

Hijab Syar'i and Instagram Social Media in the Perspective of Spectacle

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Abstract: This research is based on the argument that women who wear syar'i hijab on Instagram are a part of the spectacle society. By using Guy Debord's spectacle perspective, this research aims at enriching and closing the gaps existing within studies on hijab women in Indonesia, which is captured with numerous faces. Hijab is a display of piety, lifestyle, and also a symbol of independence for middle and upper-class women who try to embrace modernity without losing their piety. By using netnographic strategy, this research finds that the images of the hijab women on Instagram reflect a form of the commodity representation that supports capitalist society. It can be traced from the symbols emphasized by the syar'i hijab women that they display on Instagram, in the form of middle and upper-class capitalist products, for instance, iPhone, Starbucks Coffee, bags, and the latest cars. It creates paradoxical signs between modesty in religion and capitalist luxury consumption.

Keywords: Syar'i hijab, Instagram, Social Media, Spectacle Society, Debord

1. Introduction

Dissimilar to some Moslem scholars who see syar'i hijab as a gesture of piety, this research begins with an idea that syar'i hijab is not merely a gesture of piety, but also an expression of numerous faces. Therefore, this research criticizes several approaches in studies on women who wear hijab, that construct their identity as something stable. The essentialism perspective tends



to direct people to make a black and white category for women who wear hijab. For instance, Ahmadi and Yohana (2007, p. 246) differentiate the motives among students of Bandung Islamic University who wear hijab and study the relationship between the shapes of hijab and the identity construction of the students who wear it. According to Ahmadi and Yohana, there are three hijab identity constructions among the students, namely students wearing syar'i hijab with theological motives (obeying religious orders) who are constructed as a gesture of piety, students with psychological motives who wear hijab because they feel comfortable in it, and students with fashionable motives who tend to wear stylish hijab.

Whereas, as a number of scholars have studied, the hijab represents many faces (Beta, 2014; Heryanto, 2015). Hijab is a fusion of capitalist product consumption and piety of Moslem women. Women wear hijab as an image of the middle class and obedience to religious orders (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018), as a representation of piety and fashion/style (Bhowon & Bundhoo, 2016; Yulikhah, 2017) or, for the sake of their convenience in public places (Dewi, 2017).

This research investigated how the niqab and syar'i hijab that was based on transcendental ideology and worn as a part of piety have transformed into fashion that represents other values in the perspectives of spectacle. It is illustrated in several Instagram accounts that show women wearing syar'i hijab and niqab.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The society of the spectacle

In the *Spectacle Society* (1967), Debord argues that all real-life aspects had been replaced by representation. In society, the relationships of community members that are experienced directly have been replaced through images mediated relationships. Debord (1967, p. 5) firmly stated that "the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.

The idea of the *Spectacle Society* has been developed by Rousseau as well as Walter Benjamin. Benjamin uses the term *phantasmagoria*, which he borrowed from Marx who used the term to describe commodity fetishism (commodity fetishism), a term that emphasizes the changing function of exchange-value to commodity function to obscure the social context of production (Kohn, 2008). For Benjamin, a world filled with *phantasmagoria* is modernity. In modern society, public life is increasingly occurring in spaces dedicated to pleasure, images, and illusions (Kohn, 2008, p. 476).

Spectacle society is a phenomenon of modern society. It is a product of failed secularization, which only succeeds in perpetuating the illusion of religion in other ways (Kohn, 2008). The Spectacle is divided into two forms, namely spectacle as festival and spectacle as spectacle. The analysis of this research will take the second form, the spectacle as a spectacle. In the second form, the spectacle has two pairs. First, is the spectacle of commodities, the capitalist justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. Debord

in this case asserts: 'spectacle is the affirmation of appearance and all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. The second is the Spectacle of the Spectacle. Just as total work of art accompanies the idea of a total revolution, the mass multimedia spectacle of the entertainment industry is also a reflection of a society's consumption of commodities.

2.2. Social Media as a Representational Project

Although social media is constructed by only two words, media and social, actually it is a complex term. Fuchs (2014) states that social media is a complex term that has multi-layered meanings. Facebook, for example, consists of a lot of information and functions as a communication tool to build the community. However, Fuch states that this is only a small level of a collaborative tool, which involves at least three types of sociality; cognition, communication, and community. Van Dijck (2013, p. 11) declares that the word "social" associated with the media has implications for the users as a central, and the activity they do has a social characteristic, similar to the term "participatory" which emphasizes human collaboration. Therefore, according to Van Dijck, social media can be seen as an inline facilitator or people network promoter which promotes connectedness as a social value. In this network, ideas, values, and individual tastes expand and spread through the human network, and this network affects the individual's act and mind.

Instagram posts can influence people who see them, through the representation that is shown. Hall stated, "Representation connects meaning and language to culture... Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of the culture" (Hall, 2003, p. 17). For Jen Webb (2009), the representation process doesn't only aim at making the connection, relationship, or identity seen. Actual representation makes the connection, relationship, and other connections alike. Web (2009, p. 11) says that "Representation is not just about substitution and reiteration, but is about constitution: it constitutes – makes real – both the world and our ways of being in the world and communities."

3. Method

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative which is used to analyze the content of three Instagram accounts. Using the netnographic strategy, this study aims to deconstruct the representation of piety, because, on the contrary, it is more of worshiping industrial commodities in a spectacle society. Data collected through direct observation of the three Instagram accounts. The Observation process includes comments on posts obtained by the accounts. The data was analyzed by mainly looking at the forms of posts and how the Instagram posts try to convey messages based on Debord's concept. The focused analysis is not only on how the veiled woman presents herself on Instagram, but also on the elements used to accomplish the posts. Therefore, the images posted are the core of concern of this research. Analysis will be done on upload of @pesona_ukhti who has 251.000 followers, @uktymuslimah_official who has 8.849 followers, and @akhwatbercadar.id_ who has 9.051 followers.

4. Results and Discussion

The @pesona_ukhti account (picture 1) on November 23, 2021, uploaded a black-and-white photo collage of a veiled woman using an iPhone 12 Pro Max, known as iPhone Boba since it has a round camera like Boba (a popular contemporary drink), facing coffee and a bag with big Starbucks logo. The uploaded picture added with a video reel of the veiled woman walking carrying a bag with a large Starbucks logo, holding an iPhone 12 pro-Max that is deliberately facing forward, equipped with music that aims to create a mysterious impression, with the “I’m not mafia” caption, completed with hashtags that display a transcendent impression, such as #easing, #hijrahquote, #teladanrasul #beranihijrah, #hijrahku and so on.

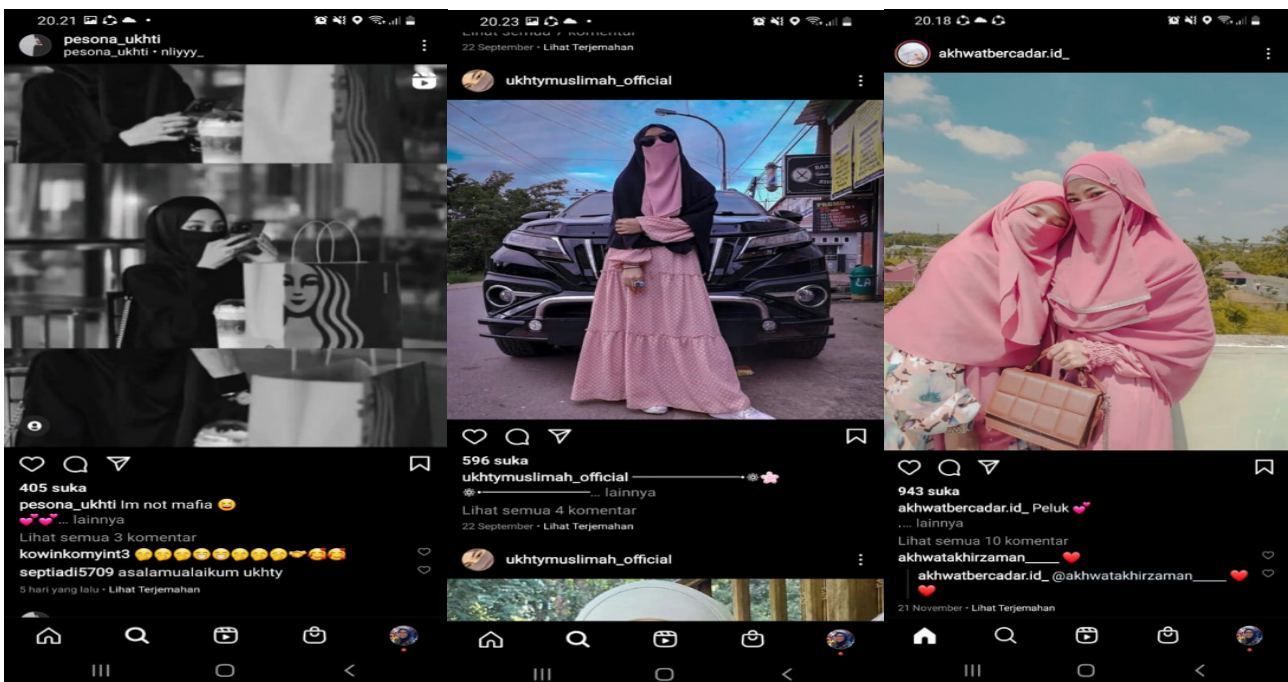


Figure 1: pesona_ukhti Instagram post, November 23, 2021

Figure 2: ukhtymuslimah_official Instagram post, September 22, 2021

Figure 3: akhwatbercadar.id Instagram post, November 21, 2021

This post provides various aspects of signs, the hijab itself, and the goods of capitalist society commodity. The deepest meaning can be read that veiled women who represent piety can also coexist with modern life, as evidenced by the consumption of Starbucks and the iPhone. These two items represent two things, the modern lifestyle of the upper-middle-class, which is contrary to traditional piety which means living simply and not showing off. Starbucks has long been a hangout place for the Indonesian middle-class, and so has the iPhone. When it was launched, many Indonesian middle-class pre-ordered it.

Picture 2, is the uploaded photo of the @ukhtymuslimah_official account on September 22, 2021. The post got 597 likes with 4 comments, 3 of them were made by accounts with

male identities. A woman wearing a syar'i hijab, a veil, and sunglasses stands tall in front of an SUV with a black Landcruiser Prado-style grille. One finger pinned a counter which is usually used to count the words of prayer beads and prayers that someone recites to remember and ask God for something.

Not much different from the previous construction, in picture two, this uploaded picture also wants to construct a picture of pious women, with the same time being a part of consumptive modern capitalist society. The image that it is trying to display is pious and exclusive. A typical picture of modern Muslim women. The picture next to it is an upload from the @akhwatbercadar.id_ account on November 21, 2021, which shows 2 women wearing bright pink syar'i hijabs, complete with the same colored veil, embracing. This photo received 950 likes and 10 comments, 7 of which came from accounts with male identities.

The appearance of various global commodities in the photo, such as Starbucks and Iphone, is a description of the spectacle stated by Debord, which is clearly reflected in social media. The satisfaction no longer comes from the use of objects produced by society but is sought through value recognition. Debord clearly states that "The satisfaction that no longer comes from using commodities produced in abundance is now sought through the recognition of their value as commodities" (Debord, 1967, p. 34).

The Starbucks coffee and iPhone 12 Pro Max depicted in the upload are products of industrial society which are often depicted in society as "upscale" products, while for the function they have similarities with similar products that are cheaper. However, it has become an important social class marker in Indonesian society (Baity, 2017). In the context of the Iphone, W. Exstarada's (2020) research also confirms that there is a positive correlation between lifestyle and decision-making among iPhone users among university students. The car is also an important class marker for Indonesian people. For the people of Indonesia, car ownership is a symbol to show how far success has been achieved. According to The Nielsen Global Survey of Automotive Demand, as many as 93 percent of car consumers in Indonesia stated that not owning a car is a shame for them. While the figure for Malaysian consumers is only 33 percent, for Singapore 22 percent and Philippines and Thailand 21 percent (Octama, 2014).

The 3rd upload also symbolizes a certain social class identity, and among Indonesian people, expensive bags have been collected and reflect social class, not only among celebrities but also in the middle class in general. They are even willing to take credit to be able to collect at high prices. Asprilla (2021) explained that in some cases the purchase and use of luxury bags were more dominant in financial value, followed by social value, functional value, and individual value respectively. In this case, women no longer see bags as objects used to carry their various needs, but also as an affirmation of the social status, they want to build in the eyes of others.

Based on Guy Debord's spectacle society, there is a shift from having to see, and social relations are replaced by representations or images. Thus, the observations of the accounts that are the subject of this research inevitably reflect very well on Debord's viewing of society. First, people are no longer in possession (having), but ownership must be shown. So, the representation that women are trying to build in this account is an attempt to show themselves for what they have. However, as Debord argues, a spectacle society is a society that is bound to the justification of capitalism, namely to consumer goods. Therefore, the representation of the piety of the women wearing the sharia hijab that they display cannot be separated from the modes of production and consumption of capitalist society. This has led to what is known as commodity fetishism. Second, image uploads are a form of communication in which these pious women try to build social relations. The pictures they display are a form of communication message to convey two things, namely "that I am religious" which is confirmed by the hashtags he wrote, but at the same time "I come from an established class". This at the same time confirms the many analyzes that have been carried out regarding the melting of Muslim women's identities (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Beta, 2014; Heryanto, 2015). In a sense, they are not only obedient to religion (as a sign of pious identity) but also embrace western modernism which relies on consumptive capitalism.

The implication of the Instagram representation, as a pious person and as a social class marker, makes some paradoxical aspects of signification, in the Islamic perspective showing-off, the luxury goods have become a big problem because they violate the Islamic ethics and values. Show-off culture (in Islam called *Riya'*) is considered a sin, and the Quran verse, Al Anfal: 47, clarifies the rule of showing off to other people. The history of the verse was when the Quraish people went to the Badar war, one of the great wars in Islamic history, and wear beautiful clothes to the sound of music, which was the background of the verse's creation (Farwati, 2020). Moreover, the show-off culture has a paradoxical position with the values which want to be shared by the Instagram administrators. Some study on showing off has concluded that it was contrary to Islamic values (Darmalaksana, 2022).

5. Conclusion

The essence of the spectacle society is the condition of society in which all lines of life have been taken over by commodities. Humans are considered to have achieved the fulfillment of their needs through the consumption of various commodified goods. Human satisfaction has been replaced by the fulfillment of pseudo-needs. However, it doesn't stop here. What is owned must be displayed so could be watched by the public. So, as can be seen in the uploads of the accounts that are the subject of this research, just having it is not enough, but it must also be watched. Through this spectacle project, they try to build communication and relationships with the community. Nevertheless, the relationship remains unidirectional, namely between the audience and those being watched. The study

also shows that piety in social media can be intertwined with modernity. In the end, the identity of the woman wearing the hijab is never singular (pious Muslim), but is also embedded in other identities such as the modernized, established middle-class women.

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