

Fashion, Celebrity, and Entertainment: Attention Economy and the Rise of Indonesian Middle-Class Muslims

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Abstract

People are constantly craving for attention. People often have to divide their attention towards many different subjects (and their own personal daily life) – attention, then, has become a thing to compete for and it has become limited. In today's world, it is often deemed that the economy is driven by “the production and exchange of information than by the production and exchange of material goods.” However, it is actually the attention of the customer/audience, in its limited state, that leads to the competition for attention to keep the economy running – thus, the concept of ‘Attention Economy’ – where it is considered as a form “currency between industries/individual to industries/individual.” Using Davenport and Beck's concept of “Attention Economy” as the point of departure, this paper endeavors to showcase the understanding of the interplay between industries and the audience – the Indonesian Middle-Class Muslims. Locating the issues in the contexts of the Fashion, Celebrity, and the Entertainment industries, the paper then analyzes the benefit and the possible effects of the industries' practice of the concept – in terms of their focus allocation in gaining and sustaining attention of the audience.

Keywords: Attention Economy; Audience; Celebrity; Fashion; Middle-Class Muslims

...
*Bright eyes,
Burning like fire.
Bright eyes,
How can you close and fail?
How can the light that burned so brightly
Suddenly burn so pale?
Bright eyes....*

-- *Bright Eyes*, written by Mike Batts, performed by Art Garfunkel

1. Introduction

The excerpt from the song “Bright Eyes” performed by Art Garfunkel above depicts people's natural condition when they are interested towards certain persons or things. It particularly illustrates how people's eyes shine brightly when they express their interest to their significant other, or when they were given the attention they are looking for. However, the part of the excerpt also depicts that without certain level of loyalty, change of interest – or attention – may occur due to exposure of many other responsibilities (i.e., child-rearing or

professional careers). Not only that, time may also affect the certain of attention given to a particular subject, if the attention is not properly supported by meaningful structure, such as strong relationship between the related subjects.

In life, people are constantly craving for attention. Teachers are making effort to grab their undergraduate students' attention during class activity, although perhaps apart from the obvious present focus, these students may also think about other things that they need to pay their attention too; such as their other unfinished assignments.

Therefore, especially in the case when these students have to divide their attention towards many different subjects (and their own personal daily life), attention, then, has become a thing to compete for and it has become limited.

In today's world, it is often deemed that the economy is driven by "the production and exchange of information than by the production and exchange of material goods (Sayre and King, 2010: 144)." However, it is actually the attention of the customer/audience, in its limited state, that leads to the competition for attention to keep the economy running – thus, the concept of 'Attention Economy' – where it is considered as a form "currency between industries/individual to industries/individual (Davenport and Beck, 2001: 3)."

Using Davenport and Beck's (2001) concept of "Attention Economy" as the point of departure, this paper endeavors to showcase the understanding of the interplay between industries and the audience. Locating the issues in the contexts of the Fashion, Celebrity, and the Entertainment industries, the paper then analyzes the benefit and the possible effects of the industries' practice of the concept – in terms of their focus allocation in gaining and sustaining attention of the audience.

2. Method: Attention Management in Attention Economy

The notion of attention that is treated as a "scarce resource" appeared to be first proposed by Simon (1971, cited in Luoma-aho and Nordfors, 2009: 7) who argued that attention has become a limited resource due to the growing amount of information. As attention becomes a highly sought after commodity that becomes the drive for economy and needed to be paid for in the middle of this clutter of information, the term Attention Economy was coined (Goldhaber, 1997). Davenport and Beck (2001: 3) elaborate and contend that the understanding and the need to gain as well as to manage attention, is the "...most important determinant of business success." The paper is guided by a case study, framed in this theory of Attention Management in Attention Economy. The sections below discuss the sets of businesses or industries amongst many that are highly affected by the theory of Attention Economy, namely the Fashion, Celebrity and the Media industries. Selected contexts for stage are the booming trend of headscarves (or known as

hijab) in the Middle-Class Muslims in Indonesia.

3. Hijab, Muslim Celebrity, and Religious Entertainment in Indonesia

According to the Asian Development Bank (cited in Tajudin et al., 2014), there has been an increasing trend in the number of the Indonesian Middle-Class society (a social group that spends from USD 2-20 per day) that reaches up to an estimate of 130 million Indonesians – with is predicted increase of eight to nine million per year. As this group of Middle-Class comprises sixty percent of the Indonesian population, a country of Muslim majority, it can be inferred that this Middle-Class group is dominated by Muslims (Tajudin et al., 2014). One of the norms for female Muslims is to cover their heads with headscarves (or hijab) along with covering parts of their body when they have come of age. Since many of these Middle-Class Muslim females are also career women, it is obvious that most of them are also looking for apparels suitable for their career as well as being able to wear style-appropriate hijab. Therefore, the situation lead to consumption and consumerism in fashion (Braham, 2007); in this case the Muslim fashion of hijab.

Observing the prospective market on hijab, a number of Indonesian Muslim fashion designers have decided to capitalize on creating hijab suitable for the Muslim culture of Indonesia. The Middle Class Muslim in Indonesia, according to a researcher at the Center for Middle-Class Consumer Studies, are those who "demanded a high degree of function, but also sought out the 'spiritual' value of a product (Yuswohadi, cited in Tajudin et al., 2014: 48)." Therefore, many of these people create the value for Indonesian Muslim Middle-Class to still conform to the norms of Islamic values and yet style-appropriate to the contexts of wearing the hijab – domestic duty or professional career; hence these Middle-Class Muslims define their identity through the hijab (Wilson, 2003: 11-12). Answering the demands of the Indonesian Middle-Class Muslim market, fashion lines of that make use of hijab as accessories are mushrooming – ranging from the High-End brands such as Elzatta and Zoya (see Appendix for Elzatta's range of collections) to many other lesser brands.

As these brands of hijab are competing for market share, they compete to gain the attention of their prospective consumers. Especially nowadays with the available technology and exposure in the Internet and television commercials, it is common for these various brands of hijab to share similar range of shapes, styles, and even patterns. The Middle-Class Muslims as the consumers then are

apparently not so concerned about the price or the brand of the hijab. It is supported by the survey conducted by the Center for Middle-Class Consumer Studies in which the consumer's main reasons to buy a hijab is 1) comfort as the first important factor, followed by 2) material, 3) matching garb, 4) trendiness, 5) color, 6) price, 7) peer recommendation, with 8) brand-name and 9) attractive advertising as the last two concerns (Tajudin et al., 2014: 46-47). This phenomenon resonates the 'democratization of fashion' when there is a fast-and-mass production of fashion and for it to become "... increasingly affordable for growing number of people (Cooper, 2011: 69)." Consequently, in order to win the attention of the Middle-Class Muslims, the high-end hijab brands need to make efforts to have these potential consumers focus their attention towards their brands despite of the many given options (Davenport and Beck, 2001: 6-12).

One of the apparent ways utilized by these higher range brands to capture the attention of the consumer and for them to be able to find the brands amidst the various available brands of hijab is by increasing the brand's visibility. It appears that, in Indonesia, these brands' effort to make their product be seen by the consumer is through locating the brands in the appropriate place and finding the public figure to wear their product to get the highest visibility and grab the audience/consumer's attention.

With the growing number of Indonesian Middle-Class Muslims, their need for Islamic television shows and entertainment seem also to increase. The Entertainment industry answers to this demand by producing TV Programs ranging from the themes of Religious sermons, Religious lifestyle to Islamic-themed television drama or comedy series. One of the booming television series is '*Tukang Bubur Naik Haji*' (literally translated to 'Porridge Hawker goes for Hajj') which tells the story of a Porridge hawker and his family's ordeal with their often envious neighbors as they compete for showing off current trends.

Both the Muslim Fashion Industry and the Islamic-themed television programs seem to benefit from the demand of religious-knit rising values of the Indonesian Middle-Class Muslims. This is seen from the fact that Elzatta has become the series' most loyal sponsor for its long-run since 28 May 2012 until present. The series itself was reportedly mentioned as the most watched and one with the most episodes – 1,078 episodes – per 21 August 2014 (Administrator, 2014). As one of the main sponsors, consequently all of the Muslim apparels and hijab worn by the characters in their many different daily-life settings are Elzatta's collection. Therefore, the brand then appropriately places its

hijab products into the media mostly watched by the prospective consumers, namely movies and television shows, to gain the consumer's attention and as an effort to "... encourage familiarity with [the] brand and the situation in which it is used (Harris, 2009: 398)." Elzatta's practice of integrating its hijab product into the characters and the situations of the television series resonates what Davenport and Beck (2001: 22-23) argue and concurred by Sayre and King (2010: 145) as an effort of capturing one type of attention, captive attention, where the audience cannot willingly evade from the existence of the depicted fashion brand.

As both brand designers and hijab consumers have viewed hijab as a lifestyle, one of the important factors to gain the consumers' attention is by featuring the presence of celebrity figures as promotional efforts as they imply "... high visibility (L'Etang, 2008: 220)." This is not only beneficial for Elzatta but also brings benefit to the ratings of the television series if the celebrity serving as the icon for both is one who the audiences/consumers relate to and identify with. The celebrity icon playing as one of the major characters and also serves as the Ambassador for Elzatta is Citra Kirana, a young attractive actress who had previously co-starred hence well-known in many popular and successful Indonesian television drama series. In the *Tukang Bubur Naik Haji* series, she plays the kind-hearted daughter of an antagonistic neighbor of the porridge hawker. She is also depicted as a young career woman who has to juggle between her domestic chores and her profession. Therefore, through the different styles of hijab she is wearing as she shuttles between the two identities, Elzatta showcases that its fashion brand has wide range of different style-appropriate functions; that it allows its wearer to choose and engage in social mobility (Wilson, 2003: 33).

It is also expected that as Kirana is still in her twenties, young female teens and tweens of the audience can relate to her and pay her the attention that as the icon she becomes some sort of role model (Rojek, 2001: 91-93). However, the fact that in real life Citra Kirana is not a hijab wearing female Muslim (Saputra, 2013), may lead to negative drawback towards some of the audience who are critical towards the 'true' essence of wearing hijab. This practice of where the interest of the celebrity does not necessarily reflect the interest of the producers implies for the practice of "celebrity-commodity" (Turner, 2004: 38) and again confirms that fashion can also serve for "appearance to replace reality" – to move between social identity provided that the look is supporting (Wilson, 2003: 33). Despite that, as long as the attention of the audience is still directed at her, Citra Kirana may still be a popular celebrity and

cast in other future television series if she is able to maintain herself as a focus of attention.

From the above illustrations and discussions, all three Industries of fashion, entertainment, and celebrity evidently have benefit from the concept of Attention Economy. It can be seen that the audience/customer play a tremendous role of keeping the industries running. Sayre and King (2010: 51) contend what they call as Audience Autonomy where the characteristics of today's audience has shifted from those who were bound by the limited options to those who have the power to choose from many available source of information. There are still possibilities for the Middle-Class consumers who are not really into watching certain television series as mentioned above opt to access other means of information where Elzatta does not actively engage. Therefore, it can be inferred that gaining attention by itself is vain if not supported by the effort of sustaining the attention of both the available and prospective audience.

4. From Gaining to Sustaining Attention: A Conclusion

The consumer/audience is constantly bombarded with innovative products and current information from many sources and types of media available. Through this exposure of visibility, it is no longer essential for a product, service, or celebrity (the industries) to simply gain the attention of the audience since the audience now has the power to question the reality and to make their own choice. These industries need also to direct their attention to win the audience's loyalty as one of the ways to sustain attention (Neale, 2010).

Therefore, to respond to this situation, it is worth for the industries discussed (Fashion, Celebrity, and Publicity) to consider Roberts' concept of Lovemarks (2004), in which he suggests for these industries to survive the ever-growing competition to gain attention, they need to focus on sustaining the attention by empowering the emotional bond and the loyalty within the relationships between the audience and the industries. It is implied that participation management – managing audience ability to participate with the industries instead of only have their attention grabbed (Deuze, 2006; Roberts, 2004) – is as important as attention management was, especially in this era where New Media have blossomed.

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