoidance, resulting from various psychological factors including ad noise, clutter, or even skepticism about the message being delivered.

Information in an advertisement plays an important role in ads, however, limited information may also change their perceptions toward the product especially in outdoor mediums. Religious signs displayed distract the consumer's perceived values toward the product information as a part of a persuasive content. The presence of Islamic signs in copy is more than just a mediator of information and ideas, but their poorly conceived visualizations can distract consumers from the core message, and at times, lead to 'misinformation'. It may reach and increase viewability, but the fact is that not all contents are equally trustworthy. Consumers are believed to have a great trust in content once their perceived positive perception is shown in ads traits. It is common for audiences to likely diagnose the visual appeals (visual communication design elements) applied in ads before starting to read the contents. In this case,

religious values as the core expression of the product may seem valuable to the recipients' preferences, which is receptive enough for the audiences to appreciate them. The symbolic visual is an "exchange" rather than a "use" to communicate the meaning instead of fulfilling the needs. In marketing, campaigns that correspond to the cultural emotional model usually seek credibility and closeness in building a good connection which make them even more credible, and effective. The application of visual communication design can be defined as trust, belief and positive image that hopefully give confidence, even though rational appeals convey logic and more educative information. In short, the visual cues serve as a direction and effective instrument more than to direct consumer's attention but to give comfort as well as mutual image-making. Since Islamic value signs are the central visual cues, they play a significant role in information processing regardless of the level of involvement. Therefore, religion and religious beliefs are important influencing factors in customer preferences; because they are a process that links the products to a symbolic lifestyle.

CONCLUSION

Religiosity values indeed impact the ways consumers perceive visual communication design in ads as a spiritual energy that binds consumer trust with brand image. Commodification, *halalness*, and trustworthiness are the three possibilities of encoded translation in giving 'the face' to those brands or products. The complexity of the concept of religiosity is difficult to measure but Muslims are all supposed to share the same basic beliefs. Nevertheless, affective religiosity or commitment for anyone is somehow different and it can also be the source of reference, including in choosing brand preferences. High-level religious consumers will certainly be influenced, even by little – by the ads' presentations which later affect their trust or even purchase intention. Marketers undoubtedly become successful in getting the audience's attention, especially the Muslim consumers – are believed to prefer products that symbolically reflect their religion. This attention is the one that later makes consumers' first impressions about their brand image. However, exaggerated sign cues in ads without a proper message lead to distraction and miscommunication in interpreting the nature of the product. These misleading ads are far from the meanings of Islamic ads that promote the truth, and without displaying the *halal* logo, making the ads appear less believable as they may harm or cause the consumers to make poor decisions concerning those products. Even though the Islamic values in the ads could sell the consumers' preferences through visuals or even superlative subjective terms or texts to bind consumers' trusts, they do come with low brand recall. The attention that focused too much on religious visual commodification design impacted the function, quality or its own brand

name which is important in selling a product. Consumers are supposed to be aware that any product that cannot be supported by facts is always puffery or deceptive, behind all the glorious displays that make up the brand image. It is suggested that marketers pay attention to the main message of the products that they try to promote, yet they can still put minimal signs of cultural values to create a sense of belonging toward the consumers. Religious signs play a pivotal role in influencing people, but the exaggerated messages affect religious values that also mislead the consumers. Any signs displayed play a significant role in brand perception. Therefore, in developing a more valuable long-term relationship, the core values of the products would make a central direction in branding. They help prevent high risk actions (including commodification) and enhance a product's perceived trustworthiness – that is consumer relationship. However, outdoor media and other mediums such as digital advertising may influence consumer perceived trustworthiness differently, whereby each of these channels engages differently in communications. Each communication channel allows marketers to adapt changes to the ways their brand contents are shaped, circulated, and consumed.

As any other, the possible concern about this study is its own limitations. First, the sample was small, limited to the experts' point of views that may have caused a distortion from the consumers themselves. A larger sample size from two different perspectives would help in generalizing the findings. Secondly, this paper only discussed five different brands of outdoor media, and the outcome might be different if the informants had viewed the different advertisement examples from different media. Therefore, any consideration of future research should be directed to investigate brand image through different media, specifically screen media and consumer response qualitatively, where more insights could be gained.

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