

# **Does The Sexual Violence The Fault Of Man Or The Fault Of Woman's Stupidity? When Religious Commodification and Offensive Marketing Go Hand in Hand**

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## Abstract

*Religious commodification, especially Islamic commodification has been rampant in modern times. This phenomenon also emboldens brands with religious symbolism to conduct offensive marketing, namely Rabbani. This research further investigates the integration of religious commodification and offensive marketing conducted by the Rabbani brand. This research utilized a qualitative and descriptive approach through the case study of Rabbani offensive marketing. The findings of this research are Rabbani has benefitted from religious commodification practices. This in turn emboldens Rabbani to engage in offensive marketing by attacking Muslim women who did not wear the veil. This research implies that religious commodification could also bring a negative impact, especially if this practice is coupled with offensive marketing. Thus, consumers need to be more critical and not easily convinced by the offerings of products that rely on religious commodification, especially if these products use unethical marketing practices such as offensive marketing.*

**Keywords:** Religious Commodification; Offensive Marketing; Rabbani Brand.

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# **Apakah Kekerasan Seksual Kesalahan Pria atau Hasil Dari Kebodohan Wanita? Ketika Komodifikasi Agama dan Pemasaran Ofensif Bersatu**

## Abstrak

Komodifikasi agama, khususnya komodifikasi Islam, sudah marak terjadi di zaman modern ini. Fenomena ini pun semakin mendorong merek yang bersimbol religi untuk melakukan pemasaran ofensif, yakni Rabbani. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui lebih jauh integrasi komodifikasi keagamaan dan pemasaran ofensif yang dilakukan oleh merek Rabbani. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan deskriptif melalui studi kasus pemasaran ofensif Rabbani. Temuan penelitian ini adalah Rabbani mendapat manfaat dari praktik komodifikasi agama. Hal ini kemudian mendorong Rabbani untuk melakukan pemasaran ofensif dengan menyerang perempuan Muslim yang tidak mengenakan hijab. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa komodifikasi agama juga dapat membawa dampak negatif, terutama jika praktik ini dibarengi dengan pemasaran

ofensif. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi konsumen untuk lebih kritis dan tidak mudah terpengaruh dengan penawaran produk yang mengandalkan komodifikasi agama, apalagi jika produk tersebut menggunakan praktik pemasaran yang tidak etis seperti pemasaran ofensif.

**Kata kunci:** *Komodifikasi Agama; Pemasaran Ofensif; Merek Rabbani.*

## Introduction

Religious commodification is known as the fulfillment of business desires by playing religious symbols as economic commodities (Fakhruroji, 2010; Umam, 2021). This means the boundaries of religiosity and business are blurred, with the practice of religiosity trapped in its formalistic symbolic aspects and significantly shifting from substantial to material (Muary & Atikah, 2023). Since modern society sees religion as the exit door for almost every modern problem, the demand for religious teaching and religious symbols becomes stronger, causing religious commodification to become more rampant. This could be seen in the USA with the phenomenon of God's Incorporation. While in the past churches relied on their follower donations, nowadays churches rely more on their business, such as selling books, CDs, merchandise, and other religious products. Thus churches could acquire millions of dollars in assets and could build grand and luxurious church buildings (Husna, 2018). As one of the largest religions in the world, Islam also has been commodified in this modern time. Islam commodification implies Islamic commercialization, or exploitation of its piety and symbols as a commodity (merchandise) that can be sold or bought for profit (Makiah et al., 2022). In this sense, Islamic products are not designed to respect religious practices and

sentiments, but rather to maximize profits (Muary & Atikah, 2023). This rampant commodification especially could be seen in Indonesia, since Indonesia has the largest Muslim in the world, thus began a fertile ground for Islamic commodification.

Religious commodification, especially Islam commodification has intensified in Indonesia for several past decades. The rise of the Muslim middle class in the 1980s coupled with the New Order marginalization of Islamic politics and Islamic identity has made several Indonesian Muslim groups demand a stronger Islamic identity (Elanda, 2019; Hidayah, 2021; Husna, 2018; Muary & Atikah, 2023). This demand began to be fulfilled with the reconciliation of the New Order regime and Islamic groups during the 1990s. Several products with religious identity became to appear, such as an Islamic bank (Bank Muamalat Indonesia) and halal-certified household goods (Amna, 2019; Choiruzzad, 2013; Muary & Atikah, 2023). The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 only accelerated the demand for more products with Islamic symbols, thus also intensifying Islam's commodification in society. This could be seen during the 2000s and 2010s era in which Islamization or Syariahisation of business products became more rampant. Many products became Islamized or received Syariah or halal labels, such as fashion and beauty products, religious films, and television shows, Islamic hotels, Islamic tourism,

and even Islamic property and Islamic plantation (Amna, 2019; Elanda, 2019; Husna, 2018; Ridho et al., 2023).

Rabbani was founded in 1994 during the early era of Islam's commodification in Indonesia. Before the 1990s Muslim women in Indonesia were banned or discouraged to wear veils in public. Thus, like any other Muslim in Indonesia, Muslim women were also deprived of their main religious symbol, namely the veil. The reconciliation of the New Order regime and Islamic groups during the 1990s contributed to the lifting of restrictions on the use of veils in public institutions in 1991 by the New Order regime (Choiruzzad, 2013; Jannah, 2018). Therefore, Rabbani was founded to tap the earlier demand of Muslim women for religious identity in the form of veils and other Muslim fashions.

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 accelerated the demand for more products with Islamic symbols, in which in the context of Muslim women, more and more Muslim women started to wear the veil and followed Muslim fashions during the 2000s and 2010s era. The success of Rabbani and other Muslim fashion brands to show that Muslim women who wear veils and Muslim clothing are modern, respectable, stylish, and trendy, further convinced more Muslim women to wear the veil and follow Muslim fashions (Jannah, 2018). Thus during the 2010s era and nowadays, Muslim women dressing in veils and other Muslim clothing became a common occurrence in the public. In this context, the veil and Muslim clothing have transformed from an expression of faith into commodities with significant market value (Elanda, 2019; Ridho et al., 2023).

As the pioneer of Muslim fashion in Indonesia, Rabbani enjoyed this phenomenon and continued growth of Muslim fashion in Indonesia. The success of Rabbani could be seen from its significant expansion, in which by 2019 Rabbani had 154 outlets spread across numerous cities in Indonesia (Hasriani et al., 2022; Prihatiningsih, 2020). The success of Rabbani and the widespread use of the veil and other Muslim clothing apparently had another consequence. Rabbani became emboldened and began attacking Muslim women who did not wear the veil through its marketing. Thus, Rabbani became engaged in the practice of offensive marketing, or a marketing activity that is controversial and offensive to certain groups of people (Chan et al., 2007; de Run et al., 2010; Marketeers, 2023; Tariq & Khan, 2017).

In its marketing, Rabbani portrayed Muslim women who did not wear the veil as underachievers in one of its banner advertisements (Marketeers, 2023). This offensive advertisement pales in comparison with other Rabbani advertisements on Instagram, in which Rabbani claimed through this advertisement that the sexual harassment and sexual violence experienced by women were the result of women who failed to cover their *aurat*, and sexual harassment and sexual violence could only be stopped if women wear clothing that covers their *aurat* (Rabbani, 2022). This advertisement, in turn, caused an uproar among netizens, since this advertisement was considered victim blaming and failed to sympathize with sexual harassment and sexual violence victims, while also absolving the blame from the perpetrators (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

Several agencies such as *Komnas Perempuan*, BPP, and P3I also condemned this advertisement and considered reprimanding Rabbani regarding its offensive advertisement (Febriani, 2023; Ramadhan, 2023). Despite this, Rabbani argued that this advertisement was justified since this advertisement was conducted to educate women to wear the veil and Muslim clothing, and only addressed the women's "stupidity" in terms of religious faith and morals, not in the intellectual sense (Febriani, 2023; Susanti, 2022). This clearly showed that Rabbani felt justified in using offensive marketing and did not feel significant remorse for doing offensive marketing.

Several researchers have explained the phenomenon of religious commodification. Hernandez-Ramdwar (2013) explained the religious commodification of Santeri'a, Candomble', Vodou, and Orisha in Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, and Trinidad & Tobago. Umam (2021) and Elanda (2019) covered religious commodification in the form of Islamic housing. Ridho et al. (2023) explained several Islamic commodification practices in Indonesia in the form of Islamic charity and Islamic plantation. Several researchers also have explained offensive marketing.

Chan et al. (2007) explained consumers' responses to offensive marketing in Germany and China. de Run et al. (2010) covered attitudes toward offensive advertising in Malaysia. Tariq & Khan (2017) explained attitudes toward offensive advertising in India. While several researchers have explained these phenomena, the concept of religious commodification and offensive marketing

being integrated has not been explored further. Thus, this research takes a different approach by looking at the integration of religious commodification and offensive marketing conducted by the Rabbani brand, and this served as the novelty for this research.

This research aims to investigate further the integration of religious commodification and offensive marketing conducted by the Rabbani brand. This research also aims to contribute to the evolving religious commodification and offensive marketing literature. The remainder of this research is structured as follows. Section Two contains a review of the literature; Section Three discusses the research method for this research, while Section Four contains the results and discussion of this research. Finally, Section Five provides a conclusion and recommendations for this research.

## Literature Review

### Islam and Religious Commodification in Indonesia

Commodification is the process of transforming use values into exchange values (Baharun & Niswa, 2019). This means an object with use value (for example the use value of a drink to quench thirst), becomes a valuable commodity because it could be sold in the market and create profit (after the drink is packaged in a bottle) (Yustati et al., 2017). Several objects have been known to be commodified, such as content, audiences, and workers (Baharun & Niswa, 2019). Religion also could not escape the commodification process (Yustati et al., 2017). Religious commodification

is known as the fulfillment of business desires by playing religious symbols as economic commodities (Fakhruroji, 2010; Umam, 2021). This means the boundaries of religiosity and business are blurred, with the practice of religiosity trapped in its formalistic symbolic aspects and significantly shifting from substantial to material (Muary & Atikah, 2023). As one of the largest religions in the world, Islam also has been commodified in this modern time. Islam commodification implies Islamic commercialization, or exploitation of its piety and symbols as a commodity (merchandise) that can be sold or bought for profit (Makiah et al., 2022). In this sense, Islamic products are not designed to respect religious practices and sentiments, but rather to maximize profits (Muary & Atikah, 2023).

In Indonesia, Islam's commodification has been enabled due to the rise of the Muslim middle class in the 1980s (Husna, 2018). The success of New Order economic development and education transformation has enabled many Muslims to reach several prominent positions, such as professionals, reformists, lawyers, political and cultural figures, technocrats, NGO activists, and Muslim preachers (Hidayah, 2021). At the same time, the New Order marginalization of Islamic politics and Islamic identity with the dissolution of several Islamic political parties and the ban on headscarves alongside the perceived decadence of morality in society has made many Muslims realize the need for an Islamic identity (Elanda, 2019; Muary & Atikah, 2023).

The erosion of New Order power with deteriorating economic conditions,

civilian resistance movements, and military resistance from outside the Army led the New Order regime to reconcile with Islamic groups during the 1990s. This began with the formation of the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* or ICMI) in 1990 as the representation of intellectuals and middle-class Muslims in Indonesia (Choiruzzad, 2013; Muary & Atikah, 2023).

With the reconciliation of the New Order regime and Islamic groups, Muslims could more freely implement Islamic values and Islamic symbols in their daily lives, such as the use of headscarves in public (Choiruzzad, 2013). Thus, many Muslims also demand products with Islamic symbols as the manifestation of Islamic identity, and several products with religious identity became to appear, such as an Islamic bank (*Bank Muamalat Indonesia*) and halal-certified household goods (Amna, 2019; Choiruzzad, 2013).

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 accelerated the religious sentiments in Muslim society. This could be seen in the establishment of several new Islamic parties, followed by commercial products with Islamic symbols such as more Islamic banks (Choiruzzad, 2013; Elanda, 2019; Muary & Atikah, 2023). During the 2000s Islamization or Syariahisation became more rampant with the introduction of several Islamic-based regulations at the local and national levels.

In the business sector, many products became Islamized or received Syariah or halal labels, such as fashion and beauty products, religious films, and television shows, Islamic hotels, Islamic tourism, and even Islamic property and Islamic



plantation (Amna, 2019; Elanda, 2019; Husna, 2018; Ridho et al., 2023). These products in turn have further actively exploited Islam as a commodity (Anis, 2013; Umam, 2021).

### Brand and Offensive Marketing

Offensive marketing is a marketing activity that is controversial and offensive to certain groups of people (Chan et al., 2007; de Run et al., 2010; Tariq & Khan, 2017). Because of the nature of the product being sold or the way a product is marketed, a marketing activity may become contentious and could be considered offensive (de Run et al., 2010). Several products are controversial in nature and thus their marketing could be considered controversial and offensive. Examples are alcohol, tobacco, gun and armament, condoms, contraceptives, underwear, and porn magazine (Tariq & Khan, 2017).

The marketing activity itself could also cause controversy and be considered offensive if the marketing activity contains controversial messages. Examples are inappropriate content or messages for children, hard selling, indecent language, nudity, racist and sexist images, stereotyping of people or certain groups of people, and violence (de Run et al., 2010; Tariq & Khan, 2017).

Offensive marketing could cause several negative impacts on a brand, such as negative brand attitude, public backlash and boycott of the brand, and even legal problems such as sanctions from government agencies or lawsuits from people that felt offended (Chan et al., 2007; de Run et al., 2010; Tariq & Khan, 2017). One form of offensive marketing

is the use of offensive advertising, where the advertisement conveys messages that are controversial and offensive to certain groups of people (Chan et al., 2007).

An example of such an offensive advertisement is Grab Indonesia's #*PilihAman* (choose safe) advertisement, where the advertisement contained images of accident victims that are too vulgar and gives a message that other *ojek* (motorcycle taxi) transportation services providers, such as Gojek Indonesia and independent *ojek* cannot provide safe transportation services for their consumers, and only Grab Indonesia can provide safe *ojek* transportation services.

This caused controversy and blasphemy from the public on social media, where people did not approve of the image of accident victims that are too vulgar and advertising messages that are seen as satirical and demeaning to Grab Indonesia's business competitors (Indriani et al., 2019). Another example of an offensive advertisement is Dolce & Gabbana: DG Loves China advertisement. This advertisement showed an Asian woman in a glamorous Dolce & Gabbana dress trying to eat pizza using chopsticks. This advertisement was considered unpleasant and racist to Chinese culture. This invited harsh online backlash, protests, and boycotts of Dolce & Gabbana products in China (Kusumastuti et al., 2023).

### Research Methodology

This research used qualitative techniques for data analysis in this study. In this case, the researcher would concentrate on the study of facts and information that are descriptive and not easily measurable

in the qualitative technique. The qualitative approach was chosen by the researcher due to its exploratory in nature. Therefore researchers might learn more about several aspects of the phenomenon (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Since this research is qualitative, the information gathered for this research is in the form of soft data, namely in words and pictures (Neuman, 2014).

Advertisements from Rabbani and relevant news articles were utilized as secondary data for this research. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive approach to assess the study's data. The descriptive approach is a technique used to identify and outline the traits of the study item (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The researcher, therefore, wants to create a methodical, truthful, and precise account of the religious commodification and offensive advertising of the Rabbani brand. Through this method, the researcher could also describe the phenomenon in detail and present a more in-depth analysis that cannot be expressed by quantitative methods. Thus, the purpose of this study is to describe the religious commodification and offensive marketing carried out by the Rabbani brand.

This research also uses the case study method since it raises empirical issues regarding a case. This is meant to be more narrowly focused on the study's subject and be able to provide relevant context. Qualitative methodologies were used to assess the data gathered from literature reviews. In this instance, the information gleaned from the study's findings is categorized and picked out, after which it is linked to the research question in order to address the question's formulation.

Data were gathered through diligent observation, which included recordkeeping and document analysis. Inductive reasoning, or the attitude and methods of drawing conclusions starting from a symptom and a fact one at a time—which may then be considered as a generalization as a conclusion—is used in this qualitative study (Neuman, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

## Findings and Discussions

### Introduction of Brand Rabbani

CV (*Commanditaire Vennootschap* or Limited Partnership) Rabbani Asysa was founded by married couple Nia Kurnia and Amry Gunawan in 1994 in Bandung. In 1995 CV Rabbani Asysa moved its office to Dipatiukur Street No. 44 Bandung and still occupies the office today, and in 2001 CV Rabbani Asysa was officially declared a legal entity based (Hasriani et al., 2022; Prihatiningsih, 2020) CV Rabbani Asysa through the Rabbani brand sells several products in the form of instant veils and other products, namely Muslim clothing including *koko* (a male Indonesia Muslim clothes), *kemko* or *kemeja koko* (a *koko* shirt), tunics, *kastun* (atunics shirt for women), and other equipment such as *ciput* (inner veils) and accessories for veils (Jannah, 2018; Prihatiningsih, 2020).

The inspiration for Rabbani as the name of the brand came from surah Al-Imron verse 79 which means the devotees of God who want to teach and be taught about the book of Allah (Al-Quran) (Prihatiningsih, 2020). When the New Order administration lifted limitations on the usage of veils in public institutions in 1991, Muslim women in Indonesia were only beginning to be able to wear them more openly.

Rabbani became the forerunner of the instant veil in Indonesia at this time (Choiruzzad, 2013; Jannah, 2018). The notion that women who wore veils and Muslim dress were less stylish and the fact that there were not many Muslim women wearing veils in public places in the 1990s were obstacles Rabbani had to overcome at the beginning of its existence. Rabbani was founded in order to demonstrate that Muslim women who wear veils and Muslim attire may look modern, respectable, stylish, and trendy while still adhering to Islamic teachings (Jannah, 2018).

Rabbani's initial marketing strategy consisted only of word-of-mouth advertising and the distribution of pamphlets and brochures. Despite this, during the 1990s Rabbani still had a benefit as the first fashion figure to concentrate on Muslim veils and attire (Hasriani et al., 2022). Rabbani's brand is becoming increasingly well-known and recognizable in Indonesia over time. Currently, five industrial units owned by Rabbani operate under the authority of the corporate entity CV. Suho Garmino assists in the manufacture of Rabbani's products.

Given that the Rabbani brand is a pioneer of Muslim fashion in Indonesia, particularly for Muslim veils, it is also recognized by the slogan "Professor of Indonesian veils" (Prihatiningsih, 2020). In 2019, it was recorded that Rabbani had 154 outlets in numerous cities in Indonesia. In addition, Rabbani also has many achievements, such as winning the Top Brand Award in the Muslim fashion category in 2014 and 2015, winning the Top Brand Award in the branded veil category in 2015, and winning 3 Top Brand Awards

in the Muslim fashion category, branded veil and *koko* clothing in 2019.

### Rabbani and Offensive Marketing

As a brand engaged in Muslim fashion, Rabbani runs its promotions through media such as advertising using Islamic elements and identities (Anis, 2013; Muhajirin, 2019). This is because brands like Rabbani rely on religiosity to attract customers (Kusdiana et al., 2021; Zehra & Minton, 2020). In carrying out its promotion, Rabbani advertisements mainly rely on Islamic elements and identities, especially those relevant to the Rabbani brand, such as the teaching to cover the *aurat* (parts of the human body that must be covered by clothing in Islam) for Muslims (Cader, 2015).

The use of Islamic elements and identities emboldened Rabbani to use offensive marketing. Offensive marketing is a marketing activity that is controversial and offensive to certain groups of people (Chan et al., 2007; de Run et al., 2010; Tariq & Khan, 2017). In this case, Rabbani uses Islamic elements and identities to offend certain groups of people who do not follow the Islamic identity, mainly Muslim women or other women who dress with clothing that does not cover their *aurat*.

Rabbani once carried out offensive marketing through advertisement banners that read "Skirt is getting on top, the achievement is getting below: do not be like that!", which can be interpreted that Muslim women or other women who wear miniskirts tend to have lower or no achievements (Marketeers, 2023). The advertisement in addition to satirizing Muslim women or other women who do not cover their *aurat*, also implies that



only Muslim women or women who cover their *aurat* could have higher achievements (Marketeters, 2023).



**Figure 1. Rabbani's Brand Banner With Offensive Advertising**

Source: (Marketeters, 2023)

Rabbani launched another offensive advertising through a video on Instagram on December 25, 2022. This advertisement covers the sexual harassment and sexual violence experienced by women, which this advertising claimed was the result of women who failed to cover their *aurat*. This advertising further claimed that sexual harassment and sexual violence suffered by women could only be stopped if women wear clothing that cover their *aurat*. This claim could be found in several statements such as "women who do not cover their *aurat* are stupid", "women who dress openly will invite a man's pervert thinking", "do not give a chance to a man with pervert thinking (by wearing clothes that cover the *aurat*)", and "(does the sexual violence) the fault of man or the fault of woman stupidity?" (Rabbani, 2022). Several offensive elements of Rabbani's advertising could be considered microaggressions, namely certain statements, both intentional and unintentional, that are offensive or insulting to certain groups (Johnson et al., 2021). There are some microaggression

elements in Rabbani's advertisements, including:

First, Blaming the Victim. Namely "women who dress openly will invite a man's pervert thinking" and "(does the sexual violence) the fault of man or the fault of woman stupidity?" provides the impression that the Rabbani brand was blaming the sexual assault victims. In this case, the Rabbani brand claims that women are to fault for sexual assault because they wear exposing clothing that encourages males to engage in sexual assault. This shows that the Rabbani brand has committed victim blaming, which is blaming the victim of a crime when they experience the crime and the blame is seen as being on the victim's side and not on the perpetrator's side (Johnson et al., 2021).

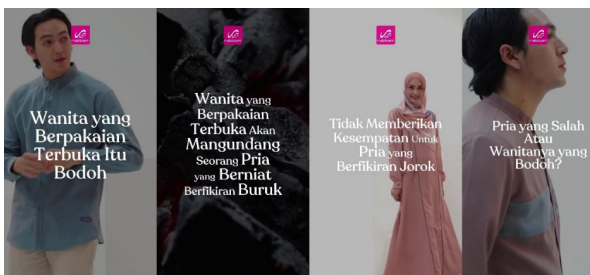
Second, Gaslighting. Namely victim blaming further gives rise to another microaggression, namely gaslighting. Gaslighting is several statements or actions taken by certain parties against other parties that suffer abuse to make the targeted party doubts their opinions about their abuse (Johnson et al., 2021). In this case the Rabbani brand gaslights by issuing statements that "women who do not cover their *aurat* are stupid", "women who dress openly will invite a man's pervert thinking", "do not give a chance to a man with pervert thinking (by wearing clothes that cover the *aurat*)", and "(does the sexual violence) the fault of man or the fault of woman stupidity?".

These statements lead to the claim that when a male sexually assaults a woman, the lady is to blame since she is wearing exposing clothing. Due to this, it is possible for women who have experienced sexual assault to have doubts about their status as victims of sexual assault. It is also

possible that female sexual assault victims hold themselves responsible. Therefore, it appears as though males who have perpetrated sexual assault seem forgiven and tolerated (Johnson et al., 2021).

Third, Splaining namely another microaggression that appeared in Rabbani's advertisement was Rabbani's continued claim based on National Commission on Violence against Women (Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan or Komnas Perempuan) data. Using this alleged data, Rabbani claimed that women's revealing clothing was a main factor that causes sexual violence cases, thus Rabbani raised this claim in its advertising (Rabbani, 2022). This claim can be categorized as splaining, which is a statement emphasized by dominant parties against marginalized parties, where the statement is claimed to be factual (Johnson et al., 2021).

In this case, Rabbani's side emphasized the statement that women's revealing clothing was a factor in the occurrence of sexual violence cases through this advertisement, and Rabbani considered this claim as factual. This claim itself proved to be incorrect due to a debunking from Komnas Perempuan that women's clothing is not significant a significant factor in sexual violence cases and women with clothes covering their aurat are also victims of sexual violence (Ramadhan, 2023).



**Figure 2. Some Offensive Elements Of Rabbani's Instagram Ad**

Source: (Rabbani, 2022)

Rabbani's Instagram advertising later drew intense criticism from netizens. "The sexual harassment had nothing to do with women's clothing. There is a survey that showed the majority of harassment victims wore relatively closed clothes. Sexual harassment is 100 percent came from the intention of the culprit.", wrote user @friskikiki in the comment section. "From my point of view, who is a communications and advertising person, those who make this content are stupid. Because instead of providing factual information about sexual harassment (You can access a lot of data. Do not be lazy), you're talking nonsense about who is at fault. If a 7-week-old baby is raped to death, whose fault is it? Babies who wear only diapers who have uncovered thighs? I do not understand content like this anymore. This is public duping.", said a female activist Poppy Dihadjo. "The most insolent advertisement with zero empathy and full of victim blaming. Who made this advertising? I want to see their face", wrote user @ayuwirum. "It is very unethical to promote a product above the suffering of victims of sexual violence. There is zero empathy, and no morals. It is better to make an advertisement that fits the product only. Do not bring up harassment issues that are clearly outside your realm. Hopefully, in the future, the Rabbani team could make better advertisements. The problem is that it is a shame that big brands like this make controversial advertisements, especially for several times.", said user @berbillovie. "Sexual harassment can hit anyone. People who wear headscarves are also affected by sexual harassment. How come the victim is to blame for the abuse?", wrote user @yuliaadi (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

Besides Indonesian netizens, Komnas Perempuan also took notice of Rabbani's offensive advertisement. Komnas Perempuan condemned Rabbani's advertisement and denied Rabbani's claim that revealing clothes were the main cause of sexual harassment against women. This is because in cases of harassment handled by Komnas Perempuan, women's clothing is not significant as a cause of sexual violence, whereas women with clothes covering their aurat are also victims of sexual violence. Komnas Perempuan further saw Rabbani's use of its data as justification for its advertisements as disinformation or spreading misleading information (Ramadhan, 2023).

The controversy over Rabbani's advertising attracted the attention of other agencies, such as the Advertising Supervisory Agency (Badan Pengawas Periklanan or BPP) and the Indonesian Advertising Companies Association (Persatuan Perusahaan Periklanan Indonesia or P3I), where these agencies considered reprimanding Rabbani regarding its offensive advertisement. After the controversy regarding its advertisements, Rabbani tried to clarify the controversy by arguing that the purpose of its advertisements is to educate women to wear clothing per Islamic teaching (Febriani, 2023). The use of the word "stupid" according to Rabbani did not mean intellectual stupidity of women, but stupidity in terms of aqidah (Islamic religious faith) and morals (Susanti, 2022).

### Religious Commodification and Offensive Marketing of Rabbani

Rabbani's offensive advertising and its justification have shown the integration

of religious commodification and offensive marketing. Religious commodification, especially Islam commodification has intensified in Indonesia for several past decades. The rise of the Muslim middle class in the 1980s coupled with the New Order marginalization of Islamic politics and Islamic identity has made several Indonesian Muslim groups demand a stronger Islamic identity (Elanda, 2019; Hidayah, 2021; Husna, 2018; Muary & Atikah, 2023).

This demand began to be fulfilled with the reconciliation of the New Order regime and Islamic groups during the 1990s. Several products with religious identity became to appear, such as an Islamic bank (Bank Muamalat Indonesia) and halal-certified household goods (Amna, 2019; Choiruzzad, 2013; Muary & Atikah, 2023).

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 only accelerated the demand for more products with Islamic symbols, thus also intensifying Islam's commodification in society. This could be seen during the 2000s and 2010s era in which Islamization or Syariahisation of business products became more rampant. Many products became Islamized or received Syariah or halal labels, such as fashion and beauty products, religious films, and television shows, Islamic hotels, Islamic tourism, and even Islamic property and Islamic plantation (Amna, 2019; Elanda, 2019; Husna, 2018; Ridho et al., 2023).

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Muslim in Indonesia, Muslim women were also deprived of their main religious symbol, namely the veil. The reconciliation of the New Order regime and Islamic groups during the 1990s contributed to the lifting of restrictions on the use of veils in public institutions in 1991 by the New Order regime (Choiruzzad, 2013; Jannah, 2018). Therefore, Rabbani was founded to tap the earlier demand of Muslim women for religious identity in the form of veils and other Muslim fashions.

The fall of the New Order regime in 1998 accelerated the demand for more products with Islamic symbols, in which in the context of Muslim women, more and more Muslim women started to wear the veil and followed Muslim fashions during the 2000s and 2010s era. The success of Rabbani and other Muslim fashion brands to show that Muslim women who wear veils and Muslim clothing are modern, respectable, stylish, and trendy, further convinced more Muslim women to wear the veil and followed Muslim fashions (Jannah, 2018). Thus during the 2010s era and nowadays, Muslim women dressing in veils and other Muslim clothing become a common occurrence in the public, unlike during the New Order era in which only a handful of Muslim women wore the veil in public.

In this context, the veil and Muslim clothing have transformed from an expression of faith into commodities with significant market value (Elanda, 2019; Ridho et al., 2023). As the pioneer of Muslim fashion in Indonesia, Rabbani enjoyed this phenomenon and continued growth of Muslim fashion in Indonesia. The success of Rabbani could be seen from its significant expansion, in which by 2019

Rabbani had 154 outlets spread across numerous cities in Indonesia (Hasriani et al., 2022; Prihatiningsih, 2020).

The success of Rabbani and the widespread use of the veil and other Muslim clothing apparently had another consequence. Rabbani became emboldened and began attacking Muslim women who did not wear the veil through its marketing. In its marketing, Rabbani portrayed Muslim women who did not wear the veil as underachievers in one of its banner advertisements (Marketeers, 2023). This offensive advertisement pales in comparison with other Rabbani advertisements on Instagram, in which Rabbani claimed through this advertisement that the sexual harassment and sexual violence experienced by women were the result of women who failed to cover their aurat, and sexual harassment and sexual violence could only be stopped if women wear clothing that covers their aurat (Rabbani, 2022).

This advertisement, in turn, caused an uproar among netizens, since this advertisement was considered victim blaming and failed to sympathize with sexual harassment and sexual violence victims, while also absolving the blame from the perpetrators (CNN Indonesia, 2022). Several agencies such as Komnas Perempuan, BPP, and P3I also condemned this advertisement and considered reprimanding Rabbani regarding its offensive advertisement (Febriani, 2023; Ramadhan, 2023).

Despite this, Rabbani argued that this advertisement was justified since this advertisement was conducted to educate women to wear the veil and



Muslim clothing, and only addressed the women's "stupidity" in terms of religious faith and morals, not in the intellectual sense (Febriani, 2023; Susanti, 2022). This clearly showed that Rabbani felt justified in using offensive marketing and did not feel significant remorse for doing offensive marketing.

Rabbani's lack of remorse presented the irony of religious commodification and offensive marketing went hand in hand. The rampant Islamic commodification during the 2000s and 2010s has transformed Islamic symbols and Islamic teachings, such as wearing the veil and dressing in accordance with Islamic teaching, from an expression of faith into commodities with significant market value. The rampant Islamic commodification also transformed society's understanding of Islamic piety, in which someone is considered pious if he or she used Islamic symbols in public, such as wearing the veil or other Muslim clothing (Elanda, 2019; Ridho et al., 2023).

This transformation had unintended consequences, in which Rabbani and other companies that benefited from the commodification of Islam felt that they had higher moral and religious authority in society. Further Rabbani and these other companies also believe that only by using their products that a Muslim could reach a piety status, since their products are part of Islamic symbols. Thus Rabbani felt justified in the use of offensive marketing since this is in line with its supposed religious authority.

This understanding means that Islamic religion and piety have been reduced only to something symbolic and concerned only with the outside appearance. Other essentials part of Islamic teaching outside

symbolism such as spirituality thus became forgotten (Ridho et al., 2023). This further explained why Rabbani felt justified in the use of offensive marketing since Rabbani only focused to teach Muslim women to reach piety only by adopting Islamic symbols (the veil and other Muslim clothing) while disregarding other Islamic teachings, such as *insaniyyah* (humanity), in which Islamic teaching should be performed with compassion and regards of human values, something that is in conflict with the adoption of offensive marketing adopted by Rabbani (Handayani & Fathoni, 2019). In the end, this phenomenon created an irony, in which Islamic commodification and offensive marketing went hand in hand, despite its disregard for the humanistic value of Islamic teaching.

## Conclusion

Commodification of religion is known as fulfilling business desires by playing religious symbols as economic commodities (Fakhruroji, 2010; Umam, 2021). Because today's modern society views religion as a solution to almost every modern problem, the demand for religious teachings and religious broadcasts is getting stronger, causing the commodification of religion to become more rampant (Husna, 2018).

As a pioneer of Muslim fashion in Indonesia, Rabbani enjoys this phenomenon and continues to continue the growth of Muslim fashion in Indonesia. Rabbani's success can be seen from its significant expansion, where in 2019 Rabbani had 154 outlets spread across various cities in Indonesia.

Rabbani's success and the widespread use of the veil and other Muslim clothing



apparently had other impacts. Rabbani became emboldened and started attacking non-veiled Muslim women through his marketing. Therefore, Rabbani engages in offensive marketing practices, or marketing activities that are controversial and offensive to certain groups of people (Chan et al., 2007; de Run et al., 2010; Marketeers, 2023; Tariq & Khan, 2017). In its marketing, Rabbani depicts Muslim women who do not wear the hijab as underachievers in one of its advertising banners.

Rabbani describes Muslim women who do not wear the hijab as underachievers in one of his advertising banners. Rabbani considered that the advertisement was justified because the advertisement was carried out to educate women about wearing the hijab and Muslim dress, and only addressed women's "ignorance" in terms of religious faith and morals, not in an intellectual sense (Febriani, 2023; Susanti, 2022). This clearly shows that Rabbani feels justified in using offensive marketing and does not feel any significant regret in carrying out offensive marketing.

Rabbani's lack of remorse shows the irony of religious commodification and offensive marketing going hand in hand. The rise of the commodification of Islam in the 2000s and 2010s has transformed Islamic practices and teachings, such as wearing the veil and dressing according to Islamic teachings, from expressions of faith into commodities that have significant market value.

This transformation had unintended consequences, where Rabbani and other companies that profited from the commodification of Islam felt they had higher moral and religious authority in

society. Furthermore, Rabbani and other companies also believe that only by using their products can a Muslim achieve the status of piety, because their products are part of Islamic teachings.

Rabbani felt justified in using offensive marketing because it was in line with his perceived religious authority. Rabbani feels justified in using offensive marketing because Rabbani only focuses on educating Muslim women to achieve piety only by using Islamic symbols (hijab and other Muslim clothing) and ignores other Islamic teachings, such as *insaniyyah* (humanity), where Islamic teachings must be implemented with love and care. Upholding human values, this is in contrast to the implementation of offensive marketing carried out by Rabbani.

In the end, this phenomenon gives rise to irony, where the commodification of Islam and offensive marketing go hand in hand, even though they do not pay attention to the human values in Islamic teachings.

For future research, it is suggested to analyze other phenomena of religious commodification, such as Islamic property or Islamic plantation. This research implies that religious commodification could also bring a negative impact, especially if this practice is coupled with offensive marketing. Thus, it is important for consumers to be more critical and not easily convinced by the offerings of products that relied on religious commodification, especially if these products use unethical marketing practices such as offensive marketing.

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