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Conclusion and Recommendations [Religion and Television in Indonesia: Ethics Surrounding Dakwahtainment]

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The entanglement of Islamic propagation in the entertainment industry may seem to many a natural progression in a democratic country where religion holds sway. This is especially true when the democratic system has yet to reach the level of maturity, and when the stakeholders, namely the media executives, social and religious entrepreneurs and the lay public are still engulfed in euphoria, following the long and winding history of colonialism and autocracy. This democratic euphoria, which in Indonesian media parlance is dubbed “*democracy*”, subsequently results in socioeconomic, political and religious political experimentation.

As a socioeconomic experiment, *Dakwahtainment* reveals an intricate, complex and multi-layered relationship between religion, the modern media (notably television), and the masses, involving diverse cultural systems that point to various tastes and preferences of people from different socioeconomic classes. Television as the provoker and circulator of meaning has a tendency to be more attuned to the dominant ideology, which is supported by the masses with preference for a certain religious lifestyle and range of consumer products.

Dakwahtainment programmes suffer from ethical shortcomings that beset religion's engagement with the modern media and dictate the market association between the *penceramah* and the *jama'ah*. In the context of *Dakwahtainment*, Islam thus becomes effectively the religion of the market, where celebrity preachers dominate religious discourse amid the push and pull of Indonesia's market liberalisation, media freedom and fast-growing popular culture. *Dakwahtainment* programmes occupy a public space in which lower-middle-class Muslims can get a taste for religious fervour but still be in touch with their materialistic, consumerist, nihilistic and voyeuristic side.

Discontent with *dakwahtainment* arises from the trivialisation of religion, religious commodification and ethical shortcomings, all of which support modern materialistic, nihilist and consumerist ways of thinking and living. While the trivialisation of Islam necessitates the dumbing-down effect, religious commodification furnishes the Islamic community with a wide range of derivative products being promoted and advertised, ready to be consumed by the increasing number of Indonesian Muslim middle-class consumers. The ethical shortcomings, rife in many Indonesian television programmes, clearly show the great divide between the ideology or false consciousness (Karl Marx) of the media executives and those who dwell in the religious domain.

The current and amicable relationship between religion and television is sure to endure for a while, despite all the shortcomings and the questions over which of the two benefits more. The Muslim audience may still need *Dakwahtainment* programmes to fill the spiritual void that the modern, secular and liberal lifestyle has been unable to satisfy. On the other hand, ethical considerations need to be taken into account to ensure that television programming suits the needs of both

the profit-oriented media executives and the mass audience who wish to be enlightened and genuinely experience true joy in the comfort of religion.

Recommended actions

Following the *reformasi* era, the KPI is confronted by a Herculean task of making broadcasting serve the public interest (*kemashlahatan masyarakat*). It also aspires to encourage broadcasting companies to support national integration and essential character (*jati diri bangsa*) building, to educate the nation, to advance general social welfare and to help shape a society that is autonomous, democratic, just and prosperous. Based on the findings and insights deriving from the action research, this study therefore proposes a set of recommendations for the various stakeholders of *Dakwahtainment* programmes:

1. Given its heavy mandate, there is a need for KPI to build stronger alliances with strategic stakeholders to scrutinise, and if possible put pressure on, television companies and broadcasting agencies to consider the various aspects of content, notably for *Dakwahtainment* programmes and those related to religion. This recommendation includes closer collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MUI and Islamic and other religious organisations.
2. Outreach programmes should be made to ensure greater cooperation with academic and research institutions. This way, KPI could potentially build upon knowledge, research and development to serve as policy inputs and recommendations. Studies could also involve

evaluative research programmes to measure the performance and success of certain interventions or sanctions made by KPI.

3. There are currently many *Dakwahtainment* and religiously oriented programmes in Indonesia that face ethical problems. It is recommended that KPI continue to hold direct consultations and negotiations with broadcasting agencies with the active participation and involvement of relevant stakeholders.
4. Scrutiny and monitoring of *dakwahtainment* programmes and religiously oriented programmes needs to be heightened to prevent further perversion and intensified commodification and to infuse better programming content and ethics to serve the public interest. This can be done by regular consultations with the stakeholders and experts to safeguard the key elements of the intended reform in place, while staying clear of any market influence and politicisation by industry players.
5. If *dakwah* is considered a profession, whereby preachers justifiably receive incentives for their work, then such a line of work imperatively requires a code of ethics, just like other professional groups such as accountants, lawyers and doctors.

