

# The Institutionalisation and Commodification of the Mushaf Al-Qur'an in Indonesia: An Analysis of the Business Practices of Syaamil Quran

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## Abstract:

This study examines the institutionalization and commodification of the Qur'anic mushaf within the business practices of Syaamil Quran in Indonesia, and explores how the sacredness of the text is continuously negotiated within contemporary market dynamics. Theoretical perspectives include Marx's theory of commodification, Mosco's content commodification, Baudrillard's sign-value, Bourdieu's symbolic capital, and Gauthier's concept of spiritual capitalism. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. The study focuses on product innovation, aesthetic design, personalization, pedagogical features, and the construction of religious legitimacy within Syaamil's publishing model. Findings reveal that the mushaf has evolved into a hybrid entity—simultaneously sacred and commodified—functioning not only as a religious text, but also as a cultural artifact, identity marker, and symbolic commodity. The principal challenge identified is the risk of commodity fetishism, in which aesthetic form and prestige may overshadow deeper spiritual engagement. This study recommends reinforcing ethical governance in religious publishing and sustaining collaboration with Islamic scholars to preserve the Qur'an's transformative function in society. This study contributes to the field of religion and political economy by positioning the Qur'anic mushaf as an emergent site of negotiation between sacred meaning and capitalist rationality, offering a critical model for understanding religious publishing in modern Muslim societies.

**Keywords:** Islamic identity; religious commodification; spiritual capitalism; symbolic value; Syaamil Quran.

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the sacred text of Muslims, functions not only as a spiritual guide but, in the context of contemporary capitalist society, has also become a significant object of commodification. This phenomenon is part of what Carrette and King term the "commodification of religion," where spiritual values are transformed into marketable commodities (J. R. Carrette, 2005). In Indonesia, the development of the halal industry has created space for the commodification of religious products, including the mushaf Al-Qur'an (physical copy of the Qur'an).

Theoretically, this shift can be dissected through the framework of Commodification Theory, rooted in Karl Marx's analysis of the transformation of use value into exchange value. Commodification occurs when a product is no longer valued based on its intrinsic benefits but rather on its potential for sale in the market (Marx, 1976).

This phenomenon peaks in the era of Late Capitalism, where market logic has expanded into every aspect of life, including culture and religion, creating what is called the Commodification of Religion. This concept specifically analyzes how religious symbols, practices, and texts are integrated into market mechanisms, making worship and piety into products that can be bought and sold (Fealy, 2009).

The publisher Syaamil Quran, a prominent Qur'an publishing and printing industry in Indonesia, serves as an ideal case study to examine this phenomenon. Syaamil Quran offers various mushaf variants with diverse features and designs. According to Hikmawan, Syaamil Quran has "successfully created market segmentation through systematic product differentiation" (Hikmawan, 2019). Products such as the Hafalan (Memorization) Mushaf, Tajwid Warna (Color-Coded Tajwid) Mushaf, Mushaf for Women, and various special editions demonstrate how the sacred text is redesigned to meet various consumer segments.

Based on preliminary observation, Syaamil Quran does not merely sell the mushaf as a holy book but also offers a packaged religious experience. This process aligns with the concept of "spiritual capitalism" explained by Gauthier as "the utilization of spiritual values within the logic of capitalist markets" (Goldstein, 2017). Through mature marketing strategies, Syaamil Quran successfully builds an image as a premium mushaf that is not only functional but also possesses high aesthetic and symbolic value.

While studies on the commodification of religion have been widely conducted, the focus on the commodification of the Qur'anic mushaf remains limited. Research by Ichwan predominantly discusses the political aspects of mushaf standardization (Ichwan, 2013), while Federspiel examines popular literature about the Qur'an without a specific focus on commodification (Federspiel, 1994).

In the context of Syaamil Quran, the study by Fahmi touches on business aspects but has not yet deeply connected them with commodification theory (Fahmi et al., 2020). This research seeks to fill this gap by utilizing the commodification theory framework to analyze Syaamil Quran's business strategies. Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze the commodification process within Syaamil Quran's business practices. It will focus on the production and marketing strategies Syaamil employs to create new exchange value for the Qur'anic mushaf and reveal the negotiation of meanings occurring between the idealism of da'wah and business imperatives in Indonesia's Islamic publishing industry.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with a case study method, focusing on commodification practices in the institutionalization of the Qur'an at the Syaamil Quran publisher and printing house in Bandung (Furidha, 2023). This approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to understand deeply the social, economic, and ideological dynamics behind the production and distribution processes of the Qur'anic mushaf. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with management, production teams, and the marketing division, as well as direct observation at the factory and office locations. Analysis was conducted using Commodification Theory (Karl Marx), examining how the Qur'anic mushaf transforms from an object with pure spiritual use value into a commodity with high economic exchange value in the market (Marx, 1976). Data validity was strengthened through source and method triangulation, comparing interview results, internal documents, and field findings. This approach is expected to yield a critical understanding of the relationship between the sanctity of the text and market strategies in Indonesia's Qur'an publishing industry.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Framework of Commodification: Sacred Text in Market Logic

The framework of commodification applied to the *Mushaf al-Qur'an* within Syaamil Quran cannot be understood merely as a technical process of printing and distribution, but rather as a complex intersection between sacred authority, economic rationality, cultural symbolism, and the logic of late capitalism. Based on in-depth interviews with the management of Syaamil Quran/Syaamil Group, particularly Mr. Dedi Wahyudi (Head of PT. SDQ), it was revealed that Syaamil Group operates under the grand vision of "becoming the leading company in grounding the Qur'an and reviving the Sirah (Prophetic Biography)." This vision reflects a dual orientation—spiritual and entrepreneurial—wherein the Qur'an is positioned simultaneously as a divine revelation and as an economic object mediated through modern industrial mechanisms. In the sociological imagination of contemporary Indonesia, the name Syaamil Quran has become deeply embedded in the public consciousness as a premium and authoritative brand of mushaf production. This branding, however, is not merely commercial in

nature; it also reflects a deeper process of institutionalization, where the sacred text is absorbed into what can be described as an Islamic moral economy shaped by modern capitalist infrastructures.

In the Indonesian context, where the government does not fully subsidize or distribute mushafs to meet the massive demand of over 230 million Muslims (Sebastian & Othman Alkaff, 2024), private institutions such as Syaamil Quran become structural actors within what may be termed the “religious supply chain.” The statement from Syaamil that “the Qur'an is positioned as a product or commodity that requires investment to reach the hands of the public” is therefore not simply an admission of commercialization, but a recognition of structural reality. This aligns directly with Karl Marx's conception of commodification as a process whereby an object originally valued for its use-value is transformed into an object defined by its exchange-value within a system of market relations (Marx, 1976). The Qur'an, intrinsically imbued with transcendent meaning and spiritual use-value, cannot escape the material conditions of its own reproduction (Alvi & Werth, 2024). Paper, ink, design, layout, translation, calligraphy, editing, verification, logistics, and marketing all necessitate financial investment, managerial coordination, and economic planning. In this sense, the sacred text enters what Marx describes as the circuit of capital, not because its sacredness is negated, but because its physical manifestation is entangled within a global capitalist infrastructure that governs production and circulation (Hasan, 2022).

This process is further illuminated by Vincent Mosco's theory of the commodification of content, in which symbolic and communicative products—including religious texts—become subject to economic logics of abstraction, packaging, and distribution within political-economic frameworks (Mosco, 2009). Syaamil Quran does not operate as a traditional religious institution alone, but as a hybrid actor located at the intersection of da'wah, media, publishing, education, and market distribution (Rijal, 2023). The Qur'an, in this framework, is not reduced to a mere consumer item; rather, it becomes what can be described as a “mediated sacred commodity,” a hybrid artifact that moves between two worlds—the spiritual and the material. This is consistent with what Kitiarsa (2008) terms the “commodification of religiosity,” wherein religious objects and practices are reformulated through market frameworks while retaining symbolic, spiritual, and moral authority (Kitiarsa, 2007).

The symbiotic relationship between da'wah and business orientation, as described by Syaamil's management—“profits are used to support the sustainability of da'wah”—illustrates the logic of spiritual capitalism, a concept elaborated by Gauthier (2013) to describe the integration of religious values within capitalist modes of organization. Rather than presenting the market as an adversary to piety, this model reframes economic activity as a vehicle for spiritual dissemination (Gauthier, 2013). In this sense, capitalism is not positioned as a secularizing force that erodes religion, but rather as an infrastructure through which religious ideas, values, and practices are disseminated in more expansive, systematic, and accessible forms. This phenomenon is not unique to Islam or Indonesia; similar patterns have been observed in the Christian publishing industry in the United States, the Bible Belt's evangelical merchandise market, the commercialization of the Torah in orthodox Jewish communities, and the Buddhist ritual industries in East Asia (Fealy, 2009). However, what distinguishes the Indonesian case, particularly Syaamil Quran, is the integration of Islamic ethics, local culture, and aesthetic innovation into this commodification process (J. Carrette & King, 2005).

From a broader theoretical standpoint, this phenomenon must also be situated within what Adorno and Horkheimer termed the “culture industry,” in which cultural artifacts—including religious products—are standardized, aestheticized, and mass-produced within industrial capitalism (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972). The mushaf al-Qur'an, traditionally copied by hand in intimate and devotional contexts, is now embedded in large-scale industrial printing rigs, digital design studios, algorithmic supply chains, and e-commerce ecosystems. Yet, paradoxically, rather than diluting its sacred aura, this industrial replication often amplifies its symbolic presence in everyday Muslim life. Qur'ans are now found not only in mosques and pesantren but in coffee shops, book cafés, corporate offices, schools, digital marketplaces, and even as aesthetic objects in home décor. This shift illustrates what Baudrillard (1998) describes as the movement from use-value to sign-value, where objects are consumed not only for their function, but for the identity, image, and symbolism they project (Baudrillard, 1998).

In the case of Syaamil Quran, the mushaf does not merely function as a text to be read; it also operates as a symbolic marker of modern Muslim identity. Ownership of a particular variant of mushaf—such as a Tajwid Warna edition, Mushaf Hafalan, Mushaf for Women, or Custom Name Mushaf—signals a certain spiritual orientation, social aspiration, and religious lifestyle. The Qur'an thus enters what Appadurai (1986) refers to as “the social life of things,” where commodities acquire meaning through their circulation within social, cultural, and ideological systems (Appadurai, 1986). The mushaf, then, is not simply an object; it is a sign, a narrative, and a carrier of value in Bourdieu's sense of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2000). By positioning their products as tools of piety,

memorization, self-improvement, and da'wah, Syaamil effectively transforms each mushaf into a bundled package of religious meaning, aesthetic appeal, and moral purpose.

This is where the true sophistication of Syaamil's commodification strategy lies. The company does not simply sell paper and ink; it sells a vision of religiosity tailored to the needs of modern Muslims who live amid digital distractions, consumer culture, and fragmented spiritual attention. By framing its products as "solutions" to contemporary spiritual challenges—lack of focus, inability to read Arabic, weak memorization, or limited time for religious study—Syaamil embeds its mushafs within the everyday struggles of modern believers. This constitutes what Bauman (2007) might describe as the "liquid religiosity" of modern life, where spiritual practices are adapted to fit the rhythms of contemporary existence (Bauman & Magatti, 2007). Syaamil's products thus become bridges between the eternal and the temporal, between the sacred revelation and the profane routines of daily life.

Nevertheless, this process cannot be romanticized without critique. The integration of market logic into sacred domains opens the possibility of what Marx calls "commodity fetishism," wherein the social relationship between humans and the divine is obscured by an excessive focus on the object itself (Marx, 2000). In extreme conditions, the mushaf risks becoming an object of prestige, aesthetic admiration, or consumption, rather than a medium for divine engagement and ethical transformation. When people prioritize designer covers, color schemes, and personalization over comprehension, internalization, and ethical practice, the sacred risks being reduced to a lifestyle accessory. Syaamil acknowledges this tension, positioning it as an ongoing "dilemma and negotiation" rather than a resolved contradiction. This acknowledgment is significant, because it demonstrates institutional reflexivity: an awareness that the very structure that enables da'wah dissemination also contains the potential for spiritual superficiality (Marwantika & Dauda, 2025).

However, unlike purely profit-driven corporations, Syaamil continuously integrates ethical discourse, consultation with religious authorities, Qur'anic etiquettes (adab al-Qur'an), and da'wah-oriented programs into its business model. Initiatives such as Qur'an waqf programs, Qur'an training, Rumah Syaamil Qur'an, and partnerships with Islamic educational institutions provide a structural counterbalance to the risk of total commodification. In this sense, Syaamil operates in a liminal space between what Weber would call value-rational action (wertrational) and instrumental-rational action (zweckrational) (Nurulita, 2025). While profit and market expansion remain instrumental goals, they are framed within an overarching value system grounded in Islamic ethics and communal responsibility.

Thus, the commodification of the mushaf within Syaamil Quran should not be simplistically interpreted as the profanation of the sacred. Rather, it should be understood as a dialectical process, in which the sacred negotiates with, adapts to, and at times resists the logic of global capitalism (Bhanye, 2025). This dialectic produces a uniquely Indonesian model of "Islamic spiritual economy," where religious dissemination, cultural identity, moral capital, and economic sustainability form a complex, interdependent network. In this model, the mushaf is at once a divine text, an educational tool, an ideological symbol, a cultural artifact, and an economic commodity—each identity existing simultaneously without fully erasing the others. It is in this tension that the contemporary meaning of the Qur'an in modern society is continuously redefined, contested, and renegotiated (Ahmad, 2023).

### **Product Differentiation of the Mushaf: Creating Identity-Based Commodities**

Product differentiation in the Qur'anic publishing industry, as practiced by Syaamil Quran, represents not merely a marketing strategy in the conventional sense, but a deeper socio-cultural and ideological transformation in how the sacred text is positioned, consumed, and experienced in contemporary Muslim society. Syaamil Quran explicitly asserts that its commitment to continuous product innovation is driven by the pragmatic intention to facilitate broader and more accessible interaction with the Qur'an, particularly in a socio-linguistic context where Arabic is not a native language for the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims. This admission, while seemingly functional, simultaneously reflects a profound shift in the ontology of the mushaf itself—from a singular, standardized sacred object into a pluralized, diversified, and highly segmented commodity form that is intricately tailored to meet the psychological, generational, educational, and identity-based needs of a modern consumer society (Qureshi, 2023). In this transformation, the mushaf is no longer treated as a uniform, homogenous religious artifact, but as a dynamic and malleable product that must continuously adapt to the evolving tastes, expectations, and lifestyles of its users (Cohen, 2019).

The differentiation strategies adopted by Syaamil Quran illustrate a highly sophisticated mechanism of cultural targeting and symbolic segmentation. For younger audiences, for instance, brightly colored pages,

intuitive visual guidance, child-friendly typography, and simplified visual cues are intentionally designed to attract attention, nurture emotional attachment, and create a sense of familiarity with the Qur'an from an early age. The development of colorful Qur'ans for children is not merely an aesthetic choice, but a strategic intervention into early religious socialization. It is an attempt to counteract the cognitive and sensory dominance of digital technology, animated entertainment, and fast-paced visual culture that increasingly shape the worldview of contemporary youth. By offering visually engaging mushafs, Syaamil is not only marketing a product but also intervening in what Bourdieu (2000) would describe as the formation of religious habitus—a set of internalized dispositions that structure an individual's orientation toward the sacred (Bourdieu, 2000).

Similarly, the introduction of the Tikrar (repetition) method into the mushaf design reflects a pedagogical shift in Qur'anic engagement. The traditional model of memorization in pesantren and classical Islamic institutions often relied on oral transmission, teacher-centered instruction, and repetitive recitation within communal spaces (Muh Mustakim, 2021). By embedding the Tikrar method directly into the printed mushaf, Syaamil transforms the Qur'an into a self-guiding pedagogical tool, allowing users to engage in structured memorization independently. This represents a form of functional commodification, where the mushaf is not merely a text but becomes an integrated learning system. In doing so, Syaamil bridges the gap between classical religious pedagogy and modern self-learning culture, a phenomenon that resonates with Giddens' concept of reflexive modernity, in which individuals increasingly take control of their own identity formation, including religious identity, through customized and self-directed practices (Tsutsumi, 2025).

The development of specialized mushafs such as the Tajwid Warna Bukhara further demonstrates the company's responsiveness to specific functional and educational deficiencies within the Muslim community. Many Muslims struggle to master tajwid, the precise rules of Qur'anic pronunciation, due to its technical complexity and the limitations of traditional learning access. By applying color-coding to indicate tajwid rules visually, Syaamil effectively transforms a complex system of phonetic regulations into a readily understandable visual language. This aligns with contemporary theories of multimodal learning, in which cognitive comprehension is enhanced through the integration of visual stimuli alongside textual information. However, from a critical perspective, this transformation also exemplifies the extension of market logic into the epistemological domain of religious knowledge (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2020). Knowledge itself becomes a feature, a product attribute, and a selling point, rather than solely a sacred trust transmitted through scholarly lineages. In this way, Syaamil does not only sell the Qur'an; it sells an experience of "ease," "accessibility," and "efficiency" in religious practice, which mirrors the broader cultural ethos of late modern capitalism characterized by speed, convenience, and personalization (Bauman & Magatti, 2007).

Perhaps the most intriguing and symbolically loaded manifestation of Syaamil's differentiation strategy is the introduction of the "Custom by Name" mushaf, in which consumers may request the inclusion of their own names and personalized design elements on the Qur'an's cover. At the surface level, this appears as an innocent customization feature, intended to increase emotional attachment and personal ownership (Karlsson & Ryberg, 2024). However, at a deeper sociological level, this represents the peak stage of religious commodification, where the sacred text is no longer only a divine message addressed collectively to the ummah, but also becomes a personalized object of individual identity construction (Chang & Barber, 2023). The Qur'an, in this configuration, is not only read, memorized, or revered; it is also "possessed" and "branded" in accordance with one's personal self-image. This phenomenon exemplifies what Appadurai (1986) describes as "the social life of things," in which objects acquire meaning, status, and value through their circulation within particular social and cultural worlds (Appadurai, 1986).

In this context, the mushaf becomes a carrier of narrative identity. It becomes a symbol that communicates personal piety, aesthetic taste, social positioning, and even economic capacity. Owning a certain type of Syaamil mushaf—especially a customized or premium version—can be perceived as a marker of one's religious seriousness, cultural belonging, or participation in a specific sub-community of practice, such as hafiz groups, Qur'an study circles, or Islamic educational networks. This transformation reflects Baudrillard's (1998) argument that in advanced consumer society, objects are no longer valued primarily for their practical function, but for what they signify about their owner. The mushaf, in this sense, transcends its role as a medium of divine revelation and enters the domain of symbolic interaction, where it speaks for the identity of its possessor (Baudrillard, 1998).

Syaamil's own acknowledgment that "the current generation is different from previous scholars; they need attractive features and visuals to easily interact with the Qur'an" indicates a deep awareness of generational transformation and cultural rupture. Traditional Islamic scholars were formed within oral, text-heavy, and teacher-centered environments, while contemporary Muslims are immersed in a world dominated by screens, images,

colors, branding, and instant communication (Chang & Barber, 2023). By adopting visuality as a primary mode of engagement, Syaamil does not merely adapt to modernity; it actively reshapes how religiosity itself is experienced and constructed. This adaptation may be interpreted as a form of Islamic pedagogical innovation, yet it also raises critical questions regarding whether the depth of spiritual contemplation can survive within a framework increasingly oriented toward aesthetic pleasure and visual consumption (J. Carrette & King, 2005).

From an economic perspective, the pricing strategy of Syaamil Quran further reinforces the commodification thesis. The determination of price is not solely grounded in the Cost of Goods Sold (HPP), such as paper quality, printing materials, ink, binding techniques, or design elements, but is also strongly influenced by market standardization, brand positioning, consumer demand, and perceived symbolic value. This indicates that the mushaf has fully entered a competitive market domain where pricing is governed by neoliberal mechanisms of supply and demand, brand hierarchy, and perceived cultural capital. In this scenario, the Qur'an, despite its inherent sacredness, is subjected to the same mechanisms that regulate fashion, technology, or lifestyle products (Pusparini et al., 2024). This is what Marx (1976) would recognize as the subsumption of even the most sacred human products under the logic of capital accumulation (Marx, 1976).

Yet, it is precisely at this point that Syaamil's model departs from a purely capitalist enterprise. Unlike purely secular commodities, the Qur'an cannot be marketed without moral, theological, and ethical considerations. Syaamil continuously frames its products not merely as commodities, but as instruments of worship, memorization, spiritual elevation, and communal good. This framing allows the company to legitimize its commercial activity within an Islamic moral framework and to maintain public trust. In Bourdieusian terms, Syaamil converts economic capital into symbolic capital by presenting itself as a guardian of the Qur'an's sanctity rather than as an exploiter of its popularity (Bourdieu, 2000). This moral positioning enables the company to operate within a dialectical zone where commodification and sanctification coexist in a tense but functional relationship.

This dialectical nature of product differentiation reflects a broader global trend in religious economies. Across the world, sacred texts—from the Bible and Torah to the Bhagavad Gita and Buddhist sutras—are increasingly produced in multiple editions: study Bibles, youth Bibles, women's devotionals, luxury editions, minimalist editions, and digital app-based scriptures. These variations illustrate how religious institutions and private corporations alike are responding to the fragmentation of audiences and the rise of identity-based consumption (Fealy, 2009). What distinguishes the Indonesian case is the relatively harmonious integration of market innovation with a strong moral discourse of *da'wah*, making the commodification process appear less as a profanation and more as an adaptive strategy of religious survival in the modern world (Hidayah, 2021).

In this light, product differentiation at Syaamil Quran can be interpreted not only as a commercial tactic but as an institutional response to modernity's epistemological and cultural disruptions. It represents an attempt to make the Qur'an "speak" in the visual, psychological, and emotional language of the present generation (Ismail & Solahuddin, 2023). However, this also implies that the very form of the mushaf is increasingly shaped by market research, consumer psychology, branding analysis, and trend forecasting. The sacred is, therefore, subtly re-inscribed according to the grammar of the market (Wardana et al., 2025). The question that emerges is not whether commodification occurs—it clearly does—but rather how far it is permitted to go before the balance between meaning and merchandise collapses.

Ultimately, Syaamil Quran's differentiation strategy reveals a powerful paradox: by fragmenting and customizing the sacred text, it simultaneously brings the Qur'an closer to individual lives while risking the erosion of its universal and transcendent character. This paradox is the defining feature of contemporary religious commodification. The mushaf, in Syaamil's hands, becomes both more intimate and more commercial, more accessible and more objectified, more personalized and more standardized. This ambivalence does not signify failure; rather, it reflects the complex reality of religion in a world governed by images, markets, identities, and accelerated change (Lee & Ackerman, 2018). In this sense, Syaamil Quran is not merely a publishing company—it is a site where the Qur'an is continuously re-negotiated between revelation and reality, faith and finance, eternity and economy.

### **Religious Legitimacy as Selling Capital**

Religious legitimacy as a form of selling capital constitutes one of the most pivotal and sophisticated dimensions within Syaamil Quran's business practices. Unlike conventional commercial enterprises that primarily rely on price competition or material superiority, Syaamil consciously constructs its premium image through an intricate combination of religious symbolism, ethical discourse, aesthetic presentation, and institutional credibility.

One of the earliest and most fundamental layers of this legitimacy-building process is the deliberate selection of halal-certified raw materials and the prioritization of adab (etiquette) in the entire production chain of the mushaf. Although often invisible or underappreciated by the general public, these decisions carry profound theological and symbolic implications. The use of halal-certified ink, paper, and other materials is not simply a technical matter of compliance, but a moral statement that affirms that the Qur'an, as the written manifestation of divine revelation, deserves to be handled, printed, and distributed through ethically permissible means. In an age shaped by industrial shortcuts and mass production, this ethical insistence on halal and adab operates as a form of moral distinction that simultaneously reinforces sacred legitimacy and justifies a higher consumer price (Mukherjee, 2014).

This careful attention to the ethical dimension of production aligns with the logic of what Max Weber would describe as the "moral rationalization of economic activity" in religious contexts, where ethical norms serve not merely as constraints, but as social capital that strengthens institutional authority (Sorenson & Milbrandt, 2023). By ensuring that the physical manifestation of the Qur'an is produced in accordance with Islamic ethical standards, Syaamil effectively sacralizes the production process itself. The factory, the workers, the designers, and the entire supply chain are symbolically transformed into participants in a sacred mission, rather than mere economic laborers. This transformation of ordinary industrial labor into an act of piety constructs an invisible but powerful narrative that resonates deeply with a Muslim public increasingly concerned with the authenticity of religious practice in an era of mass commodification (Asya Dwina Luthfia & Rohmat Yanuri, 2025).

In order to reinforce this moral and symbolic distinction further, Syaamil deliberately distances itself from traditional mushaf styles that historically dominated the Islamic world, such as the *Mushaf Bombay* or the buff-colored, brownish paper mushafs commonly associated with older generations and Middle Eastern imports (Andersen, 2023). Instead, Syaamil embarks on a form of aesthetic reinvention that repositions the Qur'an not only as a sacred guide, but also as a culturally resonant, visually attractive, and emotionally engaging object. The cover designs, color palettes, textures, typography, and overall visual identity of Syaamil mushafs reflect a deep understanding of contemporary aesthetic sensibilities in Indonesia. These design choices serve as semiotic markers that connect the Qur'an to modern Muslim identities—urban, educated, youthful, and creatively expressive (Al Khalifa & Lafi, 2025).

This repositioning is significant from the perspective of cultural theory, as it resonates with Jean Baudrillard's concept of sign value, in which objects acquire value not merely through their function or material qualities, but through the symbolic meanings and identities they represent (Baudrillard, 1998). In this sense, Syaamil's mushafs become what might be described as "aestheticized sacred objects," where beauty, design, and cultural relevance become deeply entangled with spiritual devotion. The Qur'an is no longer perceived only as a book to be read; it is also seen as a beautiful possession, a prestigious gift, a family heirloom, and even an interior decoration that symbolizes spiritual refinement. This transformation does not necessarily diminish its sacredness; rather, it relocates that sacredness into a visual and material form that is more compatible with the aesthetics of contemporary Muslim life (Nasser, 2022).

Beyond the material and visual aspects of the mushaf, Syaamil Quran also invests heavily in the construction of religious legitimacy through a wide range of da'wah-oriented programs, including Qur'an waqf initiatives, Qur'an training programs, Qur'an tourism, and long-term partnerships with pesantren, Qur'anic teachers, and Qur'an learning communities. These programs function as much more than charitable activities or community outreach; they are integral components of Syaamil's legitimacy architecture. By embedding its products within networks of religious education and charitable initiatives, the company not only expands its social reach but also situates itself as an active agent of Islamic revival. The mushaf becomes an instrument of collective piety, and every purchase is reframed not merely as consumption but as participation in a sacred mission (Mohiuddin, 2023).

The partnership with the Hafiz Indonesia Program on RCTI, which has been running for over a decade, is an especially powerful example of how Syaamil strategically aligns itself with popular religious media to enhance its symbolic authority. This collaboration places Syaamil at the intersection of religious education, mass entertainment, and national identity formation. Millions of Indonesians, particularly children and families, associate the memorization of the Qur'an with the image of young hafiz and hafizah presented in the program. By associating its brand with this nationally recognized symbol of Qur'anic devotion, Syaamil effectively embeds itself within the emotional and moral imagination of the Muslim public (Rijal, 2025). This process exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where recognition, prestige, and moral authority become forms of capital that can be converted into other types of power, including economic power (Bourdieu, 2000).

In this context, Syaamil does not simply sell mushafs; it sells the promise of participation in a Qur'anic movement. The act of purchasing a Syaamil mushaf becomes laden with moral meaning, as it is connected to broader narratives of da'wah, education, social contribution, and the cultivation of future generations of Qur'an memorisers. The consumer is therefore no longer only a buyer but symbolically transformed into a supporter of Islamic learning and spiritual regeneration (Mohamed Nasir, 2022). This narrative is continuously reinforced through storytelling, both within Syaamil's official marketing and through the testimonials, endorsements, and communal narratives generated by its partner networks. The narrative that every mushaf sold is part of a larger divine mission generates what can be described as "symbolic profit"—a non-material gain in moral satisfaction, spiritual validation, and religious meaning, which coexists alongside monetary exchange (Fealy, 2009).

This fusion of piety and profit is deeply embedded in the Indonesian religious landscape, where religious legitimacy often functions as a critical resource in economic and political arenas (Hefner, 2021). As observed by Fealy (2008), in Indonesia, religion is not confined to ritual spaces but is woven into the fabric of everyday life, commerce, education, and social interaction (Fealy, 2008). Religious symbols carry immense social authority, and institutions that successfully embody moral credibility gain widespread trust and loyalty. Syaamil's strategy is therefore not anomalous but deeply contextual, reflecting an acute awareness of how Islamic legitimacy operates as a powerful force in Indonesian society. In such a context, commodification does not necessarily erode sacredness; instead, sacredness is mobilized as a source of legitimizing power that amplifies market success while reinforcing spiritual narratives (Jain, 2022).

However, this process must also be approached critically. The transformation of religious legitimacy into a form of market capital raises complex ethical and theological questions. When moral authority becomes a branding asset and piety becomes a marketing language, the boundary between sincere spiritual endeavor and strategic commodification becomes increasingly blurred (J. Carrette & King, 2005). The risk lies in the potential reduction of religious values into instrumental tools for economic gain. In such a scenario, religious language may be emptied of its transformative power and repackaged into easily consumable slogans (Klaver, 2021). Syaamil's ability to avoid this pitfall depends largely on its commitment to maintaining genuine engagement with Qur'anic values beyond the symbolic level of branding.

To its credit, Syaamil demonstrates a consistent effort to integrate internal religious consultation, ethical evaluation, and scholarly engagement into its operational framework. The involvement of Qur'anic scholars, religious advisors, and pedagogical experts in product development acts as a counterweight to the purely commercial impulses of the market. This hybrid model, in which economic decision-making is tempered by theological considerations, reflects a uniquely Indonesian form of "moral capitalism" in which religious ethics operate as an internal regulatory mechanism (Gauthier, 2013). Rather than perceiving the market as inherently corruptive, Syaamil seeks to Islamize economic activity itself, transforming profit-making into a form of worship (ibadah) when properly oriented.

This phenomenon can also be interpreted through the broader lens of the "moral economy of Islam," where economic activity is not judged solely by efficiency or profitability, but by its alignment with divine principles and communal well-being (Arjoon et al., 2018). In such a framework, religious legitimacy does not merely decorate the surface of economic practice; it structures its internal logic (Rubin, 2025). Syaamil, therefore, operates not simply as a capitalist firm with religious aesthetics, but as a semi-religious institution that happens to operate within, and adapt to, capitalist conditions. This is the core of its distinctive power: it inhabits the intersection between mosque and market, worship and work, revelation and regulation.

As a result, religious legitimacy at Syaamil functions as a multidimensional capital. It is at once theological (rooted in Qur'anic ethics), social (produced through community trust), cultural (expressed in aesthetic and narrative forms), and economic (converted into market value). This multidimensionality explains why Syaamil is able to thrive in an intensely competitive Qur'an publishing market without being perceived as merely a profit-driven enterprise. Its legitimacy is maintained not by denying commodification, but by spiritually reframing it. Through this reframing, the act of commodifying the mushaf is reinterpreted as an act of service, an extension of da'wah, and a contribution to the collective religious life of the ummah (Fathurrosyid et al., 2024).

Thus, rather than seeing Syaamil's strategy as a contradiction, it can be understood as a contemporary manifestation of a long Islamic tradition in which commerce and piety have always been intertwined. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad, to the flourishing trade networks of medieval Muslim civilizations, Islam has historically recognized the moral potential of economic activity when governed by ethical principles (Islahi, 2014).

Syaamil Quran, in this sense, is not merely innovating; it is reactivating a historical synthesis between faith and economy, using modern tools, technologies, and markets.

Syaamil's use of religious legitimacy as selling capital is neither accidental nor superficial. It is a strategically and spiritually constructed framework that allows the company to simultaneously move within the logic of capitalism and remain anchored in Qur'anic values. Through halal materials, adab-based production, da'wah networks, visual aesthetics, symbolic narratives, and educational partnerships, Syaamil transforms legitimacy into its most powerful and sustainable form of capital. This process does not negate the sacredness of the Qur'an; instead, it rearticulates that sacredness within the language and structures of the modern world. It is precisely in this delicate, complex, and dialectical negotiation that the true character of contemporary Islamic commodification is revealed (Roose, 2020).

### **The Duality Dilemma and Commodity Fetishism in Business Practice**

The commodification of the mushaf inevitably generates a deep and persistent dilemma between market logic and theological values, a tension that lies at the very heart of Syaamil Quran's business and da'wah practices. On one side stands the sacredness of the Qur'an as the eternal, uncreated word of God (Kalamullah), imbued with transcendent meaning and absolute authority in the lives of Muslims; on the other stands the concrete reality that the mushaf, as a physical artifact, must be materially produced, distributed, promoted, and sustained within an economic system that is dominated by the principles of cost-efficiency, competition, brand differentiation, and profit rationalization. Syaamil Quran openly acknowledges the existence of ongoing pro and contra debates among Muslim scholars, intellectuals, and the wider public concerning the permissibility and ethical implications of commercializing the Qur'an. Criticism often emerges from concerns that the transformation of the mushaf into a market product reduces its sanctity, trivializes its spiritual depth, or subjects divine revelation to the logic of profit (TC, 2024). In response to this criticism, Syaamil articulates a fundamental theological distinction: what is being commercialized is not the Kalamullah itself, but its physical container, namely the mushaf. This distinction functions as both a theological justification and a practical rationale that allows the company to operate within a capitalist framework while still affirming its commitment to the sanctity of the divine message (Hoevel, 2022).

In Islamic jurisprudence and theology, the words of the Qur'an are considered sacred, eternal, and beyond commodification, yet the physical mushaf has historically been treated as a material object that can be produced, copied, transported, donated, bought, or sold (Zadeh, 2021). This historical precedent becomes the normative foundation upon which Syaamil builds its argument. By positioning the mushaf as a medium rather than the essence of revelation itself, Syaamil locates its business practice within a permissible theological space. Moreover, Syaamil reinforces this argument through a pragmatic justification rooted in socio-political reality: the lack of comprehensive government support in providing sufficient copies of the Qur'an for all regions of Indonesia, especially in remote and underdeveloped areas such as Papua, Maluku, and rural interior regions. In this sense, the commodification of the mushaf is framed not as an act of profanation, but as a structural necessity that enables the circulation and accessibility of the Qur'an in a geographically vast and economically uneven archipelago (Cohen, 2019).

This argument is further strengthened by the expressed willingness of consumers themselves to "make sacrifices" in order to obtain a mushaf, including bearing higher prices and additional distribution costs. Here, the act of purchasing a mushaf transcends typical consumer behavior and takes on the character of religious contribution. Buying a Qur'an is not interpreted as indulgence or lifestyle consumption, but as participation in a collective religious economy that allows the word of God to travel further, reach more people, and illuminate more lives (Pusparini et al., 2024). In this sense, market exchange becomes entangled with moral intention, illustrating Weber's (2004) proposition that economic actions can be driven by spiritual motivations and ethical considerations, not merely by rational calculation of utility or profit (Weber, 2004). The consumer, therefore, is not merely a passive buyer but an active participant in what can be conceptualized as a sacred circulation of divine knowledge.

However, the very mechanisms that enable the wide dissemination of the Qur'an also contain an inherent danger: the risk of what Karl Marx defined as "commodity fetishism," a condition in which social relationships and deeper meanings become obscured and are replaced by the fetishization of objects and their market value (Marx, 2000). In the context of Syaamil Quran, extreme product differentiation, aesthetic branding, personalization, and premium packaging may inadvertently shift the focus of attention from the spiritual content of the Qur'an to its

physical appearance and symbolic status. The mushaf may gradually come to be valued not primarily as a guide to ethical transformation, but as an object of prestige, an aesthetic possession, or a marker of religious status. When the external form of the Qur'an—its cover, its design, its customization, and its branding—becomes more significant to the consumer than its internal message, the process of fetishism is already in motion.

This condition mirrors Baudrillard's (1998) notion of hyperreality, in which representations and symbols begin to overshadow reality itself (Baudrillard, 1998). The beautifully designed mushaf, with luxurious covers and personalized features, can become a simulacrum of religiosity, a symbolic substitute for genuine engagement with the divine message. In such a scenario, individuals may feel sufficiently pious simply by owning, displaying, or gifting a Qur'an, even in the absence of deep reflection, study, or implementation of its teachings. The Qur'an risks becoming what Debord would describe as a "spectacle," a visual and symbolic object consumed within a society dominated by images, where meaning is gradually displaced by form (Jagodzinski, 2004).

Syaamil is not oblivious to this risk. In fact, the company's admission that the use of local endorsers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) results in less than 20% direct sales conversion is an important indicator of ambivalence toward purely market-driven promotional strategies. Despite the relatively low conversion rate, Syaamil continues to collaborate with KOLs and brand ambassadors, not primarily for immediate profit, but for long-term exposure, brand recognition, and cultural integration into digital religious ecosystems. This decision reveals a pragmatic compromise with contemporary market realities, where visibility and algorithmic presence in digital spaces are essential to remain relevant in an increasingly online religious economy. Social media, influencers, online marketplaces, and digital storytelling have become unavoidable arenas for religious discourse, turning da'wah itself into a mediatized practice embedded in the structures of digital capitalism (Mosco, 2009).

At the same time, Syaamil continues to engage in negotiations with scholars, religious councils, and Islamic authorities regarding the ethical boundaries of its practices. However, the fact that the implementation of scholarly advice and fatwas depends upon the "situation and conditions" and the "capability" of the company illustrates a delicate and often problematic reality: in a capitalist framework, ultimate decision-making power often resides not in moral or spiritual authorities but in economic feasibility and organizational capacity. This reveals the asymmetrical relationship between normative Islamic ethics and operational business realities, in which moral discourse sometimes functions more as a guiding ideal than as an absolute determinant. Such negotiation is characteristic of what Habermas describes as the "colonization of the lifeworld" by the systems of money and power, where spaces traditionally governed by norms and values become increasingly shaped by instrumental rationality (Murphy, 2022).

Nevertheless, in contrast to corporations whose sole objective is profit maximization, Syaamil consistently reaffirms its da'wah orientation as its founding and guiding philosophy. This positioning significantly moderates the degree to which commodity fetishism can dominate its practices. Rather than perceiving market logic as a threat to spirituality, Syaamil reframes it as a necessary tool for the continuity of its religious mission. Profit is not defined as an ultimate goal but as a means to sustain da'wah-related activities, such as Qur'an education, waqf distribution, training programs, and community engagement. This approach resonates with Gauthier's concept of "spiritual capitalism," a model in which economic practices do not eliminate spiritual values, but are integrated into a moral worldview that reinterprets profit as a resource for religious empowerment (Goldstein, 2017).

This dialectical relationship between submission to market logic and resistance through moral values is the most distinctive characteristic of Syaamil Quran's commodification model. On one hand, the company must survive within a competitive publishing industry where other firms offer cheaper products, mass-produced Qur'ans, and imported alternatives. To remain relevant and financially viable, Syaamil inevitably engages with the logic of branding, segmentation, competition, profit margins, and consumer research. On the other hand, it actively constructs internal ethical barriers that prevent it from descending into pure commodification. The Qur'an, for Syaamil, is not just another product line; it is the axis of its identity, the source of its legitimacy, and the foundation of its moral accountability (Rozaq et al., 2025).

This dialectical tension reflects a broader crisis of modern religiosity, in which sacred traditions are forced to operate within systems fundamentally shaped by secular rationality and economic interests. The concern is not whether religion will be commodified—because in a capitalist world, it almost inevitably will be—but rather whether religion can retain its transformative, critical, and ethical power within that process (J. Carrette & King, 2005). In the case of Syaamil, the answer appears to be cautiously optimistic. The company's persistent

emphasis on adab, Qur'anic values, da'wah programs, and scholarly consultation functions as a counter-discourse to the reduction of the mushaf into a mere consumer object.

Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, this paradoxical coexistence between reverence and consumption is not unique to Islam or Indonesia. Similar patterns can be observed in the commercialization of the Bible in Western evangelical industries, the sale of Torah scrolls and Judaica merchandise in Jewish communities, and the commodification of Buddhist amulets, prayer beads, and scriptures across East and Southeast Asia (Fealy, 2009). These examples suggest that modern religion has entered a phase in which the sacred must negotiate its place within a global market culture that values visibility, accessibility, and personalization. Syaamil Quran, therefore, can be seen as part of a global transformation in which ancient sacred traditions are re-packaged, re-negotiated, and re-contextualized within late capitalist modernity.

Yet, what differentiates Syaamil is the conscious effort to resist total absorption into market ideology. By continually affirming that "the Qur'an is not a commodity in essence, but in function," Syaamil articulates an important epistemological distinction. The sacredness of the text is not dissolved by its participation in the market; rather, the market is redefined and disciplined by the sacredness of the text (Thumala Olave, 2021). This inversion of typical capitalist hierarchy—where profit usually dominates principle—represents a subtle but significant attempt to democratize and moralize economic practice itself. In this sense, Syaamil's model may be read as a form of ethical intervention into capitalism, one that seeks to carve out a space where moral transcendence can coexist with economic immanence.

The duality dilemma and the specter of commodity fetishism remain ever-present in Syaamil Quran's business practice, yet they do not operate in a simplistic or destructive manner. Instead, they generate a continuous process of negotiation, reflection, and reorientation. Commodification, in this context, is neither purely profane nor purely sacred; it is dialectical, contested, and dynamic. Syaamil stands as a concrete example of how modern Islamic institutions attempt to navigate the complex terrain between revelation and rationalization, devotion and distribution, sacred duty and market demand. The mushaf al-Qur'an, through Syaamil's hands, becomes not just a book, but a site of struggle, synthesis, and spiritual-economic dialogue—a living symbol of how faith seeks to survive, adapt, and even flourish in the very structures that threaten to commodify it.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the process of institutionalization and commodification of the Quranic manuscript in the business practices of Syaamil Quran is not simply a shift in function from a holy book to a market commodity, but rather a much more complex cultural, theological, and economic negotiation. The main findings show that Syaamil Quran has succeeded in shaping the Quran as a "commodified sacred object," an artifact that simultaneously embodies the sacredness of revelation and exchange value within a system of religious capitalism. Through product differentiation, design aesthetics, personalization (custom name), integration of pedagogical methods (color tajweed, tikrar), and the construction of legitimacy based on adab, halal certification, and da'wah networks, the Quran has not only shifted from use-value towards exchange-value as explained by Marx, but also moving towards sign-value (Baudrillard) and symbolic capital (Bourdieu) as markers of identity, piety, and social class of contemporary urban Muslims.

Theoretically, this finding expands the discourse on the commodification of religion by demonstrating that sacred texts can enter the market logic without completely losing their spiritual authority, as long as there is an internal ethical framework that frames economic practices as an extension of the mission of da'wah. Practically, the Syaamil Quran model reflects a unique form of spiritual capitalism in Indonesia, where profit is not positioned as the ultimate goal, but rather as a prerequisite for the sustainability of religious movements. However, this study also highlights the dark side of this process, namely the emergence of the risk of commodity fetishism, when the mushaf is treated more as a status symbol, an aesthetic object, or a religious lifestyle identity, rather than as a source of profound spiritual transformation.

The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single publishing entity and its failure to elaborate on the experiences of readers and users of the Quran as active recipients. Therefore, future research needs to develop comparative studies across publishers, examine the impact of Quran personalization on religious practices, and explore how the digital generation negotiates their relationship with the Quran amidst a visual and consumer culture. Therefore, this study concludes that the Quran in the modern era is no longer just a text, but a "field of meaning" where revelation, the market, identity, and technology intertwine in a constantly shifting dialectic—

forcing religious communities to continually redefine their relationship with the sacred in an increasingly commodified world.

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