

The Declining Trend of Religious Films in Indonesia: Can They Win Again among Muslim Communities?

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Abstract

This research investigates the prospects of religious films in Indonesian cinemas and OTT streaming platforms in the post-pandemic era. It addresses the decline in viewership of religious films, particularly in the Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi regions. The study aims to identify the loyal consumers of religious films and propose strategies to reinvigorate their appeal and attract a wider audience. The theoretical framework for analysis is derived from Baudrillard's theory of the consumption society. Utilising qualitative methods, supplemented by survey data from film consumers in the Greater Jakarta area, this study examines the distinct market segmentation of religious films, albeit with relatively lower enthusiast numbers compared to other film genres in OTT and electronic cinema. To regain competitiveness, religious films could be creatively blended with other genres, such as religious comedy, to offer a more dynamic and inclusive experience, steering away from a rigid focus on da'wah content.

Keywords: Religious Movie; Society Consumption; Cinema; OTT

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Tren Yang Menurun Dari Film Indonesia Bergener Religi: Apakah Dapat Kembali Unggul Pada Komunitas Muslim?

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berusaha mengelaborasi prospek film religi di bioskop maupun layanan streaming OTT setelah pandemi. Rumusan masalah bagaimana proses penurunan tren penonton film religi khususnya di wilayah Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, dan Bekasi. Lanjut siapa konsumen loyal terhadap film religi dan apa yang harus dilakukan supaya film religi bisa kembali meningkat jumlah penontonnya. Sebagai pisau analisis penelitian ini menggunakan teori masyarakat konsumsi Baudrillard. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif didukung oleh data survei dari konsumen film di wilayah Jabodetabek. Studi ini menemukan bahwa film religi memiliki segmentasi pasar sendiri meskipun berdasarkan hasil survei peminatnya paling rendah dibandingkan genre film

lainnya di sinema bioskop maupun sinema elektronik OTT. Agar film religi mampu bersaing maka bisa dikombinasikan genre lainnya seperti religi-komedi sehingga menghindari kesan kaku dan hanya berisi konten dakwah.

Kata kunci: *Film Religi; Masyarakat Konsumsi; Bioskop; OTT*

INTRODUCTION

In today's Islamic atmosphere in Indonesia, there is a noticeable phenomenon where individuals, including female students, employees, and security forces, are free to wear headscarves in educational and work environment. This was not possible during the New Order era due to the authoritarian rule that tightly controlled social life (D'Haenens et al., 1999; Gazali, 2003; van Bruinessen, 2002). Indonesia, being the second largest Muslim country in the world, has experienced a strengthening of post-reform Islamisation, coinciding with a period of increased freedom of expression and democratic values (Susilo & Sugihartati, 2021). Following the reformation, Muslims now have the liberty to express their Islamic identity, embracing several religious attributes openly including adhering to Islamic dress codes, pursuing Islamic studies, and actively participating in communities that is aligned with Islamic teachings, such as the Hijrah and hands-on communities.

The research focuses on the evolving landscape of religious films in Indonesia, with a noticeable surge in films that embrace and convey Islamic values, particularly in the 2000s. Films serve as a medium for communicating religious messages; Da'wah messages are conveyed through verbal and non-verbal scenes. Religious films have transcended their role as entertainment and integrated

preaching content and religious messages. The shift from the traditional lecture-based preaching model to the contemporary use of film media were attributed in the advancement of information technology, hence facilitating such change in conveying morals studies.

Moreover, religious films serve as a means of education, aiming to deliver spiritual messages to the audience in a grounded and relatable manner within the context of Muslim society. The aspiration is for religious films to avoid irrational and sensationalised portrayals, steering clear of excessive supernatural elements or superstitious overtones that go beyond human reasoning. Instead, the focus is on producing films that resonate with the realities of everyday life, providing significant spiritual meaning to the audience's souls, particularly regarding religious aspects. This endeavour seeks to create a genuine connection between the audience and the message conveyed, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic values in a contemporary cinematic context.

Religious films in Indonesia often draw inspiration from religious beliefs, values, and historical events, with some centred around influential charismatic figures, such as religious leaders. The emergence of films with an Islamic background gained momentum with the release of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* in 2008, which explored the complexities

of polygamy. Subsequently, in 2009, two popular films, “Ketika Cinta Bertasbih,” or “When Love Hymn,” and “Perempuan Berkalung Sorban,” or “Woman With A Turban,” continued to captivate audiences. The year 2010 saw the release of films celebrating the life of charismatic figures, including the founder of the Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, presented in the movie titled “Sang Pencerah,” or “The Enlightener.” The success of these four films catalysed further production of films in the religious genre (Juliana, 2017). In the subsequent years, the trend of religious genre films continued, with filmmakers striving to capture the attention of the Indonesian Muslim community.

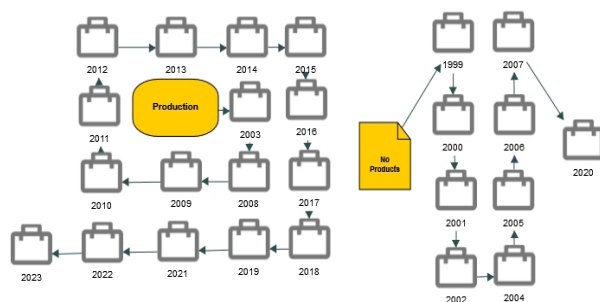


Figure 1. Religious Film Development and Production Trend in Indonesia

Figure 1 revealed a noteworthy social phenomenon, wherein only seven films have reached an impressive viewership of over 1 million. This trend began in 2008 with the film “Ayat-Ayat Cinta,” which attracted a substantial viewership of 3.7 million. In 2009, success for the two films: “Ketika Cinta Bertasbih,” is evident having 2.1 million viewers while its sequel “Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 2,” attracted 1.4 million viewers. Four (4) more films joined the league of over 1 million viewers from 2010 to 2017 starting with “Sang Pencerah” in

2010 with 1.1 million viewers, “Surga yang Tak Dirindukan,” or “The Heaven None Missed” with a total of 1.5 million viewers, and in 2017, two films achieved this feat – “Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2” with an impressive 2.8 million viewers and the sequel of “Surga yang Tak Dirindukan” with a total of 1.6 million viewers (Sarifah, 2023). This data evidently provides emphasises that the Indonesian film industry is not solely dominated by the horror genre.

The research on religious films and their viewership data becomes highly relevant in shedding light on consumption patterns of the religious genre in the post-2017 period. Evidently, the shift in the relationship between consumers and the objects of consumption conforms to the claims presented in Baudrillard’s theory of the consuming society (Fadhillah & Ediyono, 2023). In this context, consumers are no longer driven solely by the inherent benefits of the goods they purchase but rather seek deeper meanings and symbols embedded within the objects.

Religious films for Muslim society serve as a vehicle for purchasing the symbols and values they represent, transcending their mere functional and monetary aspects. As a result, the traditional use value and exchange value of consumer goods in commodities are eroded, giving rise to the significance of sign values, symbolic values, status, prestige, and honour (Sholahudin, 2019).

This research holds significant importance, particularly aligned in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, that brought about social restrictions then which in turn significantly affected the film industry. Now, considering the easing of restrictions in establishments, the Muslim

community gradually returns to watching films in cinemas. Notably, there has been an absence of religious film titles reaching 1 million viewers since 2018. Hence, this study aims to provide insights into future religious films' producers. To achieve this, the research is guided by three key questions.

Firstly, the study seeks to understand the process behind the decreasing trend of religious film audiences, specifically in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. This analysis will shed light on the factors contributing to the decline in viewership and provide valuable information in addressing this issue.

Secondly, the research aims to identify the specific consumer segments that continue to favour religious films as their preferred choice. Understanding consumers' characteristics and preferences can provide essential guidance for targeting and tailoring future religious film content meeting consumers' expectations.

Lastly, the study intends to explore potential strategies and actions that can increase viewership for religious films once again. This can be derived by identifying and analysing effective approaches. This research provides recommendations and insights for the film industry, filmmakers, and stakeholders to revitalise the appeal to viewers of religious-themed films.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The widespread adoption of religious attributes, particularly in the post-reform era, signifies a new momentum in harmonising the relationship between Muslims and the authorities (Weng, 2018). This shift has positive implications for

increasing Da'wah activities within the Muslim middle class generation. The Muslim middle class is not solely defined by their economic status, as evidenced by economic growth after the 1998 monetary crisis and the end of the New Order government (Maulida & Witro, 2022). This group exhibits changes in socio-cultural aspects and seeks to enhance their quality of life based on Islamic principles, leading to various new needs, including Islamic schools, Islamic banking, and halal tourist attractions. Professionals form a significant component of the Muslim middle class in major cities across Indonesia, and they directly experience the impact of Islamization in all aspects of life, particularly in the development of a lifestyle imbued with Islamic values.

Jayanto (2020) analysed the phenomenon of Islamisation amongst Muslim middle class in Indonesia and revealed that there is a correlation between the piety of the Muslim community and the interest of capitalising on religious commodities. The commodification of religion has been an ongoing process since the Reformation period, coinciding with socioeconomic developments and a government that is more receptive to the aspirations of the Muslim majority (Srinarwati, 2022). Ramadhan (2021) explains that commodification of religion aims not to create new forms and symbols of religion that contradict existing belief but to present religion as a commodity imbued with spiritual attraction, making it consumable by society. In this sense, religion is redefined as a commodity to exchange and trade in the spiritual market (Amna, 2019).

Indonesia's substantial Muslim population of 231 million, a significant market

is represented for the commodification of religion, and economic principles for the supply and demand to naturally come into play. Symbolically, Islam has fostered the expansion of a highly prospective marketplace, particularly for the urban Muslim generation in major cities. Husna (2019) describes how modernity and capital often clash with the Islamic community and dynamically collaborate. As a result of commercialisation, new popular trends emerged that influences clothing styles and attire that reflects the Muslim identity. Commercialisation has also led to high fees for clerics frequently appearing on television and producing religious-themed music, including songs promoting Islamic Da'wah by musical groups like Gigi, Dmasiv, and Ungu (Wasisto, 1970).

In the realm of literature, the rise of inspirational books and Islamic novels has captured the interest of urban readers, particularly among the Muslim middle class (Alamsyah & Hadiz, 2017; Hasan, 2012; Hefner, 2019; Wieringa, 2006). Notably, "Verses of Love," or "Ayat-Ayat Cinta", a best-selling novel, has garnered significant attention among its readership. The success of Islamic novels pave way for film adaptation, where Islamic-themed films have gained popularity (Panuju & Susilo, 2019b, 2019a). The digital era has transformed the Indonesian film industry, fueled by advancements in film-making and broadcast access technology, the digital film entities have empowered filmmakers to explore cultural and artistic works within the creative economy.

Baudrillard effectively demonstrated the impact of consumerism in society. His theory widely adopted by Communication scholars to describe and discussing

how Consumption trigger on society (Baudrillard, 1994; M. Hidayat, 2012; Mohammadi Vakil, 2023; Taghiyari et al., 2022). Understanding how our culture and society are shaped by our consumption habits is crucial, as Baudrillard's concept of the 'consumption society' highlights (Srinarwati, 2023). When we consider this concept, in relation to movie watching among Muslims it reveals insights.

Indonesia has a population and their movie choices and consumption patterns reflect their cultural values and beliefs (Hew & Studies, 2018; Rodriguez, 2019; Zuhdi, 2018). Following Baudrillards theory on the consumption society these patterns of consumption play a role in shaping individuals social identities and sense of self. This illustrates that movies serve not as entertainment but as a means to express and validate social and cultural ideologies (E. Hidayat et al., 2023; Panuju & Susilo, 2019a).

However there are considerations when applying Baudrillards theory to film watching, within the community. His argument primarily relies on purchasing behaviors centered around culture possibly overlooking the cultural context of Indonesian Muslims. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the theory and account for differences when applying it appropriately.

In this paper, we delve into how Baudrillard's idea of the 'consumption society' can help us better understand how Indonesian Muslims consume movies. We also explore the limitations that may come up when applying this concept. By doing we aim to gain insights that can guide future research in this area.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method, combining two data collection techniques to fulfil the research objectives. Direct interviews in the form of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with film consumers, supplemented by quantitative data gathered through surveys distributed to film consumers in five major cities in Indonesia: Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi. The reason of Jabodetabek Area chosen because more than 50% movie consumption in Indonesia centralised on Jabodetabek Epicentrum (E. Hidayat et al., 2023) as Special Regional of Indonesian Capital (Jakarta Metropolitan Region) FGD Participants chosen from the active moviegoers and watch Indonesian Movies at least once within one year.

Using qualitative and quantitative data was necessary to gain comprehensive insights into the dynamics of religious films' development after the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of both filmmakers and film consumers.

The data analysis process was conducted in multiple stages following data collection. For the qualitative data analysis, the Nvivo software was utilised. This process, based on Djamba dan Neuman's (2002) approach, involved various steps, including testing, sorting, categorising, evaluating, comparing, synthesising, and exploring the meaning of the data to derive propositions and draw conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Indonesian Religious Movies: An Object of Consumption for Muslim Communities

The modern urban society has witnessed significant changes in the film

industry, shifting away from its previous political functions during the New Order era, such as serving national security interests. At present, the Indonesian film industry focused more on aesthetics, technological advancements, and its economic role. The Film industry now plays an active role in the economy through creative works, and their development is strongly intertwined with the rise of the creative industry in Indonesia. Considering the Muslim community as a majority group in the country who embraces modern lifestyle that becomes a dynamic aspect of urban social life in major cities has created an impact towards the Indonesian film industry that leads to competition among various film genres, particularly those preferred by the Muslim and urban communities.

In the early 2000s, the Indonesian film industry witnessed a surge in popularity with the release of several high-quality films that captured the attention of the Indonesian audience. Among them, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2008) was the first religious film to gain significant attraction having a large number of viewers and generating substantial profits. Consequently, the ability of religious films to compete with other genres was faced criticism from film critics and the Muslim community.

Religious films in Indonesia from its inception have been expected to do more than just provide entertainment with religious elements; they are also tasked with conveying Da'wah messages in alignment with Islamic teachings (Sa'idah, 2019). This dual objective makes the creation of religious films more intricate compared to other genres. The theme of religious

identity is particularly sensitive, and mishandling it can lead to controversies within the Muslim community.

Given these expectations, criticisms, and aspirations, the production of religious films has become a complex endeavour. The following data provides an overview of religious film production in Indonesia since the start of the reform era in 1998.

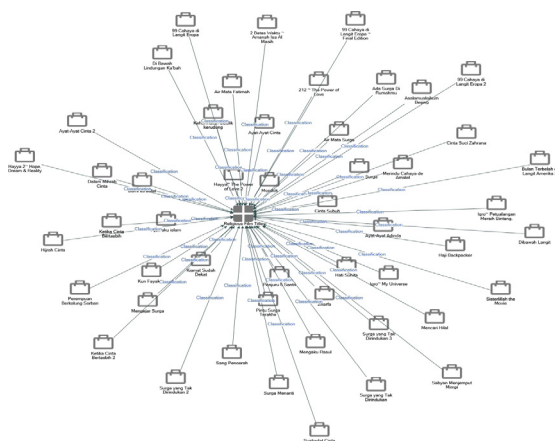


Figure 2. Religious Movie Production in Indonesia

During the early years of the reformation period starting 1999 up until 2007, no Islamic-themed films released in Indonesia. The absence of religious film production continued in 2020 due to the social restrictions imposed due to the effects of COVID-19. The production of religious films is closely linked to the number of consumers who are film enthusiasts.

Religious films have redefined itself as an object of consumption. Apart from providing entertainment, they are now seen as instruments of worship and messengers of Da'wah (religious propagation). In Baudrillard's theory of the consumption society, people's purchases are not solely based on their social class but on their capacity to consume. Consumers engage in

consumption activities to acquire symbols manifested in objects of consumption, and this is not solely driven by the use value or exchange value of the products (M. Hidayat, 2012; Mohammadi Vakil, 2023).

Baudrillard's concept of consumption goes beyond the individual's authority over the use value of goods and services as it revolves around the logic of production and manipulation, which carries a broader social significance (Srinawati, 2022, 2023). This understanding involves two distinct processes.

The first process is the interpretation and communication stage, where goods and services acquire meaning through a code of consumption actions. In this context, certain products become more than mere commodities; they take on symbolic importance and can serve as markers of social integration and power prestige. Thus, consuming such goods and services fulfils practical needs and reflects individual tastes and social aspirations.

The second process is selecting and forming social clusters, where objects or signs are assigned specific values that determine one's social status and position in the hierarchy. Certain products represent particular social identities or affiliations through this process, creating distinctions among various social groups.

In the context of consumers, individuals from various backgrounds can become fans of religious films and follow the consumption patterns prevalent in the Muslim community. This group champions the prominence of Islamic religious films over other genres, considering them superior choices. The marketing model and consumption pattern of religious

films do not rely on mass promotion directly; instead, they emerge from selected groups such as religious recitation circles, congregations, and mass organisations.

Another crucial factor influencing consumers' film choices is the presence of well-known actors or public figures who play leading roles in the films. These main characters are intentionally used as film icons to attract audiences to religious films. As a result, the more renowned the main actors or actresses are, the wider the film's reach among consumers, leading to increased revenue, mainly for films in the religious genre.

In terms of film distribution, several titles have gained popularity, featuring famous actors and actresses, such as "Ayat-Ayat Cinta," "Ketika Cinta Bertasbih," and "Sang Pencerah."

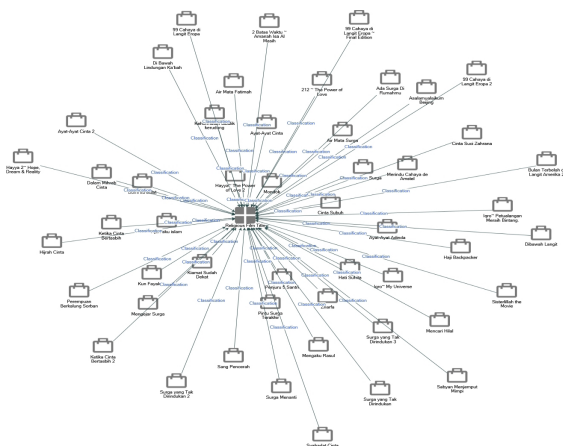


Figure 3. Distribution of Religious Film Titles in Indonesia

Several titles of religious genre films are intentionally released ahead of the month of Ramadan, taking advantage of the phenomenon of increasing religious enthusiasm during this period. This strategic timing provides the ideal opportunity to present religious films that resonate with

the Muslim community. The primary target audience for religious films in the market is the Muslim middle class, for whom watching such films holds significant value in connecting entertainment with their social piety. The assumption is that fulfilling their leisure and satisfaction is primarily driven by their pursuit of social piety (Husna, 2019).

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The availability of religious film products serves as an adaptive strategy for the Muslim middle class as they navigate the challenges of modern life while maintaining their devout Muslim identity. Membership in the Muslim middle class is determined by specific criteria, including the ability to spend an average of US\$5-20 (Rp. 45,000-Rp. 180,000) per day, with those below this range classified as belonging to the lower class. Additionally,

this group is characterised by attaining higher education, usually a bachelor's degree, a stable job with a consistent income, and the means to own property or a vehicle. Moreover, they can afford to take vacations at least once a year (Dewi & Ahmad Khoirul Fata, 2021).

Initially, the surge in Muslim middle-class consumerism in the realm of religious films appears promising. It indicates a growing film market that caters to Muslim communities' religious values and spiritual needs. However, the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic raises uncertainties about whether religious film can attract substantial number of viewers. The pandemic disrupted film releases, it closed theatres, and altered consumer behaviour, in turn affecting the religious film industry.

In light of these challenges, film business actors must be agile and innovative in their strategies to capitalise on the potential post-pandemic euphoria when social restrictions are lifted. It becomes imperative for them to seize the opportunity to regain revenue from the Muslim middle-class viewers who are eager to return to cinemas and embrace entertainment that aligns with their religious convictions.

Analysing the prospect of religious movies using consumer preference analysis

The growth of the Indonesian film industry created a significant impact on the development of the creative economy sector, aligning with the objectives outlined in the Law on Film Article 4, giving emphasises on film's economic function and its role as a catalyst for the creative economy. Cinemas represent a major source

of income for the film industry, contributing substantially to its overall revenue.

Prior to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian film industry witnessed a substantial viewership of around 60 million in 2019. However, the pandemic severely hit the industry, resulting in the closure of many cinemas to curb the transmission of COVID-19. Consequently, by the end of 2020, the number of moviegoers declined drastically to approximately 12.5 million (Fitria & Rachmawati, 2023).

Following the pandemic, gradual increase in the number of moviegoers was noticed. However, Indonesian films faced challenges in competing with foreign films despite the government's instruction on quota film policy, mandating a minimum cinema screen allocation for Indonesian films, and the recognition of several Indonesian films at international festivals. It is evident that more efforts are needed to enhance the competitiveness of Indonesian films in the global market.

The closure of cinemas during the pandemic has led to a significant increase in the usage of movie streaming services, driven by restrictions on social activities. These internet-based entertainment platforms have provided crucial support to the film industry when traditional cinemas were not operational due to social restriction policies. The rise of online entertainment media, particularly streaming Video on Demand (VoD) services, has intensified competition as they offer paid movie viewing services, directly competing with traditional cinema experiences (E. Hidayat et al., 2023). VoD entertainment media encompasses a wide range of content,

including TV shows, films of various genres, and TV series, all delivered through the Internet, bypassing traditional cable or satellite broadcast channels. Companies that provide such services are called Over The Top (OTT) companies. Netflix is the pioneer and most popular OTT service in Indonesian society, and it has been joined by other providers such as Iflix, HOOQ, and others.

The advancement of film technology, including electronic cinemas and modern film-making equipment, has become an integral part of human social life, especially in the post-COVID-19 era. This sophisticated technology enables filmmakers to present a contemporary reality or evoke nostalgia through past depictions. Moreover, it allows the creation of films that transcend actual reality, captivating urban communities and becoming new attractions or symbols.

In line with Baudrillard's theory of consumption, as discussed in Saumantri dan Zikrillah (2020), film enthusiasts are not categorised based on their social class but rather on their consumption abilities. In today's society, anyone can be part of any consumer group as long as they align with the consumption patterns, especially concerning religious groups. Consumption is viewed as a systematic action involving the manipulation of signs, and for an object to become a subject of consumption, it must be imbued with meaningful symbols.

In the consumer society, the meaning of the sign and symbolic values, such as status, prestige, lifestyle expression, and honour, is the main motivation for consumption behaviour. This shift in values was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to changes in societal behaviour and

habits. As the pandemic subsided and cinemas reopened for film screenings, a fascinating competition between cinema media emerged, particularly in the context of the religious film genre, which is the primary focus of this research.

The film industry strives to capture the consumer market by offering a diverse range of film genres. The combination of various genres aims to attract the attention of film audiences, preventing them from becoming overly fixated on a single type of film. Religious films, as objects of consumption, have acquired a new significance beyond mere entertainment; they now serve as messengers of *da'wah*, conveying religious messages and teachings.

For a more detailed analysis, the research includes comparative data on film genres that are of most interest to residents in and around Jakarta, known as Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi).

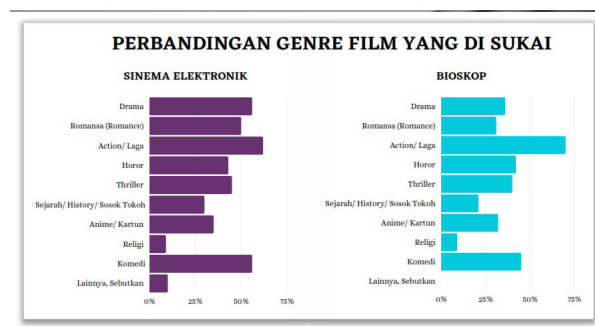


Figure 4. Film Enthusiasts According to Genre

The survey results indicate that religious film enthusiasts represent a relatively small proportion, accounting for only around 12% of the film genre in cinemas and electronic cinema platforms, including internet-based OTT services.

When examining the educational background of respondents who favour religious films, those with an undergraduate degree (S1) dominate, comprising 56% of the respondents. The next significant group consists of respondents with a master's degree (S2), making up 22% of the total. The lowest percentage of interest in religious films comes from respondents with a high school diploma or vocational education (SMA/SMK level), at approximately 17%.

Regarding gender-based preferences, the survey data shows that female respondents exhibit a higher interest in religious films, accounting for 66.7% of the respondents. In contrast, male respondents show a lower interest, representing only 33.3%.

Filmmakers consider religious film audience preferences as key factors when predicting market share and shaping their film-making strategies. An interview with a filmmaker revealed that certain religious films produced by major production houses like Starvision may not achieve significant commercial success or attract a large audience. Nevertheless, there remains a consistent market demand for religious films. Notably, religious films centred on Islamic themes, such as "Hati Suhita," "Ayat-Ayat Cinta," and "Perempuan Berkabung Sorban," continue to resonate with viewers.

Producers and production houses recognise the potential benefits of creating religious films, even if some may not be highly profitable in terms of box office revenue. Beyond the financial aspect, these films can serve as subtle means of conveying moral values and messages to the Muslim audience. This indirect sense

of guidance or patronage can impact consumers within Muslim society.

When discussing religious films, filmmakers consider more than immediate profits; they also contemplate the films' sustainable prospects. Each film is crafted with a specific purpose beyond pure business considerations. Religious films are unique in the industry, encompassing artistic expression, cultural representation, social impact, and spiritual significance. Filmmakers are mindful of their work's broader impact on shaping cultural identities and social values. As such, religious films serve as sources of entertainment and carriers of deeper meanings and messages, fulfilling a multifaceted purpose for filmmakers and audiences alike. (Panji, 2023).

Indeed, the filmmaker's perspective emphasises that films go beyond being solely profit-driven commodities. Instead, they serve as cultural tools that reflect local wisdom, encompassing values related to culture, education, entertainment, and information. Films have the power to convey messages of significance, carrying values that can resonate with the population. The religious film genre, in particular, has the potential to embody da'wah values, making it a medium for promoting religious teachings and principles to the Muslim community.

Audience preferences in this context are influenced by their hobbies, likes, and individual perceptions of their needs, which they seek to fulfil through film products. The study finds that the audience's preference is inclined towards Indonesian films with a religious genre. Genre classification in the film refers to specific types or categories

that share common characteristics, such as setting, content, storyline, theme, structure, actions, time, and characters (Rizky & Stellarosa, 2019).

The observations made by filmmakers reveal a unique characteristic of religious filmgoers; unlike general moviegoers who may watch various genres, religious film enthusiasts tend to prefer films centred around their religious beliefs, particularly those related to Islam. This behaviour aligns with Baudrillard's concept of the consumption system, which is fundamentally based on signs and symbols. For these Muslim communities who are devoted fans of religious films, film consumption transcends mere entertainment needs (Triary Hardy & Susilo, 2022). Instead, their consumption of religious films serves as a mechanism to reinforce their identity and social status. By engaging with films that contain religious proselytising content, these filmgoers are driven by a desire to express and affirm their devotion and commitment to their faith. It becomes a way for them to mark their social piety and affiliation with their religious community.

The insights gathered from interviews with film consumers provide valuable suggestions for increasing the appeal of Indonesian religious films to the Muslim community. Certain attractions and changes in approach are needed to encourage more people to watch religious films in cinemas or through electronic cinema streaming. First, avoid doom stories. Consumers expressed that they are no longer interested in religious films that solely focus on doom and lack logical connections to the modern world. Such stories can be seen as unrealistic

and unappealing. Instead, religious films should present narratives that are more relatable and relevant to contemporary issues. Second, incorporating inspirational biographical history. The audience finds it more engaging if religious films combine with inspirational figures' biographical history. This approach adds depth and relatability to the stories, making them more impactful and inspiring for viewers. Third, balancing preaching messages with entertainment. Viewers prefer religious films that balance conveying religious messages and providing entertainment. If the film is too heavy on preaching, it may deter some audiences who come to the cinema primarily for entertainment. Combining religious themes with a comedy genre or other lighter elements can create a more enjoyable and relaxed movie-watching experience.

CONCLUSION

The development of the religious film industry in Indonesia has been influenced by the increase in products labelled as Islamic, especially after the fall of the New Order. Despite the complexities and sensitivities involved in dealing with film censorship institutions, religious films continue to be produced due to the presence of a dedicated market of religious film enthusiasts. These individuals see religious films as a way to maintain their Islamic identity in the face of challenges and the influx of foreign films that carry Western culture.

In the early 2000s, religious films reached over 1 million viewers by strategically releasing films ahead of Ramadan and featuring famous actors

and public figures with high popularity. However, according to survey data, the religious genre currently has the lowest demand in cinemas and electronic cinema streaming, especially in Greater Jakarta.

To increase the number of viewers for religious films, filmmakers can consider the following strategies: 1) Avoid Mixing Religious Storylines with Horror: As audiences seek logical and relatable narratives, it is best to avoid combining religious themes with horror elements, which may be perceived as irrational and less appealing. 2) Combine Religious Storylines with Biographies of National Religious Figures: Incorporating the biographies of inspirational national religious figures into religious films can add depth and inspiration to the stories, making them more captivating for the audience. 3) Be Flexible and Add Entertainment Value: Recognising that audiences primarily come to cinemas for entertainment, religious films can be made more flexible and not overly rigid in their storytelling. Incorporating elements of comedy can make the films more interesting and enjoyable for viewers without losing their religious essence.

The research findings align with Baudrillard's theory of the consumption society, which emphasises the significance of symbols and signs in the consumption process. It reveals that consumers of religious films are not solely motivated by entertainment but also by their desire to reinforce their identity and social piety through the messages conveyed in these films. This highlights the more profound significance of religious films as a tool for cultural expression and identity reinforcement for the Muslim community.

Moreover, the research supports Baudrillard's idea about the influence of selected groups and elites in directing tastes within the consumption arena. In the context of religious films, the selected group is the Muslim community, especially devout Muslims, who have strong ties to their religious identity. In this case, the elite refers to religious leaders who actively promote the preference for religious genre films over other genres among the Muslim community. This influence from religious leaders contributes to the growing market and continued production of religious films in Indonesia.

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