SOCIO-CULTURAL DISCOURSE OF MUSLIM SOCIETY IN SOCIAL SEMIOTICS ASPECT OF ADVERTISING TEXT IN MALAYSIA

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Purpose: The socio-culture of Muslim society in Malaysia ought to be the main aspect of constructing an advertisement message. However, in developing local media, advertisement contents still do not observe locality of culture and religion such that advertising fails to fulfill the social semiotics of Muslim society. This research analyzes the social semiotics element in advertisement text which constructs the socio-cultural discourse of Muslim society.

Methodology: This is qualitative research using content analysis. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling. Discourses as material for analysis are TV adverts for health products. The three advert texts selected as initial research sample in analyzing the discourse and social semiotics are Almas Jus Nusantara, Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu. Research data was collected using coding form and analysed using Fairclough Discourse Analysis.

Main Findings: Research results find that all three ads are still not clear on the social semiotics of the socio-culture discourse of Muslim society. Analysis proves that the discourse of advertisement text neglects the Islamic Advertising Principle so as to cause erosion of religious and socio-cultural values, while the social semiotics conveyed through the metaphor of women’s and men’s images are irrelevant in terms of the cultural identity of Muslim society.

Implications/Applications: Although social semiotics give a good interpretation of a product, the locality aspect of socio-culture is also important to uphold the Islamic values for a Muslim product. Therefore, the preservation of cultural identity in marketing a product needs to be viewed from a wider perspective. In efforts to ensure the audience are aware of competitive products in the market, marketing must be balanced by taking into consideration the Islamic Advertising Principle.

Keywords: Advertisement (Advert), socio-culture, self-representation, social semiotics, locality.

INTRODUCTION

According to Mohamad (2016) changing the structure of an advertisement (advert) may balance the inequality of advert deals, especially for the proxy of a foreign company. Nevertheless, according to Adi (2014), the existence of the National Advertising Policy should take into account cultural protectionism by global corporate companies and multinationals. The reason is that adverts published overseas exhibit cultures inappropriate for consumers in Malaysia (Adi, 2014). And in discussing advertising practice, (Bari & Abbas, 2011) argued that advertising is not merely for profits such that consumerism ethics are ignored. If an advert affects social semiotics such as an advert which results in erosion of religious and socio-cultural values, then that advert is unethical (Bari & Abbas, 2011; Aida & Sofiah, 2015; Teng, Quoquab, Hussin, & Mohamad, 2016). Likewise, as discussed by Akhter, Abassi, and Umar (2011) concerning ethical issues in advertising, it implicates religious perceptions if offensive behaviour is frequently displayed in an advert.

There are adverts which do not fulfill Islamic principles such as misrepresentation of product, product which are health hazards, advert models who dress indecently, free mixing, products which are not certified as halal and so on (Abbas & Ezhar, 2012; Ahmad, 2010; Mohd, 2009; Siti, Noor, & Jusang, 2014; Tabrizi & Kabirmejat, 2017). Ahmad (2010) argued that adverts should be shariah-compliant in the context of not violating sensitive issues such as mahram, offensive or indecent language and even bad moral values, immodest or non-Islamic dressing or negative character traits.

This breach of ethics occurred in the case of two Qu Puteh products alleged to contain mercury harmful to consumer health (Hasbullah, 2016). The advert message of beauty products of Qu Puteh and D Herbs triggered different psychographics of consumers. The parody adverts of Qu Puteh and D’Herbs have become phenomenal and viral and so exaggerated such that they are associated with social lifestyle. Thus the adverts have become the tagline and style of social teasings such as the style of ‘Qu Puteh, Qu Puteh baru lah puteh’ (the right way to fairness) and Qu Puteh ‘pink’ color as well as the unmasculine style of the male in the advert for D’Herbs. Thus, the purpose of this research is to analyze the semiotics element of advert text in constructing social discourse of the Muslim society in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world of marketing, an advert is an important medium to ensure business profitability. It is a one-way form of communication in the paid market (Mohd, 2004; Alserhan, 2011; Isada & Isada, 2017) for the purpose of attracting consumer attention or interest in the availability of a new product or service (Aniss & Al-Hasan, 2015; Nugraha & Indrawati, 2017; Intan, 2016; Visser, 2016) besides being a vehicle to convey the latest information on the product or
service (Aida & Sofiah, 2015; Srisangkaew, 2017) and acts as a reminder of the product and service offered, at once giving a prolonged impact on the consumer mind (Mohd & Osman, 2012).

Mohamad (2006) stated that an advert is a form of socio-culture for a community which influences consumer psychographics (Thomas, 2007). Adi (2014) discussed the National Advertising Policy (Dasar Pengiklanan Negara) in dealing with the issue of cultural protectionism. According to Mohamad (2016), the Policy enables maintaining country branding and the local advertising agency platform to be at par with international agencies. This aspect is seen as essential in maintaining the structure of local adverts which uphold the values of local culture. According Noureldin and Amal (2014), the semiotic element in adverts is important in shaping social values and ideology. A semiotic approach enables interpretation of advert meaning and discourse which influences ideology. The semiotic element becomes a significant symbol of language and visible non-verbal communication (Solik, 2014).

Likewise, Akhter et al., (2011) in their discussion of ethical issues in advertising, stated that there are implications for religious perception if the offensive behaviour is frequently exhibited in adverts. Bari and Abbas (2011) argued that Islam has already provided clear business ethics in the practice of contemporary advertising which safeguards and protect consumer rights. There is social criticism towards advertising which encourages consumers to be materialistic or spendthrift, contains stereotyping, or are unsuitable for general viewing and even offensive (Akhter et al., 2011; Rai, 2010; El-Adly, 2010; ).

Shafiq and Kalthom (2016) argued that adverts, from an Islamic point of view recommended by past researchers, may not propagate wasteful spending (Anwar & Saeed, 1996; Saeed, Ahmed, & Mukhtar, 2001; Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2001; Al-Burayq, 2004; Hassan, Chachi, & Latiff, 2008; Abdullah & Ahmad, 2010; Hague, Ahmed, & Irfath, 2010). Bari and Abbas (2011), discussed adverts from the socio-cultural aspect of Muslim society aligned with the Islamic system of business ethics. Other researchers only stated the elements required and the prohibition in an Islamic advert without stating that such elements form a system of Islamic business ethics such as argued by Bari and Abbas (2011). Among the ethical values outlined are honesty, fairness, the prohibition of showing the female body, forbidding promotion of products which have sexual elements as well as fraudulent misrepresentation or fabrication of the properties of a product to viewers.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Analysis of discourse pioneered by Fairclough (1992) is used as a theoretical framework for this research. Fairclough (1992) focused on the text language, verbal and visual as well as the social semiotics context which translates the values of the society’s social discourse. Thus the text of the adverts selected is analyzed based on these elements in order to understand the meaning and discourse. The element of Islamic Advertising Principle by Aida and Sofiah (2015) is also used as a framework in assessing the social discourse of Muslim society. The four principles which form the basis of assessment in this research are true and honest advert message, symbol of the glory or eminence of Islam (Sh’iar Islam), Islamic values and best possible manner of portraying women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This is qualitative research using content analysis. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling. Discourse as material for analysis is TV adverts for health products. The three advert texts selected as initial research sample in analyzing the discourse and social semiotics are Almas Jus Nusantra, Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu. Research data was collected using coding form and analysed using Fairclough Discourse Analysis (1992).

ANALYSIS OF ADVERT TEXTS
The analysis was conducted on three ad texts marketing healthcare products, namely, Almas Jus Nusantra, Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu.

Purpose
This advert evokes the curiosity of the consumer to try it. The product is said to assist in energizing consumers of any age.

Image
Image of the aged man and woman who raised both hands symbolizing strength and also high energy. The woman is dressed in a Malay traditional dress.

Image of a male child and female teenager mimicking happiness while holding the “Jus Nusantra” product. Image of the female teenager shows her dress but not wearing hijab (without headscarf).

Image of product founder who wore hijab but she seems to stand out.

Language
The advert uses simple language easily understood by the consumer. Such language may influence and instill confidence in consumer to use the product.
Figure 1: Almas jus nusantara

**Audience**

The intended target audience by the advertiser is the whole family, proven by the use of imagery and language.

**Technique**

Metaphor: Sentence used “penghulu segala produk” means the product is the best among all other products.

Testimony: “Umur saya dah banyak, tapi saya masih sihat dan kuat, saya amalkan jus Nusantara sebab tu lah” is a testimony which states that this product gives energy to all consumers including the aged.

Stereotype: Images of the aged man and woman used to show their strength and energy after consuming the product. Besides, use of the product founder’s image in promoting the product.

Figure 2: Qu puteh million cell

**Purpose**

This advert is for attracting consumers who desire maximal supple, fair and healthy skin to try the product advertised. The product is said to enable overcoming external and internal problems of the consumer.

**Image**

The image of the product founder wearing bright and attractive color, without properly covering herself as required by Shariah, seems to stand out.

The product founder is wearing and seemingly showing off quite excessive accessories such as bracelet, chain with pendant, ring, and tiara.

Use of inappropriate body language in promoting the product.

**Language**
The simple language used is easily understood to attract consumers but there is too much exaggeration in promoting product.

**Audience**

The target audience is consumers who desire maximal suppleness, fair and healthy skin as well as a solution for external and internal problems.

**Technique**

Metaphor: The use of the sentence “rasailah manafaatnya yang berganda-ganda, qu puteh, qu puteh, barulah putih” as a “tagline” in the form of a metaphor to attract consumer interest.

Testimony: The product founder uses her own testimony in promoting her own product.

Stereotype: Image of woman who is more beautiful than the product founder to promote product in order to influence the consumer to look like her.

![Figure 3: D’Herbs losyen putih susu](image)

**Purpose**

This advert promotes the product to consumers who desire fair skin. This product is said to whiten the skin evenly.

**Image**

Using the image of a handsome and fair-skinned man is able to attract female attention.

Image of the woman without headscarf and with uneven skin tone problem.

Image of handsome and fair-skinned man to attract the consumer.

Image of sexy and fair-skinned woman to influence the consumer.

**Language**

Use of simple language is easily understood by the consumer. However, use of quite a sensitive sentence “eee, macam dayang senandung, muka je putih, tangan hitam” (like the singing lady-in-waiting, fair face but dark hands) to promote product. Besides that, excessive use of hyperbolic sentence (exaggeration) to promote product.

**Audience**

The target audience for the product is for consumer who desires fair and healthy skin.

**Technique**

Metaphor: Use of sentence “dapatkan segera produk d’herbs terlajak laris” connotes that many consumers have already tried the product.

Testimony: A woman with uneven skin tone problem before using the product gives testimony of her success in overcoming her problem by using the product.

Stereotype: Promoting product in advert by the exploitation of women by using a sensual image of a female model.

**DISCUSSION**

All three adverts represent healthcare products screened on terrestrial TV stations in Malaysia. The adverts are broadcast for the purpose of promoting healthcare products to society. Research results find that even though there is a semiotics...
element in the discourse of the adverts, the brand owners are still neglecting the socio-cultural aspect of Muslim society as a whole. In marketing the products, these adverts are perceived as boldly triggering change in the socio-culture of Muslim society. The advert discourse is exhibited as fresh, cheerful and positive. Nonetheless, analysis of the adverts shows that their advertisers did not refer to principles of Islamic advertising in making them. Aida and Sofiah, (2015) stressed on the basis of Islamic advertising which upholds the principle of enjoining good and forbidding wrong. Among the important aspects which the people in the advertising industry should be exposed to are that the advert message should be true and honest, glory or eminence as Islamic symbol, Islamic values, and that women should be portrayed in the best possible manner. According to Putri and Badrul (2015), there is an ambivalent attitude in advertising healthcare products which compromises advertising ethics with Eastern values in the context of healthcare to the consumer. This attitude impacts the cultural identity of a country.

The language used in adverts provides the socio-cultural discourse of society. According to Maserah and Noraini (2016), use of language builds the verbal message which may influence the target audience. In the advert discourse of Almas Jus Nusantara, the use of simple language facilitates the consumer to understand the advert. Such language influences and instills consumer confidence in the product. For the advert discourse of Qu Puteh Million Cell, simple language used is also easily understood to attract consumer interest, although there is much exaggeration in the promotion. The advert discourse for D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu also uses simple language easy to understand but the sentence, “eee, macam dayang senandung, muka je putih, tangan hitam” in promoting the product may upset the sensitivity of some people. In addition, there is excessive use of hyperbolic sentences in promoting the product.

Using testimonies in advert discourse effectively reinforces the promotion of the product’s good properties. In the advert for Almas Jus Nusantara “Umur sayah dah banyak, tapi saya masih shihat dan kuat, saya amalkan jus Nusantara sebab tu lah” is testimony that the product energises the aged consumer. The advert for D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu uses the testimony of a woman who had uneven skin tone problem before using the product and overcomes this problem by using the product. Based on interpretation of metaphor in social semiotics, the advert for Almas Jus Nusantara airs the sentence “penghulu segala produk” to mean that it is the best product among all other products. In the advert for Qu Puteh Million Cell, the sentence “rasialah manafaatnya yang berganda-ganda, qu puteh, qu puteh, barulah putih”, which means maximal fair skin from using the product Qu Puteh, is used as a tagline in the form of metaphor to attract consumer interest. Further, the use of the sentence “dapatkan segera produk d’herbs terlajak laris” means many, many consumers have tried the product.

Thus, the discourse of beautiful, healthy and fair skin is clearly raised. In the adverts Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu, the images of a beautiful woman and handsome man are used to influence consumers. The competitive marketing of cosmetic products in the market proves that consumers are obsessed with beauty and fair skin (Aimal, 2016). The images of women and men in all three adverts do not fulfill what is discussed from the aspect of Islamic Advertising Principle. Stereotyping in marketing health products such as in the adverts of Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu carries the stigma of Skeptical thinking in the Malaysian society, while the advert of Almas Jus Nusantara uses the family image to symbolize that the product is suitable for all age levels.

The scenario of contemporary advertising shows the role of the brand owner in their adverts. All three adverts use the benefit-function approach which highlights self-representation. According to Shuhaida (2015), in an increasingly competitive market, the approach of self-representation is increasingly used by brand owners to increase brand competitiveness. Self-representation enables shaping of symbolic meanings to achieve self and social goals (Shuhaida, 2015). In the advert for Almas Jus Nusantara, the images of a well-known actress, Fauziah Nawi and actor, Zaidi Omar, together with the product founder, are used to market the health product.

In the advert for Qu Puteh Million Cell and D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu, the main image is of the brand owner themselves as self—representation. Too much limelight on the image in the advert for Qu Puteh Million Cell causes image building to contradict the audience themselves. The image does not conform to Islamic Advertising Principle from the aspect of portraying women in the best possible manner. It is perceived as displaying excessive adornment and body language inappropriate for public viewing. Likewise, the advert of D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu conveys the images of a non-masculine man and sexy woman. Analysis of the advert for D’Herbs Losyen Putih Susu finds that it does not conform properly with Islamic values. This advert symbolizes the opposite of the male character who does not have to take care of his beauty for good health. In this advert, the image of a non-masculine and fair-skinned man stressing on self-beauty is irrelevant in the socio-culture of Muslim society.

Contemporary adverts widely use women as subject/object thus breaching advertising ethics. In contrast, in Islamic advertising, each advert broadcast should not contain sensual scenes which exploit the female body to attract consumer attention (Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2001; Hassan et al., 2008; Hakim, Bhatti, Omar & Al-Juhari, 2011; Haque et al., 2010; Abuznaid, 2012; Behravan, Jamalzadesh, & Masoudi, 2012). Aside from the exploitation of women, Islamic Advertising forbids using celebrities as testimony or ambassador for the product if the celebrities do not use the product advertised (Anwar & Saeed, 1996; Abuznaid, 2012). Such practice makes the viewer wish to be like the celebrity as projected, when in actual fact that celebrity probably never used the product touted. This will cause disappointment when viewers do not get the transformation to be like the celebrity as advertised (Monik, Nik, Nur & Khadher, 2013).
The semiotics element is reinforced by the metaphor of aged men and women images displayed as robust and energetic after using the product Almas Jus Nusantara. The white background used in the advert is an analogy of natural characteristics directly interpreted. The color pink in the image of man and woman alludes to a joyful and happy ambiance. Likewise, in the advert for Qu Puteh Million Cell, the color white used for the background and pink worn by the female image (product founder) translate the metaphor of colors which are deeply ingrained in people’s lives. A cheerful and happy atmosphere is portrayed to the consumer. It may be understood as if by using the product Qu Puteh Million Cell, they will be cheerful and lead happy lives. According to Monika et al. (2013), colors are significant to humans. Colors enable changing one’s taste, influences personal views, brighten up space as well as conceal one’s imperfections. Monika et al. (2013) argued that the color white is associated with rules, grace and natural characteristics which are meaningful in life. The semiotics element loaded with decorative accessories and diamonds in the female image portrays the shining and glittering properties of diamond.

With the development of globalization Samsudin (2001) discussed media culture and cultural identity which trigger changes in society. In this era of commercial media, society is not only exposed to the imagery and representation of culture through media but is also involved with the market audience. The aspects of profitability and market, as well as consumer interest, are prioritized over cultural identity which is neglected (Samsudin, 2001). The advertisement discourse may be perceived from the aspect of concern over the strengthening of cultural identity. In the effort to capture the market for the respective health products, the advertisers manipulate the important attraction of using the product so much so the social semiotics and socio-cultural values of Muslim society are ignored.

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CONCLUSION

Fairclough Discourse Analysis (1989) of the selected advert texts shows the influence of persuasive message through them. Local adverts accept the elements of attraction and influence on the target audience to make the decision to buy. This research proves that the advertising factor may change the views and actions of consumers to buy. However, when a brand owner promotes her product without conforming to principles and ethics of advertising, it will have an effect on the consumers. In the context of socio-culture of Muslim society, the advert broadcast or published should certainly abide by Islamic Advertising Principle. Even though the Fairclough Discourse Analysis (1989) stresses on social semiotics which gives a good interpretation of a product, the locality aspect of socio-culture is also important to uphold the Islamic values for a Muslim product. Therefore, preservation of cultural identity in marketing a product needs to be viewed from a wider perspective. In efforts to ensure the audience are aware of competitive products in the market, marketing must be balanced by taking into consideration the Islamic Advertising Principle.

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