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## DESCRIPTIVE OF QUANTITATIVE DATA | RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Commodification of Umrah through Social Media: Phenomenological Study on Umrah Pilgrims of Sociosalites in Jakarta

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**Abstract:** This research aims to find out the religious activities of Umrah pilgrims of socialites in Jakarta commodified through social media and to find out socialite individuals uploading religious activities on social media. In obtaining data in this study, researchers used qualitative methods based on the constructivism paradigm. This paradigm views knowledge as the result of the construction of human thought, not just the experience of facts. In this case humans understand social reality more based on the subject that examines rather than the object under study. The results of this study indicate that there are individual socialite factors uploading religious activities on social media, this study also found two elements of commodification that were implemented, namely Exchange Value and Use Value, and this study found that Umrah, which is traditionally a religious experience, has now been transformed into a culture of Conspicuous Consumption.

**Keywords:** Commodification, Conspicuous Consumption, Social Media.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Conspicuous consumption, a concept originally introduced by Thorstein Veblen in his seminal work *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), refers to the practice of consuming goods and services to publicly display wealth, status, and power. Veblen argued that people engage in conspicuous consumption not out of necessity but as a way to demonstrate their social standing and to distinguish themselves from others. This consumption is symbolic, serving as a marker of one's class position in society. A person who engages in conspicuous consumption is driven by the desire to make their wealth visible, allowing them to signal their membership in a higher social group. They do so by purchasing items that have certain cultural or social significance, be it luxury cars, designer clothing, or exclusive vacations, all meant to communicate their belonging to an elite circle.

Fast forward more than a century, and the concept of conspicuous consumption still holds relevance today, albeit in a more nuanced and technologically mediated form. Social media has become the new stage for conspicuous consumption, where individuals no longer need to exhibit their wealth and status through direct physical interactions but instead through virtual performances of their lifestyles. Digital platforms have created a space for individuals to curate their identities, and consumption has become not just about what one owns but about how these possessions and experiences are presented to an online audience. This shift in the mode of conspicuous consumption highlights the changing dynamics of class, identity, and visibility in contemporary society.

A key figure who has expanded upon Veblen's ideas in the contemporary context is Jean-Pascal Daloz. In his book *The Sociology of Elite Distinction* (2012), Daloz speaks of the "consumption of status," a phenomenon where individuals and groups use their consumption patterns to affirm their collective identity. This collective consumption creates a shared image that reflects the group's values and ideals. For example, elite groups may form exclusive networks where certain behaviors, practices,

and commodities are valued as status symbols. These symbols, when consumed collectively, reinforce the group's internal coherence and help differentiate them from other social groups.

One of the fascinating aspects of Daloz's work is the idea that modern-day consumption is less about the goods themselves and more about the social capital that comes with them. Membership in a particular social group is not simply demonstrated through the accumulation of material goods but through one's participation in shared cultural practices and symbolic exchanges. Conspicuous consumption today is less about amassing tangible objects and more about communicating one's lifestyle, values, and connections in ways that resonate with specific social circles.

In today's world, social media serves as a powerful tool for engaging in this type of symbolic consumption. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook allow users to share curated representations of their lives, showcasing not just what they own but also where they travel, what they eat, and how they spend their time. The "like" and "share" functions of these platforms enable users to accumulate social capital in the form of followers and engagement. This virtual display of consumption serves to reinforce one's social standing and group membership in ways that Veblen could not have imagined. In the digital age, the symbolic power of consumption has grown even stronger, as individuals can manipulate their self-presentation in real-time, choosing how they are perceived by their audience. For instance, a well-composed Instagram post featuring a luxury item or an exotic vacation destination can send a powerful message about a person's status without them ever having to physically interact with their audience. The act of posting becomes an extension of conspicuous consumption, transforming consumption from a purely physical display of wealth to a digitally mediated act of self-promotion and identity formation. This dynamic illustrates how the meaning of consumption has shifted from purely material acquisition to a more performative, image-based practice.

Despite the shifts in consumption patterns, one area where conspicuous consumption still intersects with more traditional values is in the realm of religious activities. Many religious teachings, particularly in the Abrahamic faiths, emphasize humility, modesty, and the avoidance of materialism. Acts of charity and religious observance are traditionally seen as acts that should be done discreetly, without seeking recognition or approval from others. Conspicuous consumption, with its focus on public display and status-seeking, appears to contradict these religious values. However, in the digital age, even religious practices are becoming commodified and transformed into social capital. This phenomenon can be observed in the context of religious activities such as the Islamic pilgrimage of Umrah, where affluent members of society—sometimes referred to as socialites—use social media to document and broadcast their pilgrimage experiences. What was once considered a deeply personal and spiritual journey has, in some cases, been repurposed as an opportunity for conspicuous consumption. This commodification of religious activities raises important questions about the intersection of faith, class, and digital identity. In the specific case of socialite Umrah pilgrims in Jakarta, this phenomenon can be seen in the way individuals use social media to showcase their pilgrimage experiences. Through platforms like Instagram and YouTube, these pilgrims curate their religious journeys, presenting them in ways that highlight their wealth and status. The Umrah pilgrimage, which is supposed to be a spiritual act of devotion, becomes intertwined with the symbols of luxury—five-star hotels, designer prayer garments, and exclusive access to holy sites. These posts are often accompanied by hashtags that further enhance visibility, attracting the attention of followers who might aspire to the same experiences.

The act of sharing Umrah experiences on social media can be understood through the lens of commodification. In a neoliberal capitalist framework, even religious practices can be commodified—turned into marketable, sellable experiences that offer social capital to those who participate in them. By showcasing their Umrah pilgrimage, socialites are not only participating in a religious act but are also engaging in a form of conspicuous consumption. They are using their pilgrimage as a way to enhance their personal brand, elevating their social standing both within their religious community and within the broader social media ecosystem.

This transformation of religious experience into a consumable product complicates traditional understandings of piety and devotion. It blurs the lines between the sacred and the profane, raising questions about authenticity and the motivations behind religious practices in the digital age. Are these individuals engaging in Umrah for purely spiritual reasons, or are they also motivated by the desire to enhance their social capital through the performative act of posting? The commodification of religious activities such as Umrah suggests that the boundaries between spiritual devotion and social performance are becoming increasingly porous. To explore this phenomenon further, this research will utilize a phenomenological approach, focusing on the lived experiences of socialite Umrah pilgrims in Jakarta. Phenomenology, as a research method, seeks to understand how individuals experience and make sense of the world around them. It is particularly useful for studying the subjective experiences of individuals and how they perceive and interpret their actions. In this case, a phenomenological study can provide insights into how socialite Umrah pilgrims experience the intersection of religious devotion and conspicuous consumption, and how they rationalize the act of sharing their religious experiences on social media.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Commodification*

Commodification is the process by which goods, services, or even social activities that were previously not traded in the market are transformed into commodities that have exchange value and can be bought and sold (Seran, 2023). This process reduces the intrinsic value or original meaning of something to an economic value. In the context of social media, commodification occurs when religious activities, such as Umrah, are turned into content that can be marketed, consumed, and valued based on the number of likes, shares, or views. Conspicuous consumption not only serves to fulfill basic needs, but also to display social status and wealth. This phenomenon reflects the tendency of individuals in society to use goods and services as status indicators, which in turn affects social and economic dynamics at large.

### 2.2. *Consumption*

Consumption is the act of taking ownership, using, and reducing the value of an item (Hoyer, McInnis, and Pieter, 2008: 4). In the process of consuming goods, consumers are faced with a choice of products that can be seen or tangible, as well as products that cannot be seen or intangible, such as activities and beliefs. In addition, the consumption process does not always mean giving full ownership to consumers, but it can also only provide the right to use for a certain period of time, for example in rental or experience activities. Consumption not only provides satisfaction for the act of consumption itself, but also has a social meaning that reflects the social environment of the consumer. Consumption patterns can reflect an indication of the consumer's social environment in the consumption activity.

The main feature of conspicuous consumption is the ability to show others that the individual is able to achieve a certain level of consumption that others cannot (Saad, 2014). Although luxury products are often used to show conspicuous consumption, it is not always limited to luxury goods; conspicuous consumption can also occur through activities that do not explicitly show status. In line with this explanation, even acts of altruism such as participation in green consumption (conspicuous conservation) can be done more easily by someone if they expect to gain a certain status from the action (Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh, 2010). Conspicuous consumption occurs because during consumption, individuals tend to compare themselves with others. Although such comparisons can be two-way, upward comparisons tend to be faster than downward comparisons, which ultimately affect self-assessment (Wood, 1989 and Collins, 1996). This comparing attitude has previously been

described by Festinger (1954) as social comparison, which is the tendency of individuals to assess their self-position by comparing it with their surrounding environment.

### 2.3. *Conspicuous Consumption and Religion*

According to Kilbourne, Grunhagen, and Foley (2005), examined variations in religious conditions across cultures and noted differences and similarities in religious practices within societies. This explains that, they found self-enhancement values, such as showing off ownership or consumption of products, often conflict with self-transcendence values related to spirituality. It is difficult for a person to pursue both values simultaneously. Therefore, strong spirituality enhancement tends to reduce interest in conspicuous consumption as acts of conspicuous consumption usually reflect self-enhancement values. Religious practices are carried out on the internal drive of the individual and not due to external pressure, such as to be recognized as a pious believer.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative approach, which produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from sources. The qualitative approach aims to construct reality and understand its meaning, so the main focus is on the process, events, and authenticity of the data. In line with this, the presence of researchers in qualitative research is explicit and limited to certain situations, involving a small number of subjects (Somantri, 2005). This approach allows researchers to understand the real world through a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and personal notes. This approach uses a naturalistic perspective to understand events in the context of meanings given by people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This research aims to understand the interviewees' behavior related to posting religious activities on social media and encourage them to share their experiences as both actors and audiences. To facilitate this, a tool is needed that can encourage interviewees to tell stories, explore their habits and experiences in posting religious activities. Visual research method is the right approach for this research because by using this method, the interviewees can convey their opinions and experiences naturally.

The use of this method will produce more in-depth data and focus on the research topic because visualization helps interviewees more easily tell their experiences. Visual research method involves the use of visual media such as pictures, photography, movies, and other visual media as instruments to extract information from the interviewees (Banks, 2001). Visual research methods make it easier for researchers to obtain information that may not be obtained through conventional methods, because with visual media, researchers and interviewees can focus more on the research topic and dig deeper information (Collier, 1986). The phenomenological approach is appropriate to use in this study because it allows researchers to understand in depth how socialite Umrah pilgrims interpret and commodify their religious activities through social media. Therefore, through phenomenology, researchers can explore the subjective perceptions and meanings given by research subjects to the phenomena that occur. This is very relevant in the context of commodification of religious activities, where individual meanings and experiences are key to understanding how and why these activities are shared on social media. Thus, by using a phenomenological approach, researchers can provide a strong framework to capture the complexity and depth of individual experiences, and allow researchers to uncover dimensions that may not be visible through other approaches.

The number of sources in this study amounted to 7 people. This number was obtained after the researcher conducted an interview with the source and the next interview conducted had obtained relatively the same answer as the source who had been interviewed. To get sources in the study, researchers conducted purposive snowball sampling. The researcher determines the basic criteria of the source and determines the first source, then the first source at the end of the interview is invited

to recommend the next source for the interview until the data or interview conducted is considered sufficient.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Exchange Rate

The commodification of exchange value in the context of Umrah illustrates how this religious experience is transformed into an asset that has social and economic value. Umrah, traditionally seen as a purely spiritual ritual, has now experienced a shift in meaning to become a marker of social status. This spiritual experience no longer only has intrinsic value as part of worship, but is also modified into a symbol of social recognition that is capitalized on by individuals to obtain a desired self-image in the public eye. This phenomenon is in line with the concept of commodification explained by experts, namely Baudrillard (1981), according to which an intrinsic value is transformed into a commodity that can be exchanged for social or economic gain. As explained earlier, the Umrah pilgrimage today is not only a spiritual experience, but has also become a tool for socialites to show their status on social media. This can be seen in the results of interviews with informants who mentioned that the number of "likes" and comments on their umrah uploads is an indicator of how high the social value given by their followers. Therefore, this is in accordance with Marx's (1867) view of exchange value, where the value of an object or experience is not only measured by its usefulness, but also by the recognition received from others. This view is also reinforced by Interviewee 2 who feels a sense of pride when he posts his umrah on social media to invite admiration and inspiration from others.

The commodification of this exchange rate shows how Umrah has undergone a change from religious meaning to a form of social recognition that is strongly influenced by public expectations. In line with the opinions of informants 3 and 4, explaining that the social pressure to post Umrah experiences on social media comes from the expectations that exist in their environment. This activity reflects how the intrinsic value of the Umrah pilgrimage has been converted into exchange value measured through social interactions on digital platforms, this is in accordance with Baudrillard's theory (1981), about simulacra and commodification in consumer society. The results of this study show that in the context of socialite umrah pilgrims, the spiritual experience has undergone a significant shift, where social exchange value is prioritized, and this is reflected through behavior on social media that is oriented towards public recognition and social status.

### 4.2. Use Value

The commodification of use value in the context of Umrah shows how worship, which should focus on spiritual experience, has shifted in meaning to become a symbol of social status. This commodification occurs when the value of Umrah is no longer seen only from the religious aspect, but also how pilgrims use it to strengthen their social identity. As expressed by Marx (1867), commodification is the process by which the utility value of an object or activity is transformed into a commodity that can be traded or utilized for other social or economic purposes. In this case, Umrah travel by socialites is used not only as a form of worship, but also as a tool to strengthen their social status, especially through social media. In line with the explanation above, Umrah has become more than just a spiritual experience and Umrah has become a symbol of personal success and a tool to strengthen social image. Based on the results of the interviews, several interviewees stated the same thing that by posting umrah photos on social media, they not only shared their worship experience, but also emphasized their social position among their friends. The activity reflects what Baudrillard (1981) proposed in his theory of simulacra, where the value of an object or experience is not only determined by its function, but also by how the object or experience is perceived in society. This commodification of use value is seen when pilgrims use the Umrah experience as a status symbol and

a tool to improve self-image. In line with this view, some Interviewees also showed awareness of the social impact of umrah activities posted on social media. They emphasized that in addition to the quality of worship, there is a strong drive to display this experience in a way that enhances self-image in the eyes of the public. This suggests that the use-value of umrah has shifted from a spiritual meaning to a commodified form of social expression. In line with Marx (1867), this commodification shows how religious activities can be transformed into symbols that reinforce social identity, fulfill emotional needs, and enhance the social status of individuals in contemporary society. Thus, the value of using Umrah is now not only judged by its religious aspects, but also by its ability to function as a social asset that increases recognition and status in the eyes of the public.

#### 4.3. *Conspicuous Consumption Status*

Conspicuous consumption in the context of social status illustrates how religious experiences such as Umrah are transformed into status symbols by socialites. Umrah, which should focus on the spiritual dimension, is now seen as a means to highlight social status through social media and public interaction. This is in line with the conspicuous consumption theory proposed by Veblen (1899), explaining that conspicuous consumption is used as a way to show the visibility of wealth and social status to others. This is in accordance with what was expressed by several research sources, one of which was Interviewee 4, about Umrah posts often being interpreted as a status symbol that shows significant achievement, which increases appreciation in their social environment. Other interviews revealed that Umrah is used as a means to showcase their social activities, especially through social media. They use this opportunity to build personal branding as religious and financially established individuals. This shows that umrah is not only a religious experience, but also a strategy to strengthen self-image in the eyes of the public, in line with Baudrillard's (1981) view of consumption as a means to project social identity. This process shows that there is an association with an exchange value of the umrah experience that has been commodified, where the spiritual element is capitalized to achieve social recognition.

Based on the explanation above, the activity of posting Umrah photos on social media is a form of conspicuous consumption that aims to show the privilege of carrying out this worship. This confirms that religious experience has become a tool to improve self-image and social status in the eyes of the public. As explained by several expert informants, through the perspective of conspicuous consumption, umrah functions not only as a spiritual experience but also as a tool to highlight social status in the digital era, where technology plays an important role in shaping social interactions and public identity.

#### 4.4. *Conspicuous Consumption Symbol*

Conspicuous consumption in the symbol element describes how consumption behavior is used to display social identity through symbols that are recognized by the public (Veblen, 1899). In the context of Umrah pilgrims from socialites, this element is clearly visible when Umrah is no longer just treated as a spiritual worship, but also as a tool to gain social recognition. Activities such as posting on social media or showing social status through visual displays of the Umrah trip become a form of expression that emphasizes their social achievement. This is in accordance with Baudrillard's (1981) view that in modern society, consumption is not only about needs, but also about the creation and dissemination of symbolic meanings that represent social status.

Posting umrah activities on social media becomes a way to show that they have achieved something special, which reinforces this concept. Umrah, which in a religious context should be a spiritual experience, is turned into a status symbol that can be seen by others. This process emphasizes how religious experiences are capitalized on as symbols of social achievement, in line with conspicuous consumption theory which emphasizes the use of symbols to accentuate social identity in the public



eye. In line with the previous explanation, this study found that the interviewees had supportive and different views in responding to this phenomenon. Interviewee 3 asserted that umrah has become a symbol of exclusivity that shows higher social status, indicating that umrah has been commodified into a tool to emphasize social differences and improve self-image. Interviewee 5 added that posting photos while in the Holy Land is not only a way to show commitment and seriousness towards religion, but also serves as a symbol of identity in the context of conspicuous consumption. The views of Expert Informants 1 and 2 support this by stating that socialites' use of social media to showcase religious activities shows a shift in the meaning of religiosity into a symbolic commodity.

Based on these arguments, it appears that the Umrah pilgrimage has undergone a transformation in meaning, from a spiritual ritual to a symbol of social status. In the context of umrah pilgrims from socialites, the symbolic element in conspicuous consumption is seen in various forms of expression, such as posts on social media and other visual displays, which are used to emphasize their social status in the public eye. This shows how the commodification of symbolic value has penetrated into religious practices, making it a tool to fulfill social needs and strengthen social identity in the digital era.

#### 4.5. *Conspicuous Consumption Cycle*

Conspicuous consumption in the consumption cycle of umrah pilgrims reveals how this religious journey functions as an element of a sustainable and repetitive consumption pattern. In this case, umrah is not only considered a form of worship, but also a means to strengthen social status through repetition of experience. According to Veblen (1899), conspicuous consumption serves as a way to demonstrate social status and prestige in the eyes of the public (Veblen, 1899). This statement is consistent with the observation that Umrah pilgrims often engage in a cycle of consumption that revolves not only around religious obligations, but also on the need to show their social status. This is also indicated by the urge to plan another Umrah trip in order to demonstrate their status and participation to others. In line with the previous, this pattern of repeated consumption is colored by the social urge to demonstrate equality of spiritual experience. This is evident from Interviewee 3's statement that after Umrah, there is a need to show that they too have undergone similar spiritual experiences as their peers. Hence, this explanation is in line with the idea of conspicuous consumption which implies that consumption is often triggered by the desire to meet social standards and demonstrate adherence to group norms. This opinion was further reinforced by expert interviewee 1 who emphasized that individuals feel the need to constantly demonstrate their consumption in order to remain relevant in their social dynamics. Furthermore, expert informant 2 also added that umrah has become part of a strategy to maintain and strengthen social identity through actions that are seen by the group. Thus, this statement makes it clear that the consumption cycle does not only function for consumption itself, but also to strengthen social position and recognition within the community. This engagement in the consumption cycle creates pressure to continuously publicize and repeat the umrah experience as a way to maintain social status and acceptance within their social group.

#### 4.6. *Conspicuous Consumption Social Impact*

The phenomenon of conspicuous consumption in the context of umrah shows how consumptive behavior exhibited by socialites has a significant impact on social norms and community perceptions. This process shows how Umrah, which is basically a spiritual worship, has shifted to a symbol of social status that is exhibited through social media. This is in line with the opinion of Veblen (1899), in his theory of conspicuous consumption which explains that consumption is done to project social status to others, not merely to fulfill basic needs (Veblen, 1899). This can be seen in the statements of several informants, one of which is the 5th informant who revealed social pressure to post Umrah activities to be considered relevant and follow trends.

The social impact of conspicuous consumption is also evident in the interview with Interviewee 1, which shows that umrah activities are no longer only seen as the fulfillment of spiritual obligations, but also as a symbol of social success. The interviewee felt that by posting Umrah activities on social media, he could improve his social status in the eyes of others. This is in line with Baudrillard's (1981) opinion, stating that in a consumerist society, goods and activities not only have use value, but also sign value that communicates social status and identity (Baudrillard, 1981). Therefore, umrah in this context has been commodified into a social asset, where its spiritual value is measured through public exposure.

Based on the previous explanation, the social impact of conspicuous consumption also gives rise to indirect competition among socialites, as expressed by one of the 4th Interviewees. This competition occurs because individuals feel the need to post more umrah activities to gain more recognition from their social environment. Expert Interviewee 1 also reinforced this view by emphasizing that worship such as umrah has undergone social commodification, where the value of piety is now often measured through public exposure on social media. This commodification creates a new norm in modern society, as explained by Expert Interviewee 3, where worship that was previously private is now used to gain social recognition, replacing spiritual value with social value.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of this research problem led to three key conclusions. First, several individual factors motivate socialites to upload religious activities, such as Umrah, on social media. These include the influence of friends and their social environment, where individuals feel compelled to follow trends; the desire to share memories of their Umrah experience; the importance of capturing significant moments; the pride associated with visiting exclusive locations like Mecca; and the intention to leave a specific impression, as these activities are made visible to the public. Second, the research identified two elements of commodification: exchange value and use value. The exchange value indicates that Umrah has shifted from a purely spiritual journey to an asset with social and economic significance, where religious activities are used to gain social recognition and enhance self-image through social media. Socialites, in particular, leverage Umrah to elevate their social status and achieve personal satisfaction. In terms of use value, Umrah is commodified as a symbol of status and identity. It is no longer just an act of worship, but also a means for socialites to reinforce their public image, especially through interactions on social media, where the religious trip serves as a tool for shaping social identity and gaining public recognition. Third, the study found that Umrah, traditionally a spiritual practice, has been transformed into a form of conspicuous consumption. This shift is evident in the use of Umrah to assert social status, where socialites seek recognition and appreciation within their social circles. Umrah trips have become social symbols, accentuating prestige, exclusivity, and reinforcing the self-image of the participants as religious and successful individuals. This cycle of consumption, where Umrah is repeatedly undertaken and publicized, helps socialites maintain their relevance and status in their community. Ultimately, the spiritual meaning of Umrah is increasingly overshadowed by social values, with public recognition becoming a key measure of the experience's worth.

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