TikTok Content Analysis on Perceptions of Masculinity: A Case Study of @ZAAFERINDONESIA

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Abstract. Fashion serves as a social communication and influence-presentation tool that reflects the culture, values, social habits and even the profession of people. Among Muslim Men's Clothing we have particularly garment elements that are used to construct an image of powerful and dominating masculinity. The aim of this research is TikTok account analysis @zaaferindonesia, a Muslim man fashion brand. Through the use of Roland Barthes Semiotics that is applied to their visual marketing, Zaafer Indonesia constructs a masculinity imagery. Data was collected by analyzing the brand's social media posts, particularly those that included men in flashy environments wearing black Thawb. The researchers' analysis shows that the thawb's black color is loaded with connotative meanings of strength, grace and authority, while vibrant purple background enhances associations with success and high social status. This indoctrination promotes a myth that, ala Muslim style, real manliness is associated with being bold, assertive and top gun. The findings of the research indicate that representations of Muslim fashion are suggestive, not only about aesthetics for both men and women, but also gendering practices, social identity and difference. Learn how semiotics in branding strategies can assist the fashion industry to build an image that corresponds with the target market's values and tastes.

Keywords: Muslim Fashion, TikTok, Barthes Semiotics, Masculinity, Zaafer Indonesia

1 Introduction

In recent decades, today's digital technology has transformed the way we communicate with one another and how we talk to ourselves. Social media is no longer just for fun, but a place where identity and culture matters; values matter. TikTok is one of the digital media platforms that has exploded fastest on the scene in recent years. TikTok's short-form videos are highly visual and can convey complex messages quickly to millions of people, all while tapping into the subconscious [1].

TikTok is a social media app for mobile phones, where users can create and share short videos of between 15 seconds to a minute. It has a variety of creative features like filters and visual effects, background music, and simple editing tools. TikTok is claimed to be a new way of making oneself being heard and creating interactive content for everyone, even amateur, not exclusive one [2].

These attributes contribute to a mechanism in which fashion flash is first personalized and then rapidly spread. TikTok also serves as a vehicle for maintaining and dispersing digital marketing messages. Brands and influencers can promote their products or services on TikTok

through creative videos that allow them to engage with their audience. The user-interest-first algorithm also encourages messages to spread rapidly and widely [3].

The digital milieu of TikTok has grown into something far more than a fun diversion. It has developed into a dynamic place where through images and storytelling values, social norms, cultural identities especially those associated with gender and masculinity are continuously crafted and contested. The construction of masculinity on social media provides a fascinating area for investigation in Indonesia where religious belief and regional customs play an important role in everyday life. One such example is the TikTok account @zaaferindonesia which despite being used for promotion of Muslim men's fashion, evokes a polished-personified man who-contradicts images of modern cacatious males use curated photos so as to create an illusionary selfconfident and well-groomed appearance [4].

History Launched Zaafer Indonesia was established as a fashion house specialising in men's muslim cloth and accessories on February 2019. The label quickly shot to fame for being Indonesia's first purveyor of slim-fitting Muslim menswear. Zaafer, whose name is a derivation of an Arabic word roughly meaning "one who can visualise things," was established by Rendy Sudigja and his wife Githa with series of products specifically targeted for youth or adult Muslims inspired from various fashion sources such as vintage and contemporary to Middle Eastern design. In their catalog, koko shirts concern three main styles: two Thawb types, and a regular-style shirt. But it is with details like the use of fursan fabric, neat construction, interesting design features and sizing that leans to the slimmer fit that Zaafer really shines.

One of the platform's more memorable examples of how the brand mixes Muslim fashion and a depiction of modern masculinity is on its TikTok account @zaaferindonesia. The consistent use of black colour, which is often associated with authority, sophistication and domination [5] can be seen as one recognisable element that perpetuates the masculine persona the authors wish to cast.

The Muslim menswear market of Indonesia has been growing rapidly in recent years. The rise of regional brands, each with it's own unique style and visual language has caused the market to become more competitive and segmented. Of these brands, Zaafer Indonesia is distinctive in that it portrays Muslim masculinity as a refined gentleman. These include sharp tailoring, washed colour palettes and viscerally charged marketing on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Digital brand, Zaafer is supporting an innovative lifestyle idea through a storytelling apporoach. They don't sell, they soft-sell the lifestyle of grace, self-confidence and emotional appeal with cinematic imagery and stories in the AISAS (Attention, Interest, Search, Action, Share) approach. Elhaus, on the other hand, takes a different route, to make its Instagram presence further ingrained in community building and cultural relevance as well as trust-based interactions like customer reviews, collaboration with others brands and daily feeds. When it is about establishing a modern and everyday look attractive to mid to young urban Muslims, Zaafer gets it better and when it's about stimulating social and cultural exchange that creates lasting adoration of the brand Elhaus' got the vibes.

However, the findings from academic journals and journal studies indicate that Noore and Zaafer Indonesia adopt differentiated branding strategies in Muslim fashion industry. Candra et al. say that Zaafer's main vision is to change the way people view jubah from solely religious wear into a stylish and appealing segment of everyday dress. Through a Saussurean semiotic perspective, Zaafer generate strong narrative imagery and lifestyle symbolism for young, urban Muslim consumers. Islamic 'values' can be introduced in a slick and stylish way, since the content tends to integrate cinematic pictures, subtle lighting and emotionally driven narratives." But with Noore, a small sportswear company that did not exist three years ago and is devoted exclusively to Muslim workout wear and sports hijabs, the branding remains comfortable and functional. Muslim women who are active in their Muslim community, but do not get the mobility they want from their attire can use their products for freedom of movement. This contrast shows that Noore provides solutions for an everyday life, whereas Zaafer represents a Muslim lifestyle focusing on elegance and aspiration.

Despite their common Islamic origins and Muslim menswear references, Zaafer and Ar-Rafi also differ stylistically. Zaafer is positioned as being the brand for modern, urban Muslim men,

who are often depicted in a confident and stylish manner. This aesthetic is supported by their preference for muted palettes, minimal silhouettes and cinematic digital content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The latter of the two takes a more pragmatic and practical approach, as compared to Ar-Rafi. Chill JORDAN offers men's clothing, sarongs as well as Thawb amongst others and has put an emphasis on comfort, affordability and useful to attract a full grown man or families. Ar-Rafi focuses on a hard-sell approach, catalog-style posts and sales-y ads, while Zaafer taps into the power of storytelling to advertise a contemporary religious lifestyle. This difference between the two indicates that Ar-Rafi is looking for market penetration and product utility appeal, Zaafer focuses more on visual appeal and a unique identity storyteller.

Further, Zaafer's power is in its aspirational brand elevation speaking to a young urban Muslim market through use of modern images and emotional storytelling to create a lifestyle look. In opposite to Rabbani Cilacap, the findings of this study offer a clear and significant brand performance. Rabbani's brand positioning was high at 82% and purchase interest was also in the high range (77%). The results reveal a strong positive relationship between brand image and purchase decision (correlation coefficient 0.609; R^2) = 37.1%). Rabbani has a consistency in quality, affordable pricing and maintaining an 'image' that is religious. 58 Thus, while Zaafer may be succeeding in constructing a more modern and stylish religious identity that speaks to younger consumers on an emotional level, Rabbani holds the weight of trust and accessibility and brand recognition that contributes to strong purchasing behavior.

Based on data from quantitative research about the influence of brand image and other factors toward the decision to buy product of samase in Jakarta revealed that;Brand awareness has a positive insignificant effect equals 0.515; Brand image itself also had a positive significant value (0.286) - While tottal contribution=73.3% for purchase desicion). Compared to Zaafer, was concluded that through academic researches show that brand quality, brand image, and word of mouth have significantly influence on consumers buying decision on Instagram, Zaafer does not demonstrate, the higher importance in which customers' buy their trust fromZaafer's strong brand image solution seller and customer recommendations are the strongest trigger of purchase conversions. In such comparison Zaafer seems to be stronger in creating consumer at¬tractiveness with aesthetic visual communication and digital social power, Samase looks more reliable based on the mass brand awareness and consolidate image reputation through offlne-online distribution network.

The diverging characteristics of these brands present an appealing opportunity for further investigation, specifically in terms of how their visual practice contributes to and communicates male identity within Indonesia's growing market for Muslim menswear. Not only does #menaesthetic increase beauty appeal, so to do rich symbolism backgrounds and alpha male poses all combine to aid an idealized image of masculinity that is getting plenty of love on TikTok. So we need to turn to semiotic analysis in order to understand how these visual cues facilitate the ongoing construction of masculinity into a digital age [3].

One powerful method for uncovering the subtexts or visual language in an image that I've adapted from semiotics, and more specifically Roland Barthes' approach. For Barthes, a sign has three levels of associated meanings which are intertwined - myth (the deeper ideological stories that have become naturalised in society), connotation (patterned after the emotional and cultural contexts) and denotation (the apparent, literal meaning) [6]. Through that lens, researchers are able to look beyond what is necessarily visible and to notice the ways that images quietly influence attitudes and help uphold certain ideas about masculinity.

Color selection, video ideas and set designs are a factor in props used, how we pose our bodies, to which expressions we wear over our faces; everything about the content is a visual prompt with meaning that goes beyond what you initially see. Applying Barthes' semiotic approach, Muslim menswear is arguably a conduit for the formation and transference of masculine identity, aside from providing material protection for the body. For instance, Zaafer Indonesia uses specific modes of display to project powerful and authoritative male image that is modern in the way it represents youthful Muslim males in the urban context.

On a practical note, the analysis is relevant for brands and marketers as well as advancing our understanding of gender identity and digital culture. With better understanding of how people

perceive visual content, marketers can develop communication tactics that are not merely eye-catching but compelling and culturally relevant. And because, this study is more than academic, it may serve as a guide for those digital marketers who negotiate new culture dynamics in the postmodern media age [7].

The development of fashion in the perspective of masculine idealism through video objects posted on the TikTok account @zaaferindonesia is discussed. Further, through studies that take the Muslim fashion identity as displayed by "@zaaferindonesia" (TikTok) being the object of study for instance, the researcher will find out of what Zaafer Indonesia's gender identification is.Base de dados :edição trilingueBN, Bibliografia Nacional Destricting Islamic Masculinity. Self-identity through fashion videos on @zaaferindonesia tiktok account is symbolized in the video content. At the same time, the researcher kept a record of TikTok account @zaaferindonesia by downloading some video materials on [8] .

In this article, Yhis study aims to unvcovw how the brand constructs masculinity through mzrketing communications strategy by analyzing the content from TikTok @zaaferindonesia. This research examines the commodification of religious symbols through Zaafer Indonesia's advertisements on the TikTok application. Both the religious and gender identity values can be promoted when a commercial message presentes religious cues.

Therefore, this research aims to expose how the meanings of masculinity are constructed and negotiated in the TikTok video contents produced by @zaaferindonesia using Barthes' semiotic approach. The purpose of this study is to offer a more critical sense of how we are made to understand gender on social media today by examining the visual cues suggested in the videos and examining why those meanings encourage certain ideological narratives about what it means to be male [9].

2 Literature Review

Content analysis is one approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods. This method, in between the positivist and interpretive methods begins with qualitative data in the form of text. The researcher subsequently infers through his/her understanding of the context of the data. Coding follows and the findings are then interpreted into an elaborate report or narrative.

After classifying the data into distinct groups, content analysis determines how frequently terms or themes appear in the text or story. Because of its capacity to recognize patterns and meaning structures in texts, this approach is frequently employed as the initial step in a sequence of social research analyses Silverman (2011).

Harold D. Lasswell, regarded as one of the pioneers of content analysis, is credited with creating the symbol coding technique, which is the method of methodically logging symbols or messages for subsequent interpretation and analysis. In some contexts, the term "content analysis" refers to a more focused analytical approach to message content, but generally speaking, it refers to a technique for analyzing the content of different kinds of texts, whether they are written, spoken, or visual.

Using music, filters, and other artistic components, users of the social networking site TikTok can produce brief videos up to three minutes long. TikTok was first released under a different moniker. Despite being straightforward and user-friendly, the TikTok app enables users to create content. This is what sets TikTok apart from its rivals.

The Impact of Content Marketing Techniques on TikTok @rucas.official Brand Awareness. The distinctive and humanistic content strategy of the Rucas brand is the main focus of this study. One strategy is to transform low-income people like scavengers and parking attendants into models for their most recent collection. In addition to drawing in netizens, this tactic is less expensive than hiring professional models. On TikTok, this makeover content has successfully received 12,086,610 views and 639,166 interactions. The brand Zaafer Indonesia, on the other hand, concentrates on a storytelling approach that presents their goods within the framework of an opulent, masculine, and contemporary way of life. Zaafer Indonesia conveys the idea that their products are appropriate for a range of circumstances and conditions by showcasing how they are

incorporated into activities like dining at upscale restaurants or taking limo rides through a number of images and videos. [10].

The cognitive process of perception starts when environmental stimuli are detected by the sensory organs, which serve as the primary receptors. By serving as a conduit between people and the outside world, the senses help people comprehend and react to their surroundings. After the stimulus is received, the information is organized and interpreted in the person's mind to produce meaning that they can comprehend. Stated differently, perception encompasses not only the reception of information but also the subjective processing and interpretation of that information by individuals [11].

Generally speaking, there are two types of factors that affect perception: internal and external factors. A person's physiological state, attention, interests, needs, experiences, memories, and emotional states or moods are examples of internal factors that come from within them. For instance, different people may perceive the same object differently due to differences in their sensory capacities. Because perception is significantly impacted by the concentration of cognitive energy on particular stimuli, attention and interest are also highly significant. A person's understanding of the stimuli they are currently facing can be influenced by references from their past experiences and memories. Furthermore, mood affects how people take in, process, and retain information [12].

The environment's features and the stimuli that were received, such as the size and placement of objects, as well as the stimulus's color, shape, contrast, movement, and intensity, are examples of external factors. Bright colors or high contrast, as well as objects that are large or placed strategically, are more likely to draw attention. The senses are better able to pick up and process unusual or unusual stimuli as significant information. Similarly, things that move or show up frequently tend to be perceived more strongly because people pay more attention to them [12].

Judith Butler, on the other hand, puts forth a performative viewpoint, according to which masculinity develops via a sequence of repeated behaviors in a social setting. Butler argues that social "actions" that are constantly created and perpetuated by cultural norms are what give rise to masculine identity rather than something that is inherently present [13].

What society thinks it means to be"manly," shaped socially, culturally and psychologically is masculinity. In examining what may be considered masculine characteristics or behaviours, the study of masculinity directly investigates how male identities, roles and values are constituted, established or transformed within social, cultural and economic systems. Topics in the study of masc. often include:

a. Cultural Expectations and Norms, How Social stereotypes and culture shape male behaviour [14]
b. Formation of Male Identity: How men generate rather than discover themselves, through interaction, media and experience.
c. Challenges and Realities: Changes in how men are perceived in terms of masculinity, including a tension between the desire for gender equity and the need to conform to traditional masculine ideals.

R. W. Connell argues that mascu-linity is an ideology, which can be understood as a set of habits, norms and appro-priate behaviors according to specific cordinates. Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity" needs masculine) and "other (less "masculine") all societies have a dominant form of one type of masculinity which acts as a norm. This model usually stresses on autonomy, rough and tough, powerful assertion with suppression of emotional expression and vulnerability [13].

Masculine is a social identity that incorporates many traits, behaviors and characteristics associated with boys and men. This concept has been in progress for quite a long time as part of the social and cultural phenomenon driven by mass media, traditions and history rather than being entirely biological. On the whole, characteristics of depth, power-ownership and domination are connected to masculinity at large: bravery, toughness, strength (physical dominance and assertiveness). However, understanding's empirical evidence about masculinity are not universalist but they vary depending on the specific social and cultural context of a particular region and epoch [15].

Construction of masculinities in popular novels, particularly in the book Ayat-Ayat Cinta by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. Based on his research, the male figures in that novel showed several masculine characteristics such as bravery, a good sense of responsibility and leadership; it thus shows how complexity masculinity is represented in fiction.

Media Per we'll see how ads portray masculinity. For men, the results found that in ads they are most likely to appear with characteristics of being men, strength, independence and decisiveness. To craft and propagate norms or expectations of masculinity with regard to how men act and look in social space, advertising matters [16].

3 Research Method

Qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or humanitarian issues. This research process involves questions and procedures that arise, data that is usually collected in the participants' environment, inductive data analysis, and an emphasis on subjective meanings. [17]

The main discussion in this work is Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics. The study of signs is the focus of semiotics. Semiotic theory is divided into two components: the signifier, which is the first part of Roland Barthes' theory, and the signified, which is the second part. Before being labeled as two orders of signification or denotation, connotation, and myth, Barthes established the theory of semiotics. The information used in this study was taken from the cover of Ronald Barthes' 2011 book. To identify the metaphorical components that create connotative meaning, the verbal and visual cues on the book cover were then analyzed according to the signifier and signified, namely denotative meaning. This study collected data through literature review and observation methods. [9]

This study used secondary data sources in the form of books, journals, theses, websites, and TikTok content @zaaferindonesia. The analysis was conducted using Roland Barthes' qualitative semiotic method through observation, processing, and classification of data. The data is presented in narrative form to describe the influence of masculine-looking influencers wearing slim-fit thawb on audience engagement on TikTok. The results of the study show that this strategy significantly increases engagement and expands Zaafer Indonesia's brand awareness through a combination of fashion, social media trends, and active interaction.

4 Results and Discussion

Three informants February Akmal Hafidz, Agus Alif Humaydiy and Sofie Noer Febriani were also interviewed for this research. These informants are also supporters of the @zaaferindonesia TikTok account, featuring influencer models and original content posting a blend between traditional values and modernity. With the story-driven strategy, Zaafer Indonesia can create a strong brand that lives in the heart of consumers and sell more.

After analyzing all the three informants then a researcher managed to find big things related of Zaafer Indonesia to describe the image of masculinity and lifestyle according Islamic value. In both of the previous levels, denotation, connotation, and myth can explain deeper how Zaafer Indonesia provide the content which enable to attract and influence their audiences.

4.1 Perceptions of Masculinity on Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok Account

One MSME in the MMs' fashion industry, Zaafer Indonesia, for instance, has been known as "the first company (in Indonesia) who sold narrow gown and pants for Muslim men". The pair of Rendy Sudigja and his wife started this brand in February 2019. Zaafer Indonesia has been creating furniture using design philosophy which emphasizing quality of the product and innovation while blending some unique trends which ranging from current to vintage Style also Middle Eastern style.

At the Zaafer Indonesia, a variety of models and designs are available for Men's robe, koko shirt, shirt - this smooth and glossy fursan fabric. Its pieces are distinct in men's Muslim fashion because of their slimmer cut. Sales are conducted only on their website. Zaafer, a pioneering innovator in Muslim slim-fit men's fashion has successfully used digital strategies and creative storytelling. Content contributes the most to increase brand excitement and establish personal relationships with the audience, particularly in videos on tiktok @zaaferindonesia that reached 1.6 million followers around 2024 amounted to446 users who are millennial community of online sellers Zaafer Indonesia's target market.

Figure 1. Zaafer Indonesia Video Content
Source : TikTok @zaaferindonesia (Urban men who are stylish and self-assured are reflected in Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok content, which features men dressed in modern, minimalist, masculine, and elegant styles)

A man wearing fashionable Muslim attire is shown in the video with a self-assured look, serene movements, and a minimalist or street as the backdrop, all to the tune of contemporary and trendy music. Despite being presented in a more contemporary manner, these visual components are recognizable in Muslim fashion culture because they still highlight modesty and religious subtleties. (Pukul 20.15, February 28, 2025)

In one tiktok of Zaafer Indonesia, recorded on a ship and related to that identification ritual is an opulent and totally beautiful setting in the middle of the ocean. The Indonesian Zaafer looks stylish in a casual thawb as he stands on the ship's deck, looking off into the distance and feeling a bit of sea breeze. It was difficult to decide which parts of the picturesque moments in time I wanted to capture, so that meant lots of footage and a blend of the modern with smooth transitions all set to feel good vacationing vibes against the serene colours of blue skies and sparkling water. The result was impressive, with 14.6M views, 1.3M likes, 33.3K saves, 37K shares and 5K comments making up the numbers. According The video is Zaafer Indonesia's most viewed and the brand seems to have succeeded in communicating a chill, stylish masculine vibe that resonates with travelers and lifestyle enthusiasts.

4.2 Trends and Unique Features in Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok Content

Its TikTok Zaafer content promotes a halal, cinematic and aspirational visual aesthetic that is holding its own with trending among young TikTok users, specifically Muslim women. They

employ myriad alluring short video forms voiceovers with Islamic messages, behind the scenes photo shoots and outfits transitioning to show how hijrah changes. Not only in line with seasonal themes such as Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr, Zaafer also portrays stories that hit home to everyday life the homecoming moments, the get-togethers, even plan for holidays all while rocking stylish syar'i looks and modern fashion on it.

As such, the compelling of spiritual storytelling that is authentically integrated in their content is what sets Zaafer Indonesia apart. They make the audience related by emphasising the value of hijrah, aurat and journey of faith pemersiyaratan about rather than just selling products. And it's not just the furniture, the brand always works with cool tones and a neutral palette to give birth to a mild and soft design universe. With this beauty on show, their TikTok is both an inspiration and a fresh genuine take on the da'wah.

Figure 1. Zaafer Indonesia Video Content
Source : TikTok @zaaferindonesia (Thawb is the go-to outfit for a variety of unexpected activities in this unique and fashionable lifestyle content)

Through the use of thawb in a variety of surprising activities, Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok content demonstrates a distinctive and distinctive way of life. All of these activities from riding a motorcycle around town to holding sacrificial animals during Eid al-Adha celebrations to attending formal events are done while looking dapper and manly in thawb attire. This content blends humor, a contemporary take on Islamic fashion, and rich local culture. The end effect is a chic yet laid-back look that can help the younger generation feel more secure about their Islamic identity (Agus, March 28, 2025, pukul 19.00).

Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok content, which shows men wearing thawb for unexpected activities such as riding large motorcycles, holding sacrificial cows, or attending formal events, gives the impression that thawb can be worn in various situations, not only for formal or religious occasions. Denotatively, thawb are used in more casual and active activities, which dispels the notion that thawb are only for certain moments. Connotatively, the thawb appears flexible, modern, and still masculine, showing that Muslim men can look stylish without compromising religious values. The previous myth that the thawb is only suitable for religious activities has been changed, and the message conveyed is that the thawb can be a symbol of a balanced lifestyle between religion and modern success.

4.3 Factual Meaning Without Interpretation of TikTok Content Zaafer Indonesia

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, denotation refers to the first level in the process of sign interpretation, namely the basic or literal meaning that can be understood directly from an object or visual representation, without the intervention of cultural interpretation or ideological values. [7]

In relation to Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok content, these visual elements convey obvious and tangible information, namely the type of clothing worn, the activities carried out, and the location where the events took place. All of these aspects are forms of literal representation without additional symbolic content. At this level, the content only conveys "what is visible," such as clothing styles, product reviews, and the atmosphere of the activities.
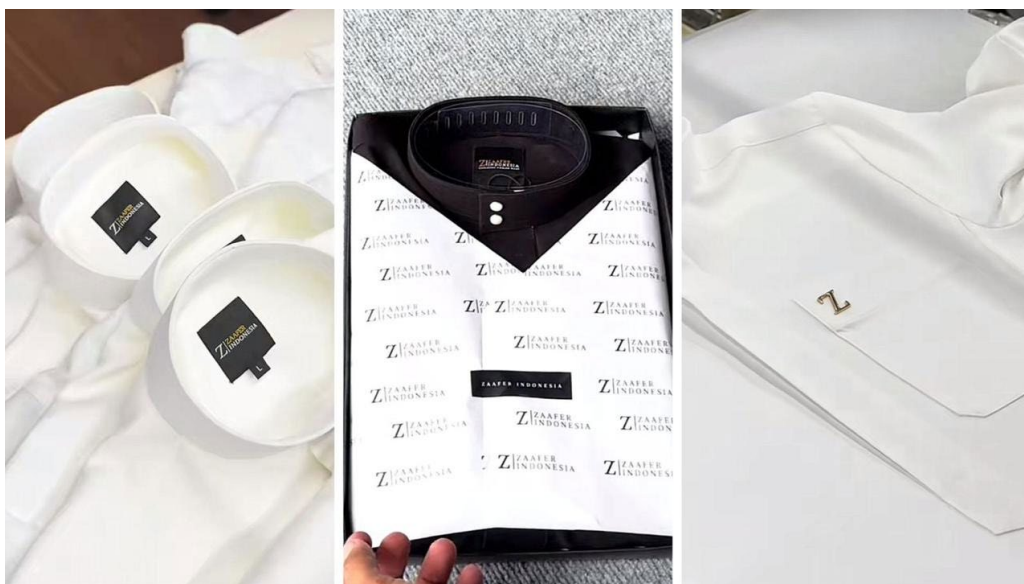

Figure 3. Zaafer Indonesia Video Content
Source: TikTok @zaaferindonesia (Several Zaafer Indonesia video contents with unboxing concepts showing details of Abaya)

Neutral colors and earth tones such as brown, gray, and black reinforce a masculine impression. Loose but structured clothing cuts also reinforce a masculine impression. However, too many ornaments or pastel colors may slightly shift the masculine perception for some people." (Agus, March 28, 2025, at 7:00 p.m.).

The interview results show that the respondent, a 24-year-old master's student at UIN Cirebon who is active on TikTok and interested in Muslim fashion, appreciates @zaaferindonesia's content because it showcases Muslim men's clothing with a modern, minimalist, and spiritual aesthetic.

Connotatively, the clothing and colors create a religious, peaceful impression and show the character of a good and polite man, with symbols such as mosque buildings and prayer beads that point to closeness to God. At the mythical level, this content conveys the message that ideal men are those who are polite, religious, and devout, and reinforces the assumption that a man's goodness is measured by his conformity to religious dress norms.

These elements form the basis for the creation of a brand identity that objectively describes masculinity, before layers of emotional and cultural connotations are added by the audience. Meanwhile, a study published by the University of Computer Science (Unikom) states that denotation is "the first level of significance that produces explicit, direct, and definite meaning." [18].

4.4 The Cultural and Symbolic Meaning of Modern Muslim Men

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, connotation is the second stage in the process of sign interpretation, which is more complex than denotation. Connotation entails a more profound interpretation based on cultural, emotional, historical, and ideological contexts, whereas denotation refers to the literal or apparent meaning of a sign that is directly seen or heard. Connotation reflects how a sign acquires additional meaning through associations formed by the collective experiences of society, cultural values, and specific belief systems. Thus, connotation plays an important role in shaping symbolic understanding that is not only individual but also social. Barthes emphasizes that connotation can influence the way we interpret reality because it inserts implied meanings that are often unconscious but very effective in shaping public opinion, ideology, and perception of a representation or discourse.

Figure 4. Zaafer Indonesia Video Content
Source : TikTok @zaaferindonesia (Some Zaafer Indonesia video content featuring photo shoots with adult and child models)

"The meaning I get is that Muslim men's fashion can still look modern and stylish without leaving behind values of modesty and religion, with neat and aesthetic content presentation. In my opinion, the content conveys the message that modern Muslim men can appear confident, fashionable, and still uphold Islamic values in their daily lifestyles." (Febrian, March 28, 2025, at 8:15 p.m.)

In the context of Zaafer Indonesia's TikTok content, connotations arise when viewers capture the implied meanings of the visuals of men wearing thawb in various activities. Connotatively, the thawb is no longer understood only as traditional clothing or religious attire, but is interpreted as a symbol of a modern, flexible, and stylish Muslim identity. This kind of thing demonstrates that thawb wearers are very much still able to carry themselves as an active, self-confident and even manly in public or modern precincts.

In other words, this data discreetly reinforces the notion that the thawb epitomizes strength, self-confidence and congruity with religious teachings as far as western quality of life is concerned not restriction. What Barthes refers to as connotative meaning, which is not explicitly stated but inferred from a social and cultural context of the audience.

4.5 Ideological Meaning in Society

Zaafer TikTok vidio content of Indonesia has great ideological consequence to public image on regional commodities and cultural identity. Zaafer also argues that indigenous knowledge has a value, and it needs to be respected rather than seen merely as the lag effect of the past with an innovative methodology and coherent storytelling. By showing a healthy way of living in harmony with nature, they help people value once again local customs and knowledge as opposed to old dead things that are integrated into contemporary solutions. In this regard, the approach illustrates how cultural values can be actualized in modern society without becoming obsolete.

In this era of globalization, Zaafar's ideology espouses a combination of cultural and economic nationalism that remains as timely. Their products are not just sold as health cures, but also a means of resistance against foreign culture and imported stuff. By poetic and emotional narratives, Zaafer expressing love to an entire country in a time of destruction is by loving the local product not only as a support for his culture, but also economically. In this instance, TikTok is not just a medium for entertainment but also a tactical site to proliferate the ideology of nationalism and promote independence within Indonesian society.

Figure 5 Zaafer Indonesia Video Content
Source: TikTok @zaaferindonesia (Video Content with a Religious City Tour Concept that Introduces Indonesian Regions and Cultures)

"The content portrays the ideal Muslim man as calm, well-groomed, religious, and in tune with the times. It is like the image of a good and ideal man, and because the content conveys the idea that masculinity can be expressed in a subtle and elegant way, it does not always have to be harsh or conservative." (Sofie, March 27, 2025, at 6:35 p.m.)

In Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, myth is the third layer of meaning in a sign system, after denotation and connotation. Myth here does not mean fiction or legend, but rather the way a particular culture or ideology constructs meaning as something that appears natural and normal when in fact it is the result of social construction.

5 Conclusion

This study shows that Zaafer Indonesia successfully represents the image of Muslim masculinity through visual content on TikTok, using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. There are three layers of meaning in their content: denotative meaning in the form of visuals of modern Muslim men in glamorous activities; connotative meaning that associates clothing style with confidence, assertiveness, and a balance between religiosity and modern lifestyle; and mythical meaning that constructs the image of the ideal Muslim man religious, stylish, and powerful, replacing the traditional concept of conservative masculinity.

The Indonesian Zaafer's branding concepts resonate through a compelling visual storytelling with equally ritzy and mystical aesthetics by owning beautiful visuals that stand out in order to establish its identity. The uploaded content is not just promotional but also disseminates ideologies on identity, ideal masculinity and the modern Islamic lifestyle. Trough cultural, religious and modern values along with the solid caste, Zaafer Indonesia has developed and modulated today's naughty but safe environment in cyberspace (internet, mobile phones, social media such as Facebook or chat rooms) through its online sites providing sex education starting from young generation to development of next.

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