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The Political Economy of Shariah Compliant Ads on TV Al Hijrah

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Abstract

Privatisation Policy (1983) has urged television (TV) stations to compete for their survival in generating income from advertising. Furthermore, this policy has imposed TV Al Hijrah in a dilemma because of its establishment as a non-profit TV station is based on Islamic Absorption Values Policy (1985), which was contained in Islam Hadhari Policy (2003). Therefore, this study attempts to comprehend the influence of political economy of Shariah compliant advertising of TV Al Hijrah for its strict and controlled conditions while increasing the advertising income. Based on the interview sessions with a producer and executive producer of TV Al Hijrah, the researchers found that, the influence of political economy is important towards the Interpretation of Shariah Compliant, Shariah Compliant Products and Social Responsibility Advertising. In conclusion, the influence of political economy towards Shariah compliant policy will strengthen the policy so that it can be understood as one of the Islamic requirements in Muslims daily life, including the publishing and viewing of the advertisements.

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1. Introduction

TV AlHijrah is actually has a great significance in the context of the Islamisation of the country, when the country became the hub of halal food, while the Islamic financial system also was among the best in the world. In addition, Malaysia has become a model Muslim country and the Shariah compliant television channel is a complement to Islamisation in Malaysia.

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The support and regulation from the government are needed in influencing the television broadcasting policy including in selecting the content and concept of a TV show (Megat, 2004). The influence of content selection does not only involve the Sharia compliant advertising but it will also fulfill the advertiser's requirements and needs. This political economy influence is beyond the sectors, which according to Syed Husin Ali (1987), "the position and strength of the economy allow a person to achieve a strong position in politics. It shows that, the economic and political factors nowadays have become close when they were integrated together. When the integration of economic and political became close at the leadership level, the greater influence and power will cover other areas". Privatisation Policy (1983) has given an impact to political economy which also influences the Malaysian TV stations. This policy is a key to the media hegemony scenario where the mutual political economy influence is integrating together and dominating the power and policy in TV station administration. Media Hegemony Theory suggested that the ruling class has the economic power not only on political (ideological and structure of government), but also the culture (science, art, education, public communication) as a way to control the society (Bryant & Miron, 2004). The political economy control is required in a competitive environment in order to generate income from advertising. In fact, in reality there is no broadcasting system in the world that can escapes from the government (political economic) influence and regulation (Asia, 1991).

However, this is a great challenge for TV stations that must be faced in order to determine the advertisements that can be aired on television, because TV advertising is their main income. As a corporate entity, the income of free-to-air TV (FTA TV) reported by Nielsen Adex on advertising expenditure (adex) market share reported August 2013 decrease to 34.0% compare with August 2012 at 37.6% (Yang, 2013). Based on this figure, reported by Nielson TAM 2012 and 2013 FTA TV channel (table 1), TV Al Hijrah viewership market share 2012 just 0.7% compare to other channels, but increase to 1% on June 2013 (Media Planning Guide, 2012; Media Prima, 2013).

Table 1. FTA TV channel market share by viewership (Source: Nielson TAM).

Channel	2012 (%)	2013 (%)
TV3	27.5	25
TV9	7.7	8
TV2	7.4	7
8TV	6.3	6
NTV7	5.2	5
TV1	5.1	5
TV Al Hijrah	0.7	1

The competition to get the advertisers will only cause an audience scrambling to happen in the context of "the talk about spending the money to get audiences", but in reality, the audience is just a commodity. The TV station will produce a number of programmes to attract more advertisers, but sometimes the TV station is overlooked when selecting the advertisement with good values which based on the policy of Malaysia TV content regulations. Therefore the selection of Sharia compliant advertisements will be reducing the advertising income. Furthermore, the TV station is an organisation that has a structural interplay between the investor, management and agenda setting (Hasan & Satria, 2009). The integration of political economy power will influence and control all areas and sectors, including the advertising industry. This situation will determine the decisions and policies of Sharia compliant in all TV Al Hijrah production including TV shows, TV dramas and TV advertisements. In the early stage, they received many criticisms from the producer, but now they started to understand the situation.

2. Al Hijrah as an Islamic TV station

TV Al Hijrah presence is seen very strange among the media persons in the early stage of its establishment. However, with the support from Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), its pioneer and all the members, they are now ready to face the challenges of a new dimension in the world of broadcasting in Islamic country like Malaysia (Utusan, 2013). In authorizing broadcasting policy with Sharia compliant that accordance with the Islam Hadhari Policy, TV Al Hijrah has to face a great criticism and pressure in selecting the content of the advertisements from the corporate companies. As a new TV station with the vision to deliver the message of dakwah

Islamiah, Al Hijrah has to adhere to its vision and disregard the current situation of other TV stations.

It is anomalous for a television channel in Malaysia that begins with the recitation of the Quran and concludes with the recitation of the Quran, but in between there are various forms of advertisements and programmes or hedonism oriented show and also adults show (Rozmal, 2004). This is because the researchers will be examining on Islamic Broadcasting System based on the views of Yusuf (2012), which discussed on the issue of the appropriateness of the implementation of Islamic laws in every place and at all times. This study outlines four conditions which are; (1) Back to Islam as a whole. Islam is positioned as a solution for life and guidance for all areas of life and society. (2) Free from the pressure of reality. TV stations should free themselves from the environmental pressure that comprises of various material and economic institutions, social and cultural rights and various schools of thought behind it and its spiritual beliefs. (3) Free from the western thoughts. Islam is actually a way of life and the western thought is not the source of the inspiration for the world. Muslims have their own civilization, heritage, thought, and values attributed to the Islamic faith. (4) Leadership principles of faith. Leaders are the true believers and their role of leadership are to overcome all the obstacles and challenges, with the confidence of a true believer that insists on having a strong faith to adhere to Islamic teachings without fear and doubt, which interprets Islamic teachings from thought to practice, from theory to reality.

Based on these conditions, the Islamic broadcasting system within the framework of political economy influence, should not sacrifice the tenets of Sharia compliant even though the aim of the advertising itself is to make profits. The end does not justify the means. To change something that has become the norm in the world of TV broadcasting is not an easy task. Even though TV Al Hijrah is the organisation under the Ministry of the Prime Minister (Islamic religion section), but the financial allocation is limited. This requires TV Al-Hijrah to generate its own income from corporate organisational advertisements. Thus, the recent developments of Sharia compliant advertisements on TV Al-Hijrah and this study would be able to provide an explanation on Sharia compliant broadcasting and political economy influence to the TV advertisement production that issued on TV Al Hijrah. In particular, this study is expected to give a contribution to the recent findings that provide a more comprehensive justification to face the challenges and to encourage more quality Sharia compliant advertisement to be produced. Based on the findings of the study, it is hoped that it can provide some insights and alternatives to the current problems in the issue of Sharia compliant advertisement production.

3. Study description

This study was conducted and analysed using qualitative method. The data was collected from non-structured interviews, documentation and direct observations through an in depth interviews with a producer and executive producer of TV Al Hijrah interpersonally which last for 40 minutes. The selection of the informants was purposely done because this study requires specific information from the TV producer and TV station management officer of Al Hijrah. The unstructured interview was conducted leisurely and thoroughly in order to get a natural and effective answers from the informants (Othman, 2009). This method was used since it is the easiest way to discover new information and there is no control and more flexible for the informants to express their stories. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to obtain more accurate data and details for analysis purposes. The overall transcriptions were analysed using Atlas.ti software version 7.1. All the transcripts were reviewed through the encoding processes which were conducted deductively by reading the texts, and then the texts were coded using Atlas.ti software. This software provides a systematic selection of segments from the transcripts or quotations to represent a concept or idea to be summarized as a code. By using this software, each category of the influences was arranged in themes in order to show the relationship between categories and themes and how they are connected to the patents and thus give meaning to the data.

4. Sharia compliant TV advertisement

Advertising is a marketing medium to promote a communication process which aims at influencing consumer spending or using a service. But nowadays the definition of advertising in Malaysia is focusing on a process of disseminating information to publicise, to display, to sponsor and to encourage the purchase or receipt of product, ideas or services on the sponsorship of an organisation (Mansor et al., 1984). However, the reality of advertising that is shown often displayed excessive use of various means with the tendency to violate the Islamic laws. As a result of this breach, the needs of Sharia compliant policy in Islamic broadcasting were introduced by TV Al Hijrah. In the

beginning, the demand of Sharia compliant advertisements by TV Al Hijrah had caused a great shock to this 'bizarre conditions', but at that time most of the producers and directors did not fully understand the concept of Sharia compliant (Utusan, 2013). But the dilemma is, the advertisers have to follow the rules and requirements of Sharia compliant advertising in TV Al Hijrah, yet, in other TV stations they just follow the advertisers' requirements! It is not based on the requirement of the TV station. So logically, this Sharia compliant advertising could not generate income to TV Al Hijrah. Nevertheless, it should be understood that, Sharia compliant is not a requirement from TV Al Hijrah, but this TV station emphasised on a guide that should have been known by Muslims. Islamic Sharia compliant condition applicable to aired on TV (Siti Rugayah, 2012) are; (1) strictly avoidance elements of contradict with the aqidah, (2) does not contradict the Islamic Shariah, (3) avoidance of neglecting the Islam obligations, (4) the obligation to cover the 'aurah, (5) preserving ethics in social relations, (6) avoidance element of gambling (7) avoidance of squandering (8) avoidance element of hatred and enmity (9) avoidance element of hurtful and damaging (10) avoidance of saying something disbelief to Allah.

4.1. The interpretation of Sharia compliant

Sharia compliant word itself was a shock for Muslims. But in reality, Sharia compliant can be understood and interpreted differently among individuals. The interpretation is very important, especially to a society that is strongly influenced by religion. So, how it was interpreted towards our religion will determine our thinking and practice that influence the national policies, which covers our life. Islam is open to interpretation, but with authorised interpretation (Abdullah, 2008). Referring to Islam Hadhari Policy which aims to "knowledge society", the authoritative interpretation of Sharia compliant advertisement is the ultimate guide to Islamic programme production on TV Al Hijrah. According to informant 2, definition of Sharia compliant was emphasised in Al Hijrah TV production, "All the guides regarding Sharia compliant were mentioned by JAKIM. We once had a discussion to have a policy on sharia compliant not only authorising by JAKIM but other agencies (Islamic Council) as well as scholars and muftis. We reorganise all the informations and make a guideline". In addition, there is Research and Development Division, which is responsible for determining the content and topic of an issue to be addressed in the programme. According to informant 1, "The experts to refer here we have a research division. We discussed the issues one by one. Maybe if there were issues, we will have the research and development division. We had a brainstorming session". The role of the division is to evaluate all the advertisements and TV production content.

The interpretation from Sharia Advisory is important since the establishment of the Sharia Advisory Council itself is accordance to the needs of industry. However, the Sharia non-compliant ads can be edited again to follow the requirements of the Islamic laws, "Usually they come to us, we explain the conditions, if the product or service ads content are appropriate we will accept their offer and vice versa. We thought that it was difficult. But as time passed by, they started to understand the conditions. "Ooo like this..., like this.... If we want to promote in TV Al Hijrah, this is the way to approach our TV station". Therefore, it is necessary to increase the quantity of Islamic programmes and Sharia compliant advertising so that we can highlight the Islamic personality to the society, for example the advertisement from financial institutions like Bank Muamalat who sponsored for 30 Minute Ustaz Don's TV show. "So they did understand the dos and don'ts of our TV programme" said informant 2. However, there are challenges in interpreting certain contents when they have disagreed on certain contents which, according to informant 2, "Among the scholars themselves they have their own views, and the council has different views. It opposed into each other. We accept differences. Since in our religion, Islam accept the differences.

4.2. Sharia compliant products and services

Sharia compliant guide is a challenge in the Research and Development Division because they have to refuse the advertisement sponsorship to the programme, while the organization needs financial resources. "This policy is the pressure over us. At first we thought it is like a burden to us. We thought there is no advertisement will be publicised. With that strict policy that we have created, but we have to make it clear. In this industry, once we have put certain limits on certain things, it is quite hard to take a turn back. So we need to ensure that what are the industry demands", according to the informant 2. Informant 2 also adds that it is quite challenging in selecting the advertisement of products or services which follow the Sharia compliant, "Even though we have ten offers from the advertising agencies, we may accept one of the offers, or we do not even accept any of them. It is important for us to review all the offers. There were a lot of comments".

But now after more than three years of establishment in this industry and briefing sessions were done, "the production of Sharia compliant advertisements seems to increase. The advertisers started to understand the situations". Informant 2 admitted that, "Actually the advertisement is very few, but the offer is very high. There are a lot of organisations that offer advertisement. But since we have to adhere to the "sharia compliant policy", so we do not have any rights on that, for example Rejoice (shampoo) going to pay us for their advertising, but how are we going to have Rejoice advertisement with Sharia compliant. Imagine if Rejoice advertisement is appearing during 30 Minit Ustaz Don's shows. Even though this advertisement may appear with a model which follows the Islamic dress code, but TV Al Hijrah will need to evaluate the perception of the audiences in order to honour the Islam reputation from other elements which may invite negative perceptions among them". This was reiterated by informant 2, "we agree with this kind of advertisement with a model wearing hijab. But... what is the perception of the ad? Rejoice symbolize the hair. In Malaysia, we already have Rejoice's ad that showing the hair. We cannot just create another ad that is similar to the existed ad". Although the production of the advertisement in TV Al Hijrah subject to Sharia compliant policy requirement for selected products or services, but the advertisers insist to publish product or service ads that are not Sharia compliant. This was reiterated by the informant 2, "We have that kind of ads but we have to put certain conditions to them. We need ads. Especially the banks, as the banks have Islamic banking system. We accepted CIMB Islamic. Maybank... Maybank Islamic. We asked Public Bank but they did not offer any of Islamic products... That is how we accept the offers". That is an example of how the non-Shariah compliant banking services had been rejected.

4.3. *Social responsibility advertising*

According to the Cultivation Theory stated that the continuous exposure for 2 hours or more than 4 hours on a specific message from the media can influence and change the opinion, attitude and behaviour of a person (Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein & Page, 2005). Thus, based on the theories, Islamic Absorption Values Policy (1985) can be used as a basis to Malaysian audience so that the exposure to Sharia compliant advertising certainly will cultivate the good moral values within the audience. More or so the TV advertisements will be often repeated on the TV. This is corporate social responsibility (CSR) for advertising agencies. Their role is to help the government to build a good character, noble-minded, have a clear direction society. Besides that, they play an important role in shaping a more peaceful and prosperous country from Islamic perspective. Looking at the current trend, the content of such advertisements are starting to improve and they are trying to suit to Islamic laws with the presence of hijab women, although it is a shampoo ad. Today, it is admitted that Malaysia has showed a high rate of TV production of Islamic content compared to ten or twenty years ago (Marina, 2011).

This is a good development since TV is a visual medium, which is proven to deliver religious messages by producing more attractive programmes to increase the number of viewers (Zulkiple, 1998). Advertisement is considered as a social service in Islamic TV station production. Advertising also has a social responsibility to educate and disseminate good messages to the society. In the beginning of the TV shows production, this TV station just produce Islamic programme as corporate social responsibility (CSR). But with the God's permission the offers from private sector to advertise is increasing. According to informant 1, "the ad is actually comes later, and we do not expect anything from this company (Bank Muamalat). The important thing is "People are started to get close to Islam"

5. Discussion

The efforts to highlight, to strengthen and to promote the values of Sharia compliant TV ads are realistic. Although it has to go through various criticism and take a long process, but the influence of the political economy has nourished the Sharia compliant policy in TV Al Hijrah.

One of the challenges in Sharia compliant policy is when they have different interpretations of the sharia compliant itself. However, every policy needs to require an authoritative interpretation to consider as a guideline. Although there are different interpretations on Sharia compliant, but Islam teaches us to accept the differences. However, the resolution needs to be followed when it has been decided by the consultant of the appointed body or council. In addition, the Sharia compliant advertising product that has been rejected with the influence of the political economy is a policy that should be followed. This is important for TV Al Hijrah to keep the audience's

perception on advertisements to honour the reputation of Islam from the elements that may invite a negative perception on Islam. Advertising social responsibility is also important in cultivating good values within the audience. Advertisements are also tools that can be used to educate, to preach and to build a community with good characters based on Islamic perspective. A Sharia compliant advertisement can cultivate the interest among community members toward Islam.

In reality, Islamic broadcasting as a dakwah dimension in the today's context has become more challenging. It can be learned that the political economy influences and Sharia compliant policy itself have restrained the content and presentation of the advertisement. But it is still needed to determine the message and culture of ads that can be displayed based on Islamic law and values which is not contrary to the policy of the organisation and the stakeholders of the TV station. Therefore, the recommendation for the future research is to obtain more information on advertising content, type of product, and the influence of advertising culture. The findings of the study will provide answers on a dilemma of Sharia compliant production. It is hoped that this study will be beneficial to all.

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