



Cancel Culture, Commodification Message, and Middle East War: Impact on Multinational Corporations in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis has prompted a range of attitudes among the countries with which they have relations. The emergence of the cancel culture phenomenon, a movement to boycott certain companies' products, has raised growing concerns. The paper analyzes the social media messages of multinational corporations regarding products that are boycotted by consumers who see them as haram and pro-American because of their alliance with Israel. Through an analysis of digital media content from several multinational companies related to Israeli attacks on Palestine and the issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023, two frames of controlled media content emerge.

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East has been rife with conflict in the final quarter of 2023. The conflict between Palestine and Israel has resulted in thousands of deaths and millions being displaced. According to Al Jazeera, Israel's attack on Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza resulted in civilian casualties. In addition to repeated bombardment of the Gaza Strip, Israeli military forces have reportedly positioned themselves at the entrance to Gaza City. Israel has also prevented foreign aid from reaching Palestinians in Gaza. Due to inadequate resources, several hospitals were unable to operate, and they became the target of Israeli troops.

The conflict escalated when the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, launched a massive attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023. Hamas forces initiated Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, which breached the Gaza-Israel border wall and penetrated the Gaza Strip, bordering nearby settlements and Israeli military bases. This is the initial conflict on Israeli territory since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and the largest attack that Israel experienced since the 1973 Yom Kippur War (Republika, October 8, 2023). Hamas launched rockets into Israeli territory and proceeded with tactical vehicles invading, attacking Israeli civilians, and nearby Israeli military bases. According to the Washington Post, the recent Hamas attack marked the start of the third Palestinian intifada. This attack was also the deadliest since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which took place almost exactly 50 years before the 2023 incident (Tirto.ID, November 6, 2023). In response, Israel unexpectedly declared war. Israel launched Operation Iron Sword of the IDF, the Israeli military forces, two weeks after the country declared independence on May 31, 1948. The attack resulted in the deaths of approximately 11,078 Palestinians, including 4,506 children and 3,027 women, according to Al Jazeera (November 10, 2023).

This retaliation not only causes physical and mental harm to Palestinians and their surroundings. Numerous civilian infrastructures, including houses, schools, universities, places of worship, and hospitals, have allegedly been completely destroyed. The number of injured and fatalities continues to rise daily. The access to food, clean water, electricity, medicine, and medical staff is diminishing. Despite the continued influx of aid from various sources, distribution channels remain hindered and unable to effectively respond to the emergency at hand. Even in these devastating conditions, the Palestinians remain steadfast in their determination to defend their rightful homeland.

There is currently no indication of a ceasefire on either side of the conflict. The situation continues to be challenging for the Israeli government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu and with support from Western countries, particularly the United States. Statements made by Israeli ministers indicate an apparent endorsement of impunity for war crimes committed in Gaza. The war sparked a variety of discussions, including religious matters and political economy, and led to numerous demonstrations globally. However, the protests calling for a ceasefire and an end to Israel's violent actions towards specific ethnic groups did not effectively silence Zionism's disturbing behavior. Despite international citizens expressing their desires to the United Nations (UN), their wishes were

not fulfilled. The UN, an esteemed institution that supervises and directs international politics, was unable to resolve the issue. Additionally, a Security Council resolution was issued regarding the conflict, proposing a "humanitarian truce" prioritizing the safety of civilians in the Gaza Strip. The ceasefire received 120 votes in favor out of 170 countries, while 14 countries rejected it and 45 countries abstained. Despite widespread support for the ceasefire, the United States and other parties opposed the Security Council resolution, resulting in its ultimate blockage.

Indonesia, as a predominantly Muslim nation, actively works to address the ongoing conflict in Palestine. The country has taken various juridical and formal actions through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to voice its concerns and take steps towards a resolution. In fact, on October 18, 2023, the foreign ministers of OIC countries convened an extraordinary meeting in Jeddah to discuss the aggression against Palestine. On November 11, 2023, the OIC convened an Extraordinary Summit attended by heads of state who are members of the organization. Additionally, Indonesia supplies humanitarian aid like food, medicine, and medical equipment to Palestinians, with the goal of alleviating the suffering caused by the conflict and blockade in the Palestinian territories.

The movement to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has gained traction in Indonesia. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) communicated a significant statement through its Fatwa, called MUI Fatwa No.83/2023, which declared that supporting the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation is mandatory. The Fatwa outlines four points, the first being that all Muslims must support the independence of Palestine. Support for Palestine can be provided through the forms of zakat, infaq, and sadaqah. Urgent needs in Palestine can be addressed using zakat funds. It is prohibited to support Israel's occupation and aggression against Palestine or individuals who support Israel, either directly or indirectly. (TEMPO.CO)

MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023 is disseminated by both conventional and social media, ultimately becoming a popular belief assumed to be true by most individuals. The widespread dissemination of media content repeatedly signals the message in the MUI Fatwa, causing it to become distorted and lose its original meaning. As a result, the media promotes the majority view of society, making it appear more dominant. Nolle Neumann (1974) posited in his theory of Public Opinion formation that media amplification of public opinion not only reflects society, but also shapes its attitudes and behavior.

The message of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023 has been amplified, explicitly stating that supporting Israeli aggression on Palestine, whether directly or indirectly, is forbidden. The Indonesian Ulema Council is urging Muslims to minimize their transactions and usage of products associated with Israel and to support the occupation and Zionism indirectly or directly. MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023 has various messages that led to the haram proposition's emergence. The proposition restricts the use of products categorized as derivatives of multinational corporations that aid Israeli aggression.

These may include reduced consumer trust, decreased consumer interest, and declining sales. Corporations impacted by the negative public opinion of

haram products may encounter significant challenges. Effective strategies are necessary to address the potential consequences of cancel culture in response to the haram public opinion of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023.

This paper illustrates the strategic approaches of multinational corporations impacted by MUI Fatwa No.83/2023 in managing cancel culture through digital content. The present paper covers:

1. Digital content management is linked to beliefs that suggest alignment of multinational corporations with America as Israel's ally.
2. What are the actions taken by multinational corporations to manage cancel culture prior to the issuance of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023? How does the management of cancel culture change after the issuance of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023 and its impact on the redefinition of boycott to include haram products from each corporation?
3. How has the commercialization of digital content changed since the release of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023

The management of cancel culture for a corporation is important for various reasons. Firstly, it serves as a strategic corporate move to tackle the internal and external crises faced by the company due to pressure from consumers concerning policies or violations of social, political, and cultural systems. Secondly, it is a means to champion social justice for the boycott movement. Moreover, it enables the public to receive factual information and educates them on the matter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cancel Culture

The term "cancel culture" has gained popularity alongside the rise of communication technology, particularly social media. Increasingly, individuals are utilizing social media to redefine their rights as citizens and engage in activism (Bosch, 2015). These actions are commonly referred to as "call-out culture" or "cancel culture." The growing trend of activists utilizing social media platforms has resulted in increased boycotts of individuals, businesses, and institutions that fail to align with social values.

Additionally, social media has been found to impact consumer behavior through its influence on various aspects such as awareness, information gathering, opinions, attitudes, purchasing behavior, and post-purchase communication (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). This power held by consumers through social media is commonly referred to as cancel culture.

Cancel culture is an alternative name for the product boycott in marketing, wherein one or more parties aim to meet specific goals by encouraging customers not to buy certain products from the market or a particular brand. This approach serves as an instrument, tactic, or strategy to impact a corporation by abstaining from consuming its goods or services (Friedman, 1986).

From a consumer perspective, boycotts are used to clarify a company's political, social, or ethical statements, and to even force the company to change or discard actions that are considered immoral or controversial (Sen, et al., 2001). For corporations, the consumer boycott movement highlights the need for vigilance in their statements and behavior regarding issues related to social

values and beliefs. Neglecting delicate corporate concerns is not only detrimental to corporate reputation, but it may also result in social media campaigns promoting boycotts (Shiradastian, Laroche & Richard, 2019).

As such, it is necessary to manage this opposing cultural movement by managing digital corporate content through the commoditization of messages with the primary goal of clarification and education regarding social media-related issues. In 2009, McDonald's in Malaysia faced criticism when it was discovered that LM 10, a type of lard, was present in their fast food sauces. To address the issue, the corporation utilized social media to clarify the situation and dispel rumors. They emphasized the "Halal" certification granted by the Malaysian Ministry of Religious Affairs. (Lee, Hooi, & Raman, 2013).

When political issues are subject to boycott movements, managing this cultural cancellation movement becomes a matter of corporate interest. According to Ng's (2009) article, over 2,000 Muslim restaurants in Malaysia eliminated Coca-Cola from their menus as part of a protest against American products and Israel's bombing of Gaza. American companies were targeted due to the US government's support for Israel, which conducted a military intervention in Gaza to halt rocket attacks from the Hamas-controlled area (Ng, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the corporate management of multinational companies in connection to the issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023.

The Role of Commodification

According to Smith's classical political economy, commodification is one of the key elements that contribute to the political economy of the media in a capitalist world. The perspective presented is based on products that satisfy specific human wants or needs, known as use-value, and products whose value is determined by their exchange value (or added value). Commodification involves converting use-value into exchange-value.

When media is utilized as a tool for political economy, Moscow identifies three forms of commodification: content, labor, and audience. Related to the management of social media content by corporations in the context of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023, this study will focus on how corporations can handle their 'cancel culture' using content commodification as a constraint.

The commodification of message content (content) is the process of transforming information into a marketable product with a system of meaning. The commodification of messages regards messages or information as commodities that can be traded or sold, typically in the media and entertainment industry where they are packaged as products for consumers.

The commercialization of messages can serve as a means to establish or enhance brand images. Specific brands or labels may be linked with particular messages or values, aiding in the development of a robust brand identity in the view of consumers. These techniques for constructing or modifying product images are the methods used by multinational corporations in response to the impact of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023 on cancel culture.



METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research method and an in-depth study of official Instagram posts of multinational companies to explore the company's communication strategy for products that are boycotted by consumers due to their links with Israel, which are considered illegal and pro-American. Primary data in the form of Instagram social media image feed posts in the four multinational companies were collected and then analyzed for text and narrative of message content. An extensive observation period was conducted from mid-October to mid-November 2023. This period includes two weeks before and after the issuance of MUI fatwa No. 83/2023. To illustrate this issue, a comprehensive analysis was conducted for four multinational companies: McDonald's, Unilever, Nestlé, and Danone (Aqua).

RESEARCH RESULT & DISCUSSION

The analysis of digital media content by several multinational corporations regarding the Israeli attack on Palestine and the release of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023 reveals two-time frames of managed media content. The first frame is before the issuance of the MUI Fatwa on November 7, 2023, and the second frame is after its release. Prior to the issuance of the MUI Fatwa, multinational corporations released digital content to counter negative sentiment regarding the Israeli military attack on Palestine. This is a common practice among American-based corporations, as the United States is often seen as a protector of Israel's allies. The four observed corporations and their corresponding digital content are as follows:

McDonald's Indonesia

| Prior to MUI Fatwa | After MUI Fatwa |
|---|---|
|  <p>Instagram Feed : October 23, 2023 Pernyataan PT Rekso Nasional Food Terkait Kontroversi Aksi McDonald's Israel. Instagram</p> |  <p>General Instagram Display McDonald's Indonesia (@mcdonaldsid) Instagram profile</p> |

On October 23, 2023 issue of McDonald's Digital Content discusses the creation of leaflets featuring the corporation's contrasting yellow color and digital content highlighting positive corporate branding. The article explores how messages about the practical benefits of products are being turned into marketing devices that can provide advantages for a corporation when it is in the public eye as a supporter of America. Some of the messages about commodification that are presented in the paragraphs of the leaflet include:

1. A corporation that upholds the value of social human values.

In the first line of the pamphlet, McDonald's expresses concern regarding the recent escalation of conflict in the Middle East. *Our sympathies go out to the victims, their families, and the affected communities.* By providing deep sympathy to the victims of this attack, McDonald's is bolstering its image of having high social values and concern for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

2. An independent and impartial corporation.

McDonald's Indonesia operates independently and is not affiliated with McDonald's operations or decisions in other countries, including McDonald's Israel. It is a neutral corporation that does not form political networks with similar corporations in other countries.

3. Companies that prioritize exceptional customer service.

Reputation-building efforts prioritize meeting the needs of customers or product users by delivering the highest quality service available. The corporation stresses in the third and fourth paragraphs of this brochure that they consistently offer top-notch customer service (paragraph 3) and aim to foster a sense of community centered around providing a beloved and dependable experience for customers.

After the release of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023 on November 8, 2023, and the consequent establishment of American-corporate-affiliated products as haram, a 'cancel culture' or boycott arose, causing McDonald's to shift their digital content's message commodification, among other changes.

1. A wholly Indonesian-owned corporation.


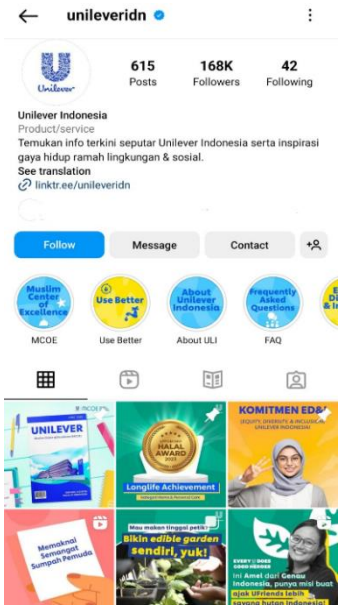
It is evident from the overall look of McDonald's Indonesia's Instagram account that it showcases product logos, corporate names, and bio information about the company 'Mekdi Indonesia', which is fully Indonesian-owned and operated.

2. Companies that pay great attention to the lives of Muslims in Indonesia.

After the issuance of MUI Fatwa No.83 of 2023, McDonald's Instagram display underwent changes to prioritize a post featuring Humanitarian Infaq for Palestine through BAZNAS. On November 8, the post was broadcasted, coinciding with the same date as the issuance of the Indonesian Ulema Council's Fatwa No.83 of 2023. Despite this, McDonald's placed the post at the top of its social media display arrangement. McDonald's promotes their message content on social media in order to thrive and maintain the performance of their food

franchise business in Indonesia. This form of commodification helps the company survive and operate successfully.

Unilever Indonesia

| Prior to MUI Fatwa | After MUI Fatwa |
|---|--|
|  <p data-bbox="277 822 855 1055">Instagram Feed : September 15, 2023 UFriends, brand Lifebuoy dari Unilever Indonesia juga dianugerahi penghargaan "Favorite Halal Brand" kategori Home & Personal Care oleh... Instagram</p> |  <p data-bbox="880 1014 1390 1122">General Instagram Display Unilever Indonesia (@unileveridn) (instagram.com)</p> |

Unilever Indonesia Tbk Corporation is a major producer of consumer goods in Indonesia. A Dutch holding company owns up to 85% of Unilever Indonesia's shares. In 1982, Unilever Indonesia became a public company, and its shares have been trading on the Indonesia Stock Exchange since then. (Source: Kumparan, May 21, 2022) The corporation recognizes that the largest consumer of its products resides in the Muslim-dominated Indonesian society, where the importance of halal content in daily needs is high.

Amidst the conflict between Palestine and Israel, Unilever established its corporate image as a result:

1. Companies with halal products that can be used by the majority of Indonesians. Commodification of messages by highlighting in the post an award 'Halal Award' that they received from LPPOM MUI for one of the flagship products, namely Lifebouy soap. The content of the digital content in the form of an image of the "Halal Award" given by LPPOM MUI to one of Unilever Indonesia's products, namely Lifebouy soap, is an "added value" where the company wants to remind the public that its products have so far received halal certification from the MUI institution.



After the issuance of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023, Unilever Corporation commodified messages in their digital media by emphasizing :

1. Corporations that focus on community involvement and religious considerations in Islam are increasingly prevalent. Unilever Indonesia's

Instagram page showcases the company's products, corporate information, and environmental and social inspiration. It includes highlighted features such as the 'Halal Certificate', 'MODE' or Muslim Center Of Excellence, 'Use Better', 'About ULI', 'FAQ', and more.

2. Corporations that are close to the Islamic community (Muslim Friendly)
After facing a 'cancel culture' backlash and the subsequent issuance of Fatwa No.83 of 2023 by the Indonesian Ulema Council, Unilever Indonesia's Instagram page featured a "Muslim friendly" theme evident in the top three posts. The first post outlines the company's three main pillars of commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusiveness, referred to as ED&I. The 15-second video post showcases Unilever Indonesia's mission aligning with Pancasila's spirit to establish a serene atmosphere and serve as a basis to construct a cohesive, socially righteous, and cultured Indonesian nation. Moreover, Unilever Indonesia received halal certification from LPPOM MUI. This "Longlife Achievement" award in the Home & Personal Care category represents a utilized value applied by the corporation over a span of almost 90 years in Indonesia. The caption notes that Unilever Indonesia consistently offers products that meet the community's needs while ensuring the quality and halal certification of their products. Third, Unilever's Muslim Center of Excellence (MCOE) is an initiative by Unilever Indonesia aimed at meeting the requirements of Muslim consumers while promoting the development of the halal industry in Indonesia. The company recognizes the significance of maintaining the halal certification of its products for Muslim-majority customers. Furthermore, due to the rise of boycotts and 'cancel culture,' corporations are increasingly mindful of the practical value proposition they provide. The three digital content posts arranged in order of importance on Unilever Indonesia's social media aim to restore consumers' trustworthiness in their products.

Nestle Indonesia

| Prior MUI Fatwa | After MUI Fatwa |
|---|---|
|  <p>Instagram Feed : September 22, 2023 Memperkuat peran perempuan merupakan aspek penting dalam pengembangan masyarakat. Sejak 1994, kami mendukung peningkatan kesejahteraan... Instagram</p> |  <p>General Instagram Display Nestlé Indonesia (@nestle_indonesia) Instagram profile</p> |

Nestle Indonesia, a subsidiary of Nestlé SA, was established in 1971 and now has approximately 3,200 employees. The factories producing Nestle Indonesia products are located in three main regions of Indonesia: Lampung, West Java, and East Java (www.nestle.co.id). Among their flagship products is Nescafe coffee, made from locally grown Indonesian coffee beans.

Before the issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023, Nestle Corporation's Instagram digital content posted on September 22, 2023, displayed a 10-second video about a group of farm women in Lampung. The commercialization of messages to be formed from the video includes:

1. Corporations that ensure regenerative agriculture practices are sustainable. Bringing a positive impact on the welfare of farmer partners and also guaranteed products.
2. Corporations that build welfare for women in Indonesia through corporate social responsibility that supports the improvement of the welfare of coffee farmer partners, especially female coffee farmers.

Following the issuance of MUI Fatwa No. 83/2023, the overall digital content display on Nestle Indonesia's Instagram social media shows that the company is committed to improving the quality of life of each individual, especially for future generations. In the face of boycotts targeting the company and its products, Nestle has so far only placed the top 3 posts with the theme of Youth Pledge, CSR mangrove planting for the benefit of the environment, and

images of various types of products that have been present in Indonesia for more than 50 years with good taste, nutrition, quality and safety.

Danone Indonesia / Aqua

| Prior MUI Fatwa | After MUI Fatwa |
|---|---|
|  <p>Instagram Feed : September 22, 2023 Danone Indonesia bekerja sama dengan BPJPH dan LPH-KHT Muhammadiyah mendukung pemerintah memajukan industri halal di Indonesia melalui... Instagram</p> |  <p>General Instagram display Danone Indonesia (@danoneindonesia) Instagram profile</p> |

Time framing the entry of Israeli military attacks on Palestine for the Danone corporation, which distributes Aqua products, the content of the corporation's digital content is described as:

1. Companies advancing Indonesia's halal industry are highlighted in digital content uploaded on September 22, 2023, exhibiting collaborative activities with BPJPH and LPH-KHT Muhammadiyah to support the government's certification programs for MSMEs. From the digital content posted on September 22, 2023, the corporation aims to demonstrate the benefits they have garnered from collaborating with the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) and the Muhammadiyah Halal Examination and Halal Thayyiban Study Institute (LPH-KHT), specifically to increase awareness amongst MSMEs regarding the significance of obtaining halal certification, which results in heightened product value in the minds of the general public.

After the issuance of Fatwa Mui No.83 of 2023, Danone corporation displays a corporate image, among others:

1. Danone Indonesia is a corporation that aims to improve the health of Indonesian people through health benefits. Their Instagram profile features animated graphics of a person gazing at the stars with the words

“One Planet One Health”, and the bio reads “Join us, Danone Indonesia, in spreading the goodness of One Planet, One Health”.

2. Danone Indonesia has established a positive relationship with Muhammadiyah, a major Islamic organization in Indonesia.

The top feed displays three main highlighted posts. The first post, dated September 7, 2023, reports on Danone Indonesia's support for the Rakornas MPKU Muhammadiyah. Based on this report, it can be inferred that the corporation aims to emphasize the monetization of its message content as a means to strengthen its ties with Muhammadiyah Indonesia.

Additionally, it is worth noting that corporations offering halal-certified products are included in this discussion. Aqua products are recognized for their quality, having received the Top Halal Award 2023 in the Bottled Drinking Water (AMDK) category and SGM Eksplor in the Kids Milk Powder category from the Indonesia Halal Training & Education Center (IHATEC) survey institute. Aqua products are recognized for their quality, having received the Top Halal Award 2023 in the Bottled Drinking Water (AMDK) category and SGM Eksplor in the Kids Milk Powder category from the Indonesia Halal Training & Education Center (IHATEC) survey institute. This confirms Danone Indonesia's dedication to providing halal-certified products.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, it is evident that the multinational corporations impacted by MUI Fatwa No.83/2023 commercialized the messages in their digital content well in advance of the Fatwa's issuance, ultimately permeating public opinion among the Muslim community in Indonesia. These multinational corporations comprehend the measures required to overcome cancel culture through the commodification of messages that enhance the product's added value, while still prioritizing its use value.

The increment in the corporation's added value, measured before and after the Fatwa issuance, indicates a shift towards message commodification. Before the issuance of the Fatwa, corporations commodified their values to include upholding humanitarian and social values, achieving independence, operating locally in Indonesia, and providing products associated with halal standards while avoiding environmental harm and promoting women's productivity.

After the release of MUI Fatwa No.83/2023, multinational corporations transitioned towards more Islam-aligned corporations in the digital media message commodification industry. They marketed their products as halal, collaborated with Islamic religious institutions, and provided aid for the betterment of the Muslim community.

The commodification of positive messages created for digital media by multi-national corporations is a strategic approach to counteracting cancel culture. Such corporations may face consumer boycott movements for things or values that contradict appropriateness and feasibility in society.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

For future research, it is expected to take from another point of view how to respond to this phenomenon from the point of view of society and humanity. Because Indonesia has a majority Muslim population, the power to make changes to world peace, especially in the Israeli genocidal conflict against Palestine is very influential.

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