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Being Active Consumers: Indonesian Muslim Youth Engaging with Korean Television Dramas

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Abstract:

The rise of Korean pop culture signifies an active audience framework because, as this study finds, Indonesian Muslim youth are more active in their consumption of television dramas through laptops than through television. Globalisation has supported the instant availability of Korean television dramas on the internet, and these can be downloaded and shared as pirated DVDs and free files. Furthermore, Muslim youths who watch Korean television dramas actively imagine the modernity reflected in them, and seek to selectively experience the modern elements that are represented. This imagination is interwoven with their Islamic belief structure and thus allows them to be both modern and Muslim.

Key words: *Dissemination; Hallyu; Indonesia; Modernity; Muslim Youth; Popular Culture; Television Drama*

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Being Active Consumers: Indonesian Muslim Youth Engaging With Korean Television Dramas

Imron Rosidi

INTRODUCTION

The dissemination of Korean pop culture within Asian countries and beyond has been called *Hallyu* or the Korean Wave. According to Iwabuchi (2008), the main reason for the popularity of Korean pop culture among Asian people is that the audiences and the producers of the Korean television dramas are culturally proximate. However, viewing Asian audiences as a homogenous group contradicts current research. Chua (2015), for example, identifies four regional circuits of media cultural flows in Asia in which Indonesia and South Korea are placed in different circuits, indicating that these two countries are culturally different. Therefore, as Chua (2012: 340) points out, cultural proximity faces an empirical problem in Indonesia, where Korean television dramas are also popular.

Research on the popularity of Korean pop culture in East Asian regions is abundant, but unfortunately does not include a focus on Muslim society. It should be noted that Indonesian Muslim youth do not share the underlying values of East Asian countries such as Taiwan and China (Chua, 2012: 340). Crucially, then, examining Korean pop culture in Indonesia is a means of ascertaining the extent to which it is popular amongst Indonesian Muslim youth. Using an active audience framework (Ang, 1991; Barker, 2000; Storey, 2003) and an imagination concept (Appadurai, 1998), this article investigates the television consumption practices of Indonesian Muslim youth in Pekanbaru, Sumatra, and their responses to Korean television dramas. Using snowball sampling, 40 Indonesian Muslim youth—all Korean television drama enthusiasts—were recruited to be interviewed and observed. Interviews were conducted in the form of focus

group discussions and personal interviews. Field work was conducted in two phases over the course of a year. The first phase was from July 2013 to January 2014; the second was from June to December 2014.

Before discussing how these Muslim youth consume and respond to Korean television dramas, it is crucial to provide details about their backgrounds. In so doing, we seek to distinguish them from other Asian consumers of Korean television dramas in places such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Vietnam. Furthermore, we can show how these young Muslims might differ in certain characteristics from other young Indonesian Muslims in other Indonesian regions.

Backgrounds of Muslim youth

Young Indonesian Muslims in this study, who grew up after the fall of the authoritarian Soeharto regime, come from socioeconomically average families. These 'santri' (i.e. pious Muslims), a term borrowed from Geertz (1976), enjoy freedom of expression, which was restricted during the New Order. This freedom provides an opportunity to interact with modernity, broadcast by both domestic and foreign media, more extensively than in older generations. However, this political climate also allows them to access Islamic information freely through many channels such as education and media to enhance their understanding of Islam. Thus, they are bombarded by many forms of modern and Islamic symbolism emanating from inside and outside Indonesia. This ease and extent of access informs their imagination about modernity, interwoven with strong Islamic sensibilities.

Muslim youth in Pekanbaru who enjoy Korean television dramas have general, identifiable characteristics, one of which is their 'ordinary' socioeconomic backgrounds (i.e. not middle class). Importantly, however, they cannot be categorised as poor, because they typically attend universities and buy modern goods such as mobile phones and laptops. They represent 'ordinary' only in that they are less wealthy than middle class youth but more wealthy than youth who come from poor families.

These Muslim youth study Islamic values in Islamic universities and *Madrasah* (Islamic schools); Islamic values are also taught by their parents. Furthermore, the culture of Pekanbaru is heavily influenced by Islamic norms. Indeed, Islam plays a key role in every aspect of human life, a reality alluded to in the popular proverb: '*Adat bersendi Syarak, Syarak bersendi Kitabullah*', which means 'custom is based on Islamic tradition, and Islamic tradition is based on the *Qur'an'.* Thus, Pekanbaru youth are influenced by their multifaceted Islamic environment.

Additionally, the origins of youth in Pekanbaru are heterogeneous; they could be from a small Javanese island or a remote village deep in Riau Province. The Sumatran Province of Riau comprises many villages, some of which have not been touched by governmental development. Madani village exemplifies this: it is located far from Pekanbaru and received electricity just 2 years ago. Some youth from this village have migrated to Pekanbaru. For example, Hamdah (Male, 28 years old), who came to Pekanbaru to earn money and experience modern life—for him it is the best place in Riau to find such opportunities. In Pekanbaru, he can watch Korean television dramas on pirated DVDs, even when these dramas are not broadcast on Indonesian television channels.

Television and Korean television dramas

The rise of the Korean Wave in Indonesian television was catalysed by Indosiar, a private television company in Jakarta. In 2001, it aired a Korean drama entitled *Endless Love*, every Monday through Thursday. It attracted so many viewers that from 2001 to 2007, Indosiar added other Korean dramas such as *Jewel in the Palace* and *Lovers in Paris* (Tambunan, 2015: 78).

According to Lee (2012: 448), the spread of the Korean Wave can be categorised as two important phases, each with notable characteristics:

> "The first Korean Wave texts, which were mainly television serials and films, were broadcast on terrestrial and cable television and also distributed by means of VCDs and DVDs (mainly illegally reproduced, except for in Japan). In contrast, the second Korean Wave text, K-pop, has been diffusing through social network services such as YouTube and Facebook."

It is clear from this description that television has played a significant role in broadcasting Korean television dramas and thus in ensuring its global popularity. However, it is important to note that the roles played more recently in its distribution by pirated DVDs and social network services such as YouTube and Facebook have challenged television's dominance as the conveyer of the Korean Wave in Indonesia. Pirated DVDs are inexpensive, and online networks provide free access to and information about Korean television dramas, which can therefore easily be watched online or downloaded.

Nuraini (Female, 23 years old), who watches Korean dramas primarily on her laptop, exemplifies the receding dominance of television in the media space. There are two main reasons for her choice of technology. First, when she lived in her village, she had neither reason nor desire to own a laptop, but during her stay at university, she had to purchase one to support her studies. Now, she has access to Korean television dramas not only through television, but also in the form of files, VCDs, and DVDs—media formats that were limited in her village. In Pekanbaru, however, they are abundant and can be easily found. Second, a television is not as transportable as a laptop; the former is often large and heavy, while the latter is small and lightweight. Most of the youth living in Pekanbaru rent accommodations, and thus are relatively transient, commonly moving from one rental house to another a few times in a year. Mobility is driven by their need for the least expensive, but comfortable rental house. Therefore, they resist buying goods that are difficult to move.

At the time of my field work in 2014, Korean television dramas were rarely aired on Indonesian channels. Of all the Indonesian national television channels, Indosiar had historically been the one channel that consistently broadcast Korean dramas, although airtime had recently decreased. Another Indonesian television channel, Global TV, started broadcasting a once-popular Korean drama in June 2014; titled *Coffee Prince*, it aired daily at 4 p.m. However, this old Korean drama could easily be found on the internet and on VCD or DVD, and most participants preferred to watch it through these media rather than on television.

My participants have three main issues with watching Korean dramas on television. First, older Korean dramas are already available in more convenient formats, such as VCDs or on the internet. Second, the presence of advertisements on television disrupts their enjoyment of the

show. Finally, compared with its alternatives, a television is incompatible with their mobile lifestyle. Thus, the development of modern communication technology has introduced and supported the spread of more diverse forms of media. As Tambunan (2015) says, 'these television dramas were distributed to many other countries and the development of the internet made it possible for streaming and downloading to be alternative modes of circulation and consumption.'

These days, 'the Internet has enabled fans to transcend geographic space and organise themselves in virtual space to conduct fan activities' (Chua, 2012). In Pekanbaru, rather than inspiring international fan clubs, the internet is used for downloading Korean television dramas; access is gained in various ways. One is through the abundant internet cafes (Nilan, 2008) in Pekanbaru. Another is through a personal internet subscription (i.e. a modem). Because internet connection times tend to be slow in Pekanbaru, however, consuming Korean television dramas directly from the internet is not always possible; one episode of a Korean television drama is typically 90 minutes. Rather, young people commonly download and save the files to a flash disk so that they can share them with their friends who also love Korean television dramas. Based on what I observed during my research, the popularity of Korean television dramas among Indonesian youth has been traced by following the spread of files between flash disks.

Flash disk technology, then—particularly its compactness and portability—plays an important role in the spread of Korean television dramas among youth in Pekanbaru. Importantly for these young fans, the flash disks also function as a place where they can preserve cultural products such as Korean celebrity photos, Korean pop music, Korean movies, and Korean television dramas. It is increasingly rare to find Indonesian youth watching Korean dramas on television. A rating of Korean television drama issued on 17 December 2014 entitled *Jang Ok Jung* broadcast by Indosiar was only 0.6/5.0. Some Indonesian television broadcasters, such as Indosiar and Trans TV had stopped airing their Korean drama shows at the time of writing, although this does not necessarily mean that Indonesian youth are not watching them.

Based on my fieldwork, two categories of young Korean-drama viewers can be identified in Indonesia. The first is active consumers: those who actively search for Korean dramas in DVD shops and on the internet. They are not dependent on television content or availability, but rather

download files from pirated DVDs and the internet, and circulate them among their drama-loving friends.

The second group is passive consumers: those who watch the dramas mostly on a television. While they will not go out of their way to wait for the next Korean drama to air, they will nevertheless eagerly sit and watch a Korean drama should it happen to air at a convenient time. There are many reasons why passive consumers do not actively search for Korean television dramas. Some are financial—downloading from the internet incurs a fee. Other reasons are temporal—watching television episodes requires extra time that conflicts with many other activities. Yet another reason is lack of familiarity and expertise in seeking out and watching Korean dramas as active consumers do. Relatedly, passive consumers tend not to own laptops—despite the common assumption that they are essential for most young people—and therefore do not watch the dramas on a laptop. Laptops are also expensive; they cost between 2.5 to 7 million rupiah, which is impracticable for young people who do not receive monthly stipends from their parents. Another reason some Indonesian young people do not watch Korean television dramas on laptops is that they enjoy watching them in a group—watching with friends allows them to casually discuss the presentation of the drama as it happens. One downside to using a laptop rather than a television with a group is, of course, the reduced screen size.

Korean television dramas and imagination

Many Indonesian Muslim youth imagine a middle class future for themselves, but presently they are studying hard in university or working to earn money. These lower-class youth struggle to become part of the middle-class, who are still an exclusive minority in Indonesia, including in Pekanbaru. These young people opt to study in cheap state universities rather than private universities, because the tuition fees are lower. State universities, for example, are often subsidised by the government and thus many of their students are able to pay the tuition fees. However, some still need to work part time to financially support themselves. The perception that work in a city pays more than work in a village draws many youth to cities like Pekanbaru. Cities in Indonesia have become the centre of development and may enjoy privileges from the government. These privileges are related to the availability of modern amenities, which also

attract young people to go and experience those places. Furthermore, cities like Pekanbaru provide universities, which are not available in many rural areas. To become educated, young people attend schools and universities in Pekanbaru, which reflects their imagination about their future. These Muslim youth strive for a better future—it is an essential part of a modern identity, and hard work and studying is their way of achieving it. For most youth in Indonesia, a city like Pekanbaru is the best place for achieving their 'imagination' (i.e. a better future). The availability of modern facilities has supported the desire of young people to move from village to city. Muslim youth who move from their villages show that they want to change—to be rich, educated, and modern people; they do not want to be '*ndeso*' or '*kolot*', which mean 'not modern'.

However, the imagination of Pekanbaru youth is also informed by their Islamic identity. They believe it is crucial to preserve Islamic values while achieving their 'imagination', and thus believe that their hard work should include reference to God. That is, '*Usaha'* or *'Ikhtiar'* (hard work) will not be effective if there is no 'do'a' or prayer. They also believe that their success in this world is closely related to God's decision or '*Takdir'*. This has led to an understanding among youth in Pekanbaru that Islamic spirituality must be practiced to realise their imagined modern future and identity.

Importantly, the emergence of Korean television dramas has intensified the imaginations of Indonesian youth. Transnational media—including Korean television dramas—play a significant role for ordinary people such as young Indonesian Muslims as they imagine modernity (Appadurai, 1998). Luxurious images and modern fashions shown in transnational television programs have created a greater scope of opportunity for imagination.

Korean television dramas are regarded as symbols of modernity: their large budgets support both trendy and historical productions, and their presentations depict many modern artefacts, all of which feed into this symbolism. To watch Korean television dramas, then, is to watch and consume a product of modernity. Ang (2006: 4) also acknowledges this:

> "Broadcast television has been one of the most powerful media of modernity. As a medium of mass communication, it was generally put into motion in the social realm throughout the core of the Western world at the apex of social modernity, the 1950s and 1960s, a time when confidence in the possibility and superiority of a modernity based on infinite economic growth and 'Western' values (e.g. individual freedom, democracy and affluence for all) was riding high."

However, the rise of Korean television dramas has decentralised 'western modernity' because western countries are no longer the only propagators of modernity. As Appadurai (1998: 31) says, 'the crucial point, however, is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscape.' So young people's consumption of Korean television dramas suggests that their imaginations are diverse, and not dominated by western influences. It can be argued that the emergence of 'imagination' refers to Asian countries, and more specifically South Korea.

The rise of Korean pop culture has been identified as a cultural product challenging western cultural forces—a phenomenon that changes the dynamics of the media landscape in the region. Historically, Indonesia has been open to foreign cultural products, including products from the West. Moreover, in Muslim Southeast Asia (e.g. Indonesia and Malaysia), the rise of Korean pop culture sits alongside the plenitude of western cultural products available through television, radio, cinema, billboards, online sites, and mobile phones. The cultural flow from Korea to other Asian countries is 'an example of the decentralising multiplicity of global media flows' (Kim, 2008: 3), and the plurality of an imagined world (Appadurai, 1998).

The popularity of Korean television dramas among Muslim youth seems to indicate that western cultural products are no longer the primary focus of consumption. This is because East Asian countries have provided a framework of modern values that can be viewed as a model for the imagination of youth. Muslim youth consider Korean television dramas to be different from western ones. This means that the notion of modernity is not monopolised by the West. In this context, Shim (2008: 31) argues that:

"...most Asians have long referred to the West for melodramatic imagination as modernization. However, in the 21st century, we are consuming images that originated from Japan, Thailand and Korea. The vitality of East Asian popular culture is growing, evidenced in the success of Japanese television drama and animation, Hong Kong and Thai movies, and what is called the Korean Wave. These changes are meaningful for regional cultural exchanges that have long been denied their prosperity or existence by the dominance of a hegemonic global culture. Now, the dialogue among Asians has begun."

Stories and representations depicted in Korean television dramas facilitate an 'imagination' for young Muslims in Indonesia to be modern. Through consuming these dramas, these young people learn that modern values such as discipline and hard work play significant roles in achieving future wellbeing, and also that anyone can become modern. This encourages Muslim youth to work and study hard as it is portrayed in those dramatic productions.

Muslim youth's imagination about modernity is also stimulated by modern items such as mobile phones and cars, and their imagination about modern cities is inspired strongly by images of cities that they see on Korean television dramas—a modern place in which people enjoy their daily activities. Muslim youth also notice the many modern images such as modern houses and clean environments portrayed in Korean television dramas. Fitri (Female, 21 years old), for example, commented:

> "I imagine sometimes that Indonesia could be like that. I see through watching Korean television dramas that the environment in Korea is clean, no rubbish. Their houses are modern. The roads are good and there is no rubbish in the street. I think Indonesia should look at Korea in order to be modern in future."

Appadurai (1998: 14) argues that 'the imagination has emerged as a new force in social life, largely as a result of the spread of electronic media, in the context of rapid flows of resources, images, and persons across national boundaries.' After watching Korean television dramas, Muslim youth often note that the dramas have provoked their imagination. Even though most youth understand that their thoughts are inspired by a fictitious story, they continue to imagine the performance of the actors or actresses, the setting of each location, and other aspects of the production.

Fung and Ma (2002), quoted by Jiang and Leung (2012: 161), assert that foreign television dramas—including Korean television dramas—tend to offer 'a televisual version of modernity' that is more intense than local television dramas. Transnational modernity, then, is arguably spread by the emergence of foreign television dramas on local television channels.

For Indonesian Muslim youth, Korean television dramas have provided modern culture—embodied in details such as film locations and fashion styles—and have provoked an interest in visiting South Korea to see non-fictionalized Korean people, locations, and culture for themselves. The many elements of Korean culture that are not suited to Indonesian culture do not deter young Indonesian Muslims from enjoying Korean television dramas; they argue that it is the modern era, and they wish to learn how to be modern. Interestingly, most of these young Indonesian Muslims do not like watching Indonesian television dramas because they feel that those shows do not portray "Gaul" (i.e. a new Indonesian term meaning 'modern' in the form of modern fashion and hair styles) that can be followed.

The future that Indonesian Muslim youth desire for Indonesia is a modern one, as represented by Korean television dramas. Nadia (Female, 22 years old), for instance, adores the modern setting and images she sees on such dramas, and this inspires her to find out whether it is real. She said:

> "I really want to visit South Korea to see the real condition of this country. I want to see about modernity there in real situations."

Unfortunately, visiting South Korea is not inexpensive. Nadia added:

> "I imagine that when I graduate and am able to get a job, I could visit there. I will earn much money to go there. I admire the stylish ways of Korean people. Even the female people who are thirty years old as depicted on Korean television dramas are still as stylish as those who are twenty years old. I also admire the modern and stylish rooms owned by Korean people."

Fitri also commented on the contrast she sees between her living arrangements and those portrayed on Korean television:

> "I admire the architecture of houses in South Korea depicted on Korean dramas. It is unique because it unifies traditional and modern values. It is impossible to arrange my room to match those on Korean television dramas. This is because my 'Kos' room does not support this. Every room consists of two persons or more so that I cannot freely arrange the room as I want."

These young women are longing for the modernity represented by Korean television dramas. In contrast, when asked how she felt about western countries, which are also modern and developed, Dika (Female, 22 years old) argued that:

> "Western countries of course are modern. But, I do not think we should refer to these countries because to some extent they do not look at traditional values. Korea is good because it keeps traditional values though it is a developed country."

Clearly, Muslim youth believe that the reference for modernisation in Indonesia should be South Korea rather than the USA—as a modern Asian country, South Korea embraces similar traditional Asian values such as respecting older people. Selly (Female, 22 years old) considers South Korea a modern country because of its ability to produce modern products such as those manufactured by Samsung and LG, among others. Despite their global reach, Lee (2006), Yun (2009), and Shim (2006) (quoted in Yang, 2012: 110-111) suggest that 'Korean popular cultural products are unique in that they are mainly Western in form but mostly traditional Confucian in contents.'

Thus, Indonesian youths' consumption of Korean television dramas can be seen as their way of fulfilling their desire to be modern while keeping traditional values. They claim Korea as an alternative modern image which is compatible with their desires. Their preference for Korea over western countries is rooted in their religious identity, which is close to that of Koreans; it is an identity strongly influenced by Islamic values.

Islamic and 'not Islamic' values in Korean television dramas

Islam and Confucianism differ in various traditions and beliefs, but also share similar values. Confucian values, which are commonly represented in Korean television dramas, tend to deliver either one of two particular meanings to Indonesian audiences: 'Islamic' or 'not Islamic'. This is because most Indonesian people are Muslims.

It is important to note that the popularity of Korean television dramas is bolstered by both their Islamic and 'not Islamic' representations of values. Scenes that portray 'not Islamic' values to Indonesian audiences are readily available. An example of this is the Korean television drama entitled *Full House*. In this Korean television drama, an unmarried male and an unmarried

female live in the same house. This is forbidden according to Islam, because they are not '*muhrim*' (i.e. opposite sexes who cannot be married such as a brother and sister). Indonesian Muslim young people are nonetheless drawn to this 'not Islamic' story in *Full House*. Chua (2012: 340) says that, in fact, 'audiences are aware that the drama is foreign and that this sense of difference is actually integral to the viewing pleasure.'

The term 'foreign' is different from 'not-Islamic'. Some scenes depicted on Korean television dramas may provide Islamic values although they are foreign for Muslim youth. For example, the way in which young Koreans show respect for their elders, as represented on Korean television dramas, is foreign for young Indonesian Muslims. However, they rationalise that these foreign mannerisms are compatible with Islam because they are essentially about respecting older people.

Not unsurprisingly, the stories on Korean television dramas that seem to be most loved by young Indonesian Muslims are those that are Islamic. For example, dramas depicting family struggles are deemed Islamic. Eli (Female, 21 years old) shared that she is interested in Korean television dramas that depict lives in which people struggle to become successful by working hard. Hard work is a value that Confucianism shares with Islam. Muslim youth understand that hard work is necessary to achieve their imagined ideal of being a successful person. Eli is also able to identify some scenes which offer other Islamic values such as respecting parents.

My participants were able to distinguish some elements on Korean television dramas that were 'not-Islamic' but are still accepted by Muslim audiences. Nadia stated that even though the fashions of Korean actors do not reflect Islamic values, their attitudes do not entirely contradict Muslim culture. Indeed, Indonesian television dramas use these same fashions.

During the focus group discussion, it was apparent that my informants believed that the values represented in Korean dramas are Islamic. Bunga (Female, 22 years old) said:

> "I found that Korean culture as reflected in the Korean television dramas is Islamic. I saw in Korean television dramas that younger people respected older people. They bow toward older people."

Nadia added:

> "From the television dramas, I see that Korean people are disciplined. They are really hard workers. This is relevant to Islam. I also enjoy the scenes in the Korean television dramas when a husband loves his family. It provides some understanding to me that I should also have a man like that in the future."

Bunga argued:

> "I think there are some values represented in Korean television dramas that are similar to our Islamic values. In Korean television dramas, younger people are expected to speak politely to the older ones. This kind of tradition is similar to our tradition. Furthermore, it is not polite in Korean television dramas for younger people to talk harshly."

However, participants also pointed out disagreements with Islamic values. Bunga, for example, stated that there are differences with respect to drinking alcohol—Korean television dramas portray it as common, while Islam forbids alcohol consumption.

Other female participants spoke particularly about the actors they see in Korean dramas. These young Muslim women want to have a boyfriend who is similar to the actors, or experience a 'sweet' love story as depicted in the television dramas. It is interesting to note, however, that although they love Korean actors, some participants are also critical of them. This conflict is represented by Selly and Ditya (Female, 23 years old), who do not want to have a Korean partner in the future but rather want to have an Indonesian man—specifically one with Korean tastes. In other words, a boyfriend who is handsome like the actors they idolise but one who is Indonesian, not Korean. I suggest that this preference is based on their understanding of the differences in religion between Koreans and Muslim Indonesians.

For these young women, Korean actors who are not Muslim are simply idols, not potential marriage partners; Islam contributes to this perception. Being Muslim is more important than having a cute face. For a pious Muslim, marriage is a sacred event, and is based on Islamic values. Islam dictates that a Muslim man should marry a Muslim woman. Thus, having a boyfriend or husband whose features resemble those of Korean actors becomes the fantasy of many young Muslim women. Korean actors are modern: they wear modern fashions and they are not '*ndeso*'. Ultimately, however, this imagination is blended with the part of their Islamic identity that wants a Muslim husband or partner.

Importantly, some participants reported that after watching Korean television dramas they rarely engage in the physical activities presented in them. Zul (Male, 21 years old), for instance, said:

> "I, myself, feel that after watching Korean television dramas, I am not so interested in collecting posters, eating Korean food, or learning Korean language. For me, Korean television dramas touch my heart. If you ask me about the impact of Korean television dramas, I say the impact is not physical, but abstract. Korean television dramas teach me about good character and attitude, that's it."

Thus, Zul acknowledges that after consuming Korean television dramas he just takes away the positive values that he can follow, most of which are non-physical in nature. By focusing on the abstract rather than the physical it will be less obvious to other people that he admires Koreans. The relevance of this is explained by Willis (1998: 552-553), who declares that young consumers are not cultural dupes; young consumers:

> "bring a necessary creative symbolic pressure, not only to make sense of cultural commodities, but partly through them also to make sense of contradiction and structure as they experience them in school, college, production, neighbourhood, and as members of certain genders, races, classes, and ages. The result of this necessary symbolic work may be quite different from anything initially coded into cultural commodities."

'Abstract', in this case when referring to the ability of Muslim youths to identify Islamic values, means things that are not visible. 'Concrete' activities, by contrast, include socially visible activities such as collecting posters and joining fan clubs. Clearly, such concrete activities require money. Furthermore, even though these concrete activities are '*mubah*' (permitted) in Islam, they are not '*sunnah*' (encouraged).

Indonesian Muslim youth consume both Islamic and 'not Islamic' values depicted in Korean television dramas. However, they do not follow or practice the values that are not Islamic. For example, they do not eat Korean food, because it is not '*halal*'. Nor do they buy posters of Korean actors and actresses, because they are '*mubadzir*', or not advantageous for them. Indonesian Muslim youth prefer to spend money on things they deem more important, such as their university and school studies.

Idols are crucial for the popularity of Korean television dramas among Indonesian youth. Gitzen (2013: 12) acknowledges that 'such images and types of idols are extremely important in attracting fans: there is something for everyone. Yet idols must be circulated in a very particular way to attract fans.' Significantly, however, for Muslim youth, their desire to be modern (e.g. looking cute like the idols on television dramas) must align with Islamic norms. Zulia (Female, 19 years old) explained:

> "However, being cute does not necessarily detach from Islam. I do not want to remove my hijab so that my beautiful hair can be seen by others. Being cute does not only refer to hair. Cute faces, behaviour and heart are crucial for me to be shown. And I can learn from the dramas that cute faces refer to clean and white. For me, white and clean faces can be realized by taking ablution (*menjaga wudhu*) every day, not only by using expensive cosmetics. Cute behaviour and heart are reflected by '*akhlak yang baik*' (good attitude). I understand that the television dramas also provide some '*akhlak yang baik*' such as being honest, respecting family, being disciplined and independent."

Indonesian Muslim youth who enjoy watching Korean television dramas can learn from scenes that depict Islamic and modern values. However, these lessons cannot be separated from either their Islamic identity or their ordinary sociocultural background. Ultimately, modern and Islamic representations are accepted, while those that are not Islamic—and thus forbidden in Islam—are rejected. Korean television dramas, then, shape the imagination of Muslim youth who want to be both modern and Islamic or religious.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Indonesian Muslim youth do not passively receive all the messages conveyed by the media such as those embedded in Korean television dramas. These youth have an innate cultural identity as well as conscious knowledge, which they have gained from their learning environment (e.g. education) and culture. Scholars refer to this as active audience—Indonesian Muslim youth are active audiences or consumers. Willis (1995: 550) states, for example, that 'consumerism now has to be understood as an active, not a passive, process. Its play includes work.' Consumers or audiences must actively interpret the polysemic (Barker, 2000: 46) texts circulated by media producers, and interpret their own meanings. Popular culture such as music, films, and television may be produced by capitalist corporations,

but meanings are always contested (Barker, 2000: 71) by the consumers or audiences; audiences can selectively receive and interpret the messages. Furthermore, reasons for consuming Korean media content—including Korean television dramas—vary according to local and social identities, sense of belonging, and shared histories and experiences (Chua, 2012: 340).

Furthermore, the recent trend of consumption practices among Indonesian Muslim youth indicates that these young people are now very actively engaging with Korean television dramas. This increase can be attributed to the fact that they do not passively depend on television broadcasts. Rather, the availability of pirated DVDs and free videos on the internet has supported their active consumption of Korean television dramas. This has become a challenge for the Indonesian television industry, as Korean television dramas broadcast on Indonesian channels increasingly lose television viewers.

Whilst watching Korean television dramas, young Muslims are capable of identifying Islamic and 'not Islamic' elements, both of which attract young people's interest in these dramas. Korean television dramas also project modern representations such as amenities and fashions, which have been imagined—and are desired—by Muslim youth, many of whom come from ordinary socioeconomic backgrounds. As Appadurai (1995: 14) states, 'the imagination has emerged as a new force in social life, largely as a result of the spread of electronic media, in the context of rapid flows of resources, images, and persons across national boundaries.' The spread of modern images promoted by electronic media like Korean television dramas has inspired ordinary people—especially young Muslim consumers—to imagine having modern living conditions and sensibilities. Modern fashions worn by famous actors or actresses broadcast on television are also able to attract viewers by helping them to imagine wearing those very fashions.

However, Muslim youth also believe that being modern should not detach them from their Islamic values—to be pious, it is crucial that they practice these values. Importantly, they recognise that even Korean actors in Korean television dramas, while modern, still maintain traditional values. Therefore, Muslim youth are able to imagine themselves as both modern and pious while engaging with these dramas. This study has shown how Korean television dramas help to shape the modern-religious imagination of contemporary Muslim youth in Indonesia.

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