



Concert and Charity: Operating *Da'wah* Activism through Maher Zain's Pop Culture Industry

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ABSTRACT

Maher Zain is an icon of Islamic pop culture with the largest market share in the world. Indonesia constitutes the largest Maher Zain's fan base with multiple platinum awards and recorded million copies of album sale. Maher Zain's rise to fame coincided with the shifting of conventional Islamic authority, which turned from Kiai or Ulama to popular Muslim preachers. These preachers seek aspirations of Islamism in social and political movements through the *da'wah* institutions they lead. This article is aimed to examine the intersection between the Islamic pop culture industry, Maher Zain as a leading Muslim singer icon, and the strategies of Islamic activism of *da'wah* in Indonesia. This research found that popular preachers utilize their charitable activities, philanthropy and Islamic *da'wah* to legitimize and capitalize on Maher Zain's popularity in Indonesia, by playing role in the capitalistic mechanism of the Islamic music industry. These *da'wah* institutions operate through industrial mechanisms for the benefit of Islamic *da'wah* activism in Indonesia and even become an advantage in the midst of the struggle for political Islam in Indonesia.

Introduction

Maher Zain is well-known as one of the biggest Muslim pop stars in the world. Starting as an immigrant from Lebanon to Sweden, Maher Zain pioneered to become a popular icon that



represents the image of Muslims, especially in the Western world. It is no exaggeration to call Maher Zain an icon of global Muslim pop singer. Noted, he sings his songs in various languages, starting from Arabic, Turkish, English, Urdu, to Malay and Indonesian. In Indonesia alone, he received a series of awards and a fantastic sales record. His first album, Thank You Allah, went eight platinum in Malaysia and two platinum in Indonesia in 2010, recording record sales of over 750,000 copies. While his second album titled Forgive Me also achieved great success with a platinum award. His third album titled one which was released in 2016 won double platinum in Indonesia based on the results of digital album sales in Indonesia. Wisnu Surjono, managing director of Universal Music Indonesia revealed in a news release in 2019 that the sales value of Maher Zain's third album in Indonesia was more than 2 billion Rupiah (<https://www.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/3920997/album-maher-zain-raih-double-platinum-di-indonesia>). Indonesia has a large population of fans who like Maher Zain. In the Maher Zain Indonesia Fans Club Facebook fanpage, it is recorded that it has 68,000 members.

The impact of the Swedish-born Muslim pop star is not only in the area of profit for the popular culture industry. His great influence as a popular Muslim singer has made him attractive to Indonesian Muslim politicians. His appearance, which has always attracted the interest of the Muslim community, even led him to be invited by the Indonesian presidential candidate pair in 2014, to support the presidential candidate Prabowo-Hatta Radjasa, which had a conservative Muslim base and is supported by the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) – the party representing conservative Muslims in Indonesia.

There are prior researches under topic of Islam and popular culture. Among the research is Andrew Weintraub, on the book titled *Islam and Popular Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia* (2011)

suggested that popular culture, especially in Indonesia, deserves our attention because of its pervasive nature in the lives of society. Understanding of Popular culture is closer to an understanding of Islam as a lived practice among its society rather than segregated dichotomies such as, for instance, between liberal and literalist, urban and rural, authentic and hybrid view on religion.

In specific case, study about Maher Zain is addressed by Sean Foley through his essay titled; *Maher Zain, Technology, and Southeast Asia's Place in Modern Islam*, published on Oxford Islamic Studies. Through the essay, Foley simply argues that music takes a big role in compromising contesting identity of being faithful Muslim and existence as a part of modern world (culture) which is dominated by Western modernity (http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/focus/essay1009_maher_zain.html). Foley's remark focuses on how (Maher Zain's) music becomes a crucial medium between contesting identities, Muslim with sense of religiosity and as a part of modern global society.

Sean Foley also addresses on contesting identity between Islam and modernity (Western) based on Maher Zain's music itself and how the songs reflect the condition and challenge of modern Muslim. His article titled "Maher Zain's Hip but Pious Soundtrack to The Arab Spring" (2011) stated that Maher Zain realizes that his R&B music is from Western meanwhile his message is deeply rooted in Islamic message. Not to mention that Maher Zain's songs caused demonstration and political effect, but Maher Zain's work, as assumed by Foley, reflects the aspiration of million modern Muslim in the world (<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/maher-zains-hip-but-pious-soundtrack-to-the-arab-spring/243191/>).

Sean Foley addressed Maher Zain in another article titled *When Life Imitates Art: The Arab Spring, the Middle East, and the Modern World* (Foley, 2013). He described how the songs of Maher Zain and

Hamza Namira is able to reflect aspiration of better Arab world and brought the idea took shape through art, especially in relation to Ghonim's vision on revolution. As known, Wael Ghonim and other Egyptian bloggers were among the online actors that generate Arab Spring occurred. Together, Zain and Namira are dubbed as *fannan at-thawra*, or artist of revolution. These works of Foley may conclude and portray how Maher Zain's songs represent aspirations of what so-called "modern Muslims" in the world and may feature in this research that will reveal Muslims aspirations.

Foley also suggests that Maher Zain contributes in describing the vision of modern Muslim society. Analysis on videos highlights that how society is viewed with no traditionally associated with Islam, and massive reception in Malaysia and Indonesia, supported by the growing technology and media, Foley concludes that Western-produced music, filled with Islamic values, is still a powerful vehicle to shape a vision of modern Muslim identity. The Western song by Maher Zain and other Muslim singers indicates that West and Islam could be reconciled. Muslims are still able to embrace their faith and make impact to society which is dominated by Western modern world (Foley, 2011). Foley's work still limited on Malaysian case and emphasizing on the contribution of technology development and analysis on videos content analysis but it has not focused on the involvement of Da'wah institutions and its operations with the Islamic music industry.

As the study will focus on Indonesian society, thus it is necessary to analyze the case through the relation and impact of popular culture and Islam in Indonesia. Ariel Heryanto (2011) portrays the content of popular culture in Indonesia is shaped by three distinctive elements, which are: Islamic piety, liberal Western-consumerist indulgent, and mystical (indigenous), in the framework of post-authoritarian era. These three elements are contesting to build their legitimacy, and

shaping Indonesia identity after demise of authoritarian New Order.

The wave of popular Islam took place in the right momentum when Islamic preachers are gaining popularity on the performance stage and new media. The role of religious authorities shifted from charismatic *kiai* and *ulama* based on pesantren intellectual discourses to preachers who were able to provide *da'wah* with fresh, participatory methods and were familiar with ordinary people (Hoesterey, 2016). Unlike the conventional *kiai*, this new group of Muslim preachers is close to the resources of the middle-class of Indonesian Muslim (Hasan, 2011), like the methods they use through themes of charity or a halal business. Such closeness to middle-class Muslim society is also earned because of their popularity which is supported by the entertainment world. However, most studies of popular culture, especially music, and its relation to Islam are still dominated by studies that's centered to the form of commodification, performance, or performer. Some of the literature that I encountered still dominated by studies centered on popular cultural objects, rather than focusing on the interplay between Islamic *da'wah* organizations and the music industry.

This study attempts to bridge and complement Islam and popular cultural studies from the perspectives on how the *Da'wah* institutions owned by several Muslim preacher figures take part in capitalizing Maher Zain for the sake of their own mission and aspirations. Thus some literature on the study of fans will be included as well as guidelines for entering the opportunity of connecting religious studies from the point of view of the fans as the main consumers of popular culture. This article is aiming to reveal the intersection between the rising trends of Islamic pop culture industry, the popularity of newly Islamic preachers, and how the latter interplay, capitalize and using pop culture as a strategy in utilizing their *da'wah* activism that they carry along with several

da'wah organizations.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach by conducting field research from February 2016 to January 2017. During the period, Maher Zain released his third album “One” and his management organized series of promotional tour concert in five cities in Indonesia during August-September 2016. The author conducted observation and participatory research by joining Maher Zain’s fans club, contributing in welcoming meet and greet, following press conference, and attending two concerts of Maher Zain in Jakarta and Yogyakarta during the promotional tour. In addition, library research was also conducted to collect statements, information, and promotional advertising from the observed da'wah institutions such as Rumah Zakat, PPPA Darul Qur'an, and Yayasan Syekh Ali Jaber Indonesia. Mostly the library research was acquired from the internet, statements and news circulated during the promotional periods. Finally, the data of this research were selected and analyzed based on accordance of field finding and social phenomena.

Result and Discussion

This article suggests that the Indonesian popular Islamic preachers, as the result of shifting religious authorities in Indonesia, with the *da'wah* institutions they lead as a vehicle, were able to capitalize Maher Zain and the Islamic pop culture industry for the interest of da'wah and Islamic activism that they carry. This capitalization is demonstrated through the operation of providing legitimacy and constructing public image of Maher Zain, as well as utilizing donations from ticket sales and albums. By such operation, the da'wah institutions are playing role in the capitalistic

Islamic pop culture industry, while at the same time are aiming at succeeding their initiatives in channelling their Islamic aspirations both in social movements even to some extent in aspiration of political Islam in Indonesia.

The article will start by discussing the emergence of Halal Market industry worldwide (Izberk-Bilgin, 2013; Morris, 2016), which marked the inception of Islamic pop culture industry as the base of Maher Zain and other Muslim pop singers alike under Awakening Records in England. A discourse of Halal Music will also be provided to reveal the motivation, ethics, and what such Islamic pop culture aiming for. In supporting the suggestions, I will demonstrate three domains of which the Da'wah institutions are playing their support for Maher Zain as well as being the vehicle and promotional benefit for the industry. Firstly, by providing legitimacy in shaping the public image of Maher Zain as pious Muslim that Muslims in Indonesia must celebrate. Secondly, by utilizing donations wrapped by campaign of charity and alms, and provided by religious messages.

Finally, the article attempts to analyze promotional advertising and endorse that are coming from Indonesian Islamic preachers through various media. By unfolding strategies of several da'wah institutions such as Rumah Zakat, Yayasan Syekh Ali Jaber, and PPA Darul-Qur'an who were giving prominent endorsements during Maher Zain promotional tour in Indonesia, This article will finally present a case example of how Maher Zain's popularity has become a crucial meeting point that shows the shift in religious authority in Indonesia (Hoesterey, 2016) represented by Islamic preachers and the da'wah institutions they lead, the development of the Islamic popular culture industry, and the growth of a new market for the Indonesian Muslim middle class (Fealy, 2007; Hasan, 2011).

Halal Music: Faith-inspired and Value-driven Pop Culture Industry

As a country with the largest Islamic population in the world, Indonesia promises its Muslim population as potential consumers in the eye of halal market worldwide. Islamic or Halal market has been a phenomenon worldwide at least since the past decade. The value of halal market worldwide is estimated at 2.1 billion US dollars and growing (Izberk-Bilgin, 2013).

The spectrum offered by this halal market is really wide—starting from Sharia banking, Islamic fashion to halal tourism. In Indonesia alone, we can see the rising concern and awareness on using halal cosmetics, halal products certified by MUI, *Siwak* toothpaste, and other daily goods with visibility of Islamic symbolism. The sensitivity of the halal value to these commodities may indicate a symptom of conservatism among Muslims in value, but simultaneously having a desire to engage with a global consumerism culture (Fealy, 2007). The climate of a fairly democratic political state and the development of the Muslim middle class in Indonesia have increased Indonesian Muslims' purchasing power and is considered open enough to penetrate the global halal market.

In relation to global markets, the dogmatic position of Islam at a glance is antagonistic and becoming a contesting value to modernity and Westernization. Modernity and Westernization were commonly accused as the main cause of Muslim suffering and the drastic decline of Islamic civilization. In the contestation of global politics, the Islamic world is characterized as underdevelopment, socio-economic inequality, low literacy rate, and high poverty. Thus, it builds an assumption that Islam is way backwards and left behind by the advance of globalism and Western countries. Dogmatically, the interpretation of Islamic teachings is political rhetoric and a political attitude in contestation towards modernization and Westernization.

Concerns about Western modernization and values have been indicated by anxious—if not antagonistic—behaviour towards Western culture (Otterbeck, *Music and Islam*, 2012, pp. 211-228). Western culture is perceived by Muslims as an “agent of moral destruction”, and contributes to the destruction of the younger generation. The polemic about Inul Daratista’s erotic dance (Heryanto, 2008, pp. 7-9), Lady Gaga rejection in Indonesia, or the background of Nasyid’s emergence in Malaysia and Indonesia (Sarkissian, 2005, pp. 124-152), to compensate for the bad influence of Western culture confirm the insecurity that Muslims people suffer. However, such view doesn’t easily apply to the generation of young Muslims today. Izberk-Bilgin (2013) also explains that the main proponents of interest in the halal market are none other than younger generation of today’s Muslims who have higher levels of education than their parents or predecessors. This level of education makes them more open and familiar with modernity, globalization and Western culture than the previous generation. Current young generation of Muslims are also trying to stay connected with their peers by consuming a global brand, with the ease of access to the economy and the digital media. This shows their effort to remain and be recognized as a part of global citizen. In addition, sensitivity to the value of halal finds its momentum along with the rise of Islamism movements, which puts the Muslim identity as a separate part of state-based nationalism or loyalty to elements other than Islam. Specifically, the need for this Islamic identity was welcomed by the Muslim middle-class. For the middle-class, one of the easiest ways to reveal identity as a Muslim is to consume halal commodities and products that are Muslim-friendly.

In the context of Indonesia, the emergence of the middle-class Muslim is visible and experienced a tremendous shift in their consuming behaviour. The Centre for Middle-Class Consumer

Studies, an Islamic marketing research institute under the leading business magazine SWA, called this shift middle-class Muslim behaviour a behavioural shift revolution, ready to be taken by the Muslim market. The institute also mentions that the potential of Muslim consumers in Indonesia reaches 87% of the total population of Indonesia (Yuswohady, 2014). In the context of the Indonesian Muslim market, there are nine sectors of the Muslim behavioural revolution that stimulate the rise of halal, or Islamic market in Indonesia although some of them overlap with other sector; sharia bank, hijab business, cosmetics, religious tourism (especially for *Haji* and *Umrah*), Islamic hotel and resort, Islamic pop culture, Islamic entrepreneurship, philanthropy, and concern to halal label for the commodities.

The production of Islamic music is influenced by the consumer Muslim market. Islamic music is located beyond halal market in the form of halal food, cosmetics or other Islamic functional services. The consumer market is also about lifestyle and reworking Western products and practices. In this account, halal could not only be regarded as a religiously permitted product as opposed to the term haram, but also a concept of identity which becomes the forefront to trigger consumerism factor.

Carl Morris (Morris, 2016) suggested there are at least two kinds of conceptualizations of halal industry, namely practical and symbolic forms of consumption. Practical consumption relates to specific services and products that Muslims require for religious observance. This includes halal foods, prayer mats, beads and books, and also sharia financial services. Such consumption relies upon religious structure which necessarily done by Muslims as part to complete their faith. So, the use of practical consumption impacted fulfilling one's need on his obedience to religious teachings.

Meanwhile, symbolical consumption differs from practical consumption, since it does not provide any specific religious functions but still contains attributes as Islamic or Muslim. Symbolical consumption is more giving value to identity and lifestyle rather than on practical matters. For example, Ethical guidance on Islam basically only relies on specific parts of the body's coverage and does not specifically describe what must or must not be printed on your shirt. But wearing a t-shirt with specific message like "Just *Dua* It" imitating globally-popular Nike slogan "Just Do It" signifies a declaration of Muslim identity and a subversion on mainstream branding and consumer culture thus creating a form of ethical consumer culture, meaning a consumer culture that is characterized by visible ethic or specifically religious ethics.

Islamic pop culture industry also finds a space and plays its part in this wide halal business. Islamic music offers an alternative to challenge the mainstream, sometimes Western-centered, pop culture with all its stereotypes that glorifies overconsumption, pleasure, sexuality and excessive lifestyles. Harris J, the English Muslim singer who is often called as 'Muslim Justin Bieber' claimed on an interview on NPR.org (2015) that Islamic music is aimed to speak about things that morally sound and not speak about drugs and stuff.

"I just wanted to do music that wasn't necessarily speaking about drugs and stuff like that, but speaking about things that are morally sound and things that people can get benefit from in their day-to-day life. I've always wanted to make a change within music that people, mostly teenagers, listen to nowadays (<http://www.npr.org/2015/10/24/451456711/harris-j-pop-music-meets-islam>)."

Such huge potential of halal market worldwide also celebrated by entertainment sector. The birth of music record label that released Islamic music by Muslim singers signified a new trend on halal market, and as well successfully triggered the rise of the flow of Muslim singers worldwide. Awakening record is one of the most

distinguished record labels in halal music business worldwide. The faith-driven music industries in Western world were rising to address Muslim society. The record label has provided an opportunity to listen to halal, “clean” music for those who require it. Consequently, it has impacted many young Muslims worldwide, particularly in the West.

Starting in 2000 as an Islamic book publishing company in Swansea, England, Awakening Publishing began to expand their value aspiring to music industry. The company saw an opportunity in music industry that is considered void, due to lack of moral and spiritual drive to the listeners. Such void in the music industry draw a promising market to target, since they saw that the industry “wasn’t helpful for spiritual growth” referring to Western ‘secular’ music industry. The establishment of Awakening record is inseparable with the rise of European Muslim society, as four British Muslims founded the record company; Wassim Malak, Bara Kherigi, Sharif Hasan al-Banna and Waliur Rahman.

The initial idea of establishing Awakening record is surrounded by idea of Islamic vis-à-vis secular music. Waliur Rahman, one of the founders said that they saw an opportunity of Muslim market since there are lacks of role models (idols) for Muslim youths. Awakening seemed successful in gaining recognition among Muslim and secular audiences. It is not difficult to consider which direction Awakening is going, as the company is putting a tagline “Islamic media redefined”. The company itself takes place in the middle of Western world, England, as headquarter.

Awakening proudly announces themselves as a pioneer of Islamic global media, focusing on music and publishing. Traditionally, music has been controversial in Islamic jurisprudence, with many Muslims believing it to be prohibited, or at least still selective to enjoy music due to its controversy. However, Awakening

put a slogan “faith-inspired and value-driven” to confirm its aim: religious music promoting morality and sending out “something positive”.

Several Muslim singers are earning success and fame under the Awakening record label. Sami Yusuf is among one of breakthrough. Sami Yusuf was the first artist signed professionally for Awakening in 2003. Under Awakening, Yusuf released two albums titled *Al-Muallim* (the teacher, referring to Prophet Muhammad) and *My Ummah* (my Muslim community). The albums were an instant success for Awakening, as they raised 3 million and 4 million-copies worldwide, respectively. Time Magazine also cited Yusuf in 2006 as “the biggest Muslim rock star”.

Lists of the artists under Awakening Records might represent the idea of global Muslim itself. Other than aforementioned, there are Mesut Kurtis, a Macedonian Muslim singer from Turkish origin and Raef Haggag, an Egyptian origin who lives in the United States. Humood Alkhudher is from Kuwait until recent young star Harris J, a British Muslim. Due to his young age and popularity, Harris is even compared to pop megastar Justin Bieber thus, he is dubbed as the “Muslim Justin Bieber”. There is also Hamza Namira, an Egyptian origin singer who gain his prominence after releasing a song titled *El-Midan*, or The Square in solidarity to Egyptian revolution.

Carl Morris (Morris, 2016) revealed that Awakening by far is the most successful Islamic production company, both in Britain or worldwide. It has successfully boosted approximately 500 million customers worldwide even though the Muslim market in the UK alone is not sufficient for them to generate returns. Then the option is to spread their market fully worldwide and to concentrate to a combination of pop-nasyid Islamic music, which has successfully met the demand of global Muslim market.

Maher Zain, Global Muslim Pop Star

Meanwhile, Maher Zain is by far the most successful singer under publication of Awakening Records. Maher Zain is a Swedish R&B singer, songwriter & music producer. He was a Lebanese origin, born and raised in a small city called Tripoli. In an interview, Zain revealed that his childhood was surrounded by war and conflict surrounded his hometown. He described that he was able to hear explosion of bomb from his house, and his father used to run his family to a mountain for protection. It was in 1989 when his family decided to move to Stockholm, Sweden in his eight years old. His father was a local singer in Lebanon. The memory of his father made him passionate to music despite he studied in aeronautic engineering during his university in Stockholm.

His ability to compose and produce music brought him to begin performing music in local level. Getting himself into music led Maher Zain to meet Red One, a Moroccan origin producer who lives in New York and living his career in music recording and productions. Zain decided to flee from Stockholm to New York at around 24 years old. Red One and his co-worker's composing instruments, wrote songs, and then decided which song is suitable to be performed by some singers, like Beyonce, Usher, and other big names whom Maher Zain described "famous people you only watch on TV". He released three albums with Awakening Records, Thank You Allah (2009) & Forgive Me (2012), and the latest is One (2016).

Maher Zain, with Awakening record, implements different branding strategies and approaches than pop artists in the West. Despite being a Muslim singer with the world's largest fan base, Zain does not show the image of a devout Muslim in the sense of symbolic or visual attributes. He does not nearly never wear symbolic attributes as a Muslim such as a praying cap, cloak, robes or any other symbol of Islam. In the album cover and various video clips, the image

of a Maher Zain never changes. He represents himself as an ordinary man wearing jeans, wearing a shirt or sometimes with a jacket, along with his iconic dapper hat. Resembling a man dressing that is more appropriate to go to a concert instead of praying. However, in various album covers, it appears that Zain was kneeling and raising her hand into the air, showing his obedience that he is calmly praying to Allah. Maher Zain songs carry a message about the inspiration of life and an invitation to thank and praise God and the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, many songs describe Maher Zain's vision, craving on how Muslims should unite in a peaceful society.

Equally important, Zain encourages individuals to take ownership of their problems and to confront injustice but not to do so with violence. In the video for hit song, "Insha Allah" (See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfXIF2Mm2Kc>) one sees pictures of dark and menacing riot police chasing innocents and even violent torture, as Zain sings that one should never lose hope or despair because Allah is always on your side. Even more astonishing view is portrayed in "Palestine will be Free" (See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foSbqLi6UI0>) where audiences see a schoolgirl holding a stone in front of an Israeli tank—an image meant to invoke a very famous picture of a Palestinian child from the 1987 Palestinian Intifada holding a rock high to throw at a nearby Israeli tank. But the girl drops the rock, stands defenceless in front of the tank, and implicitly puts her faith in God that her personal will is stronger than the mighty Israeli tank. Her faith is rewarded as the tank withdraws.

One of the other music videos that promote living harmony is titled The Chosen One (See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foSbqLi6UI0>). The video clip of the song tells the example of the Prophet Muhammad as a model of the Muslims. The recording of this video clip is located in the USA, and takes the setting on how Muslims live in the middle of Western society. The video begins with

an antagonist neighbour who dumps the garbage in front of Maher Zain's house. Described as a typical Western blonde-haired, the woman hates to see Maher Zain. Then the scene shifts with Maher Zain going out from his house, walking downtown, and witness the devastating effects of modern society; poverty, drugs, robbery and homeless people. Maher Zain comes and gives alms to the homeless people and the poor.

Furthermore, the music video is also constructing image of a happy Muslim family. The Muslim family visibly performing prayers at home, while the children playing around at the city park in peace. In a scene of the music video, one little boy from the Muslim family feeds a thirsty dog in the park despite dog is considered unclean for Muslims. Such scene in the music video aspiring has shown a Muslim's compassion by displaying image of pouring water to the dog by Muslim's shoe. Maher Zain returns to his home, and discovers that his antagonist neighbour is suffering sick. Zain takes the initiative to cook a soup, and delivers it to the neighbour's house. The video ends with a statement that all the good deeds in this video are inspired by the teachings that Prophet Muhammad taught.

Implicitly such video illustrates the situation of Muslims in Western society who are experiencing Islamophobia. Western society here is portrayed differently. Rather than portrayed as developed society, the video illustrates the disease of modernity that engulfs Western society. The Muslims, represented by Zain, are present not to oppose or confront the surrounding Western community, but instead embrace and continue to give goodness even though his neighbor hurts him (as a Muslim). The video seemed to tell that Islam does not reject the West completely and give resistance, but Islam lives in the middle of Western society, embraces them and becomes a part of the solution of moral thirst experienced by Western society.

Worldwide Success and Popularity in Indonesia

Another factor by which Maher Zain gained success worldwide is that he performs his songs in various languages. This created bonds with Muslims worldwide with different backgrounds and diverse nations or states. Maher Zain basically sings in English and Arabic, a language which every Muslim is required to understand for religious purposes, but some of his popular songs are covered in many other languages, sung by himself and collaboration sometimes. This made the songs reach out to wider audiences, acknowledging Muslims all around the world.

Such factor might also confirm the purpose of Awakening record, transferring ideas and values to touch global Muslim community through their local roots. *Insha Allah*, for example, is sung in French, Arabic, Turkish, Malay and Bahasa Indonesia. Other songs are released in other languages due to his collaboration with the singers from the country. *Allah Allah Kiyah Karo* (Continuously saying Allah) is a song features Irfan Makki, a Pakistani singer and is sung in Urdu. Even the latest album, *One*, which is released in 2016, features Maher Zain's collaboration with Awakhono We Sintu, a choir group from South Africa in a track titled 'The Power'. The song itself has written and sung in English and African language.

As a language spoken by one of Zain's largest fan base, Bahasa Indonesia is also sung by Maher Zain in his songs. *Sepanjang Hidup*, is released in Indonesia as a translation from 'For the Rest of My Life' in his first album in 2009. Indonesian audiences are also similar with the song titled '*Insha Allah*' sung by Maher Zain and Fadly Padi, a vocalist of major group band in Indonesian music scene. The title '*Insha Allah*' is then adopted to a TV series (*sinetron*) in Indonesia with similar title. The series consist of 40 episodes and was airing in Indonesian channel, SCTV circa 2012 and expand its coverage to Malay audiences through Malaysian satellite channel, Astro Oasis and Mustika HD.

Universal Music Indonesia holds Maher Zain's songs as the main distributor. The record label also holds selling rights to international superstars like Justin Bieber and many others.

Maher Zain's debut Album, Thank You Allah, was released in 2009. Zain and Awakening records used social media and online platforms like iTunes to promote the album, and it earned worldwide success for an Islamic singer with an album promoting Islamic values. The album sold millions copy worldwide. In Indonesia alone, the album was sold over than 750.000 copies by 2011 and gained multiple Platinum awards. While in Malaysia alone, the album was sold more than 250.000 copies and awarded as best-selling album in Malaysia. Only from these two countries, the debut album was successfully sold one million copies and made Maher Zain began to rise in fame and recognized by Muslim community worldwide.

Maher Zain early point in gaining success also coincided with the emergence of Arab Spring during 2010-2011; hence his songs and works gained attention by Arabic-speaking audiences. Wael Ghanim, one of the revolution activists, revealed on an interview that he is inspired by Maher Zain and Hamza Namira songs during his struggle. Not to suggest that the songs caused revolution, but the audiences love the revolutionary feel on the way Maher Zain delivered his message through his songs, as quoted during his concert in Cairo, March 2010. It is not surprising that he is also dubbed as "Soundtrack of Arab Spring" (See, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/maher-zains-hip-but-pious-soundtrack-to-the-arab-spring/243191/>) together with Hamza Namira and unofficially named as "*fannan at-thawra*", or the artists of revolution(See, <https://www.mei.edu/content/artist-revolution-hamza-namira-arab-spring-and-dream-free-egypt#edn2>) by Arabic people.

Indonesia definitely is the largest market for Maher Zain's albums. In Indonesia alone, the album was sold over than 750.000

copies by 2011 and gained multiple Platinum awards. While in Malaysia alone, the album was sold more than 250.000 copies and awarded as the best-selling album in Malaysia. The fan base blossoms along with the popularity of the Muslim pop star. In Indonesia alone, there are a hundred thousand dedicated fans that connected online in its official Facebook fan page.

Awakening record is represented by DNA Production for its distribution in Indonesia. At the same time, the label record of Maher Zain belongs to Universal Music Indonesia. DNA Production is taking responsibility and holding rights for management, concerts and scheduling for certain live event. DNA Production holds the distribution rights and managements for Maher Zain since the first time Maher Zain entered Indonesian music industry in 2010 and gaining huge success ever since.

Zain's debut album, "Thank You Allah" is awarded multiplatinum, sold hundred thousand copy in Indonesia. DNA Production holding not only rights for Maher Zain's management, but also all Muslim artists under Awakening records such as Raef Haggag, Harris J, and Humood Alkhudher. According to DNA Production's CEO, Rina Novita, Zain is the pioneer for other Muslim foreign artists to get recognition in Indonesia. Rina reveals that those four major Muslim artists have different characteristics of each other. In an interview, she revealed:

"Those four singers have different characters. Maher Zain is dubbed as Sharia Michael Buble. Raef is called the Sharia Jason Mraz. Harris J is compared to Justin Bieber. While Humood directs to Dangdut, Malay also Middle Eastern music. With different image, the promotion strategy is also different (<https://www.tabloidbintang.com/articles/film-tv-musik/ulasan/40914-serbuan-penyanyi-impor-muslim-ke-tanah-air>)."

Such a statement from the CEO implies that the business is targeting Indonesian Muslims as potential consumers. The attribution to Muslim singers by referring to 'secular' singers as mentioned

by Rina, and their implication to the marketing strategy of DNA Production demonstrated that the Islamic music industry is nowhere escaped from the hegemony of secular music. On the other hand, such situation sparked an idea that in Indonesia, the singer or genre of music will not be much problem, as long as the contents promote Islamic values. For Maher Zain's album launching in Indonesia, DNA Production mostly utilizes holy month of Ramadan as momentum for album promotion. Maher Zain album launched near the month of Ramadan when Indonesian Muslims are consuming more than usual in welcoming Ramadan.

In welcoming Holy Month Ramadan 2017, DNA Production released new album of Maher Zain, in collaboration with several Indonesian singers like Fadly, the vocalist of Padi Band and Indah Nefertari, a veiled female singer from Rising Star, a talent-hunting TV program. The album itself is titled "Album Religi Terbaik" and was launched in May 2017. Interestingly, the album is distributed through the vendors of large fast-food franchises across Indonesia, KFC and becoming the first "religious album" that KFC distributes (<http://showbiz.liputan6.com/read/2965875/dari-maher-zain-hingga-fadly-kolaborasi-di-album-religi-terbaik>).

The field data was mostly obtained during Maher Zain's road-show tour in Indonesia in August 2016. The road-show concert was held to promote the latest album of Maher Zain, titled "One". According to the source from Universal Music, the road-show is supposed to be a promotion for audiences and targeted to loyal audiences for 'reunion' since it has been some years Zain was absent from visiting Indonesia. Jakarta, Palembang, Balikpapan, Yogyakarta and Makassar are the destinations of the road-show tour in 2016.

Maher Zain's road-show concert mostly located in public hall and convention center in hotels that arguably luxurious. In Yogyakarta, the concert took place in The Alana hotel, a luxury

five-star hotel located in Jl. Palagan, Sleman. With the range ticket price ranging around hundred thousand Rupiahs, the middle-class Muslims seems favouring Islam integrated with modernity and luxury-consumerist appetite. The ticket price ranges from 225.000 to 750.000 Rupiah, and not included in the price ticket for meet and greet with the idol after concert. For meet and greet alone, the price is 200.000 Rupiah per person, only to have the star giving signatures and posing a picture with the idol.

The rising consumers of Maher Zain albums and concerts are more affiliated with urban-middle class Muslims than communal rural society. Urban middle-class Muslims treat Islam as a lifestyle choice and a vehicle in building social identities. According to Hasan (2011), the Middle-class represents individuals and households with certain characteristics, including accruing surplus income beyond daily livelihood necessities, hence they don't hesitate to spend for entertainment and pleasure. The surplus of wealth leads them to increase demands for expressing specific lifestyles, including Islamic symbols. Islam, as a lifestyle, provides legitimacy and moral value which could form their social identities. The middle-class Muslim's presence in the public sphere is visible in rising consciousness of importance of showing Islamic symbols in 'secular' spaces in the urban landscape.

***“Nonton Konser Sambil Bersedekah”*, Legitimation and Promotional Strategy from Islamic Preachers**

During the road-show concert in 2016, several renowned Islamic foundations that work on charity and philanthropy and with interest in Islamic *da'wah* were visibly endorsing the road-show concert. Maher Zain's road-show concert was purposed to promote his latest album, titled One. The road-show was supported by Universal Music Indonesia as the record label and supported by several institutions and

Islamic foundations in sight. Whether in the form of Islamic education foundations were *da'wah* mission or Islamic philanthropic institutions that have a mission of social welfare. There is a form of cooperation between the Islamic foundations and the promotional marketing of the road-show concert. All the publication posters and promotion banners for the concert promoted that 30% profit from ticket selling during road-show concert will be distributed to the foundations for charity purposes. There are at least four foundations mentioned in every publication poster both in physical or digital posters; Yayasan Ali Jaber, ACT (*Aksi Cepat Tanggap*), PPPA Darul Quran and Rumah Zakat Indonesia. They are foundations that are affiliated with Islamic activism across Indonesia and even potentially worldwide reach, focusing on collecting alms, charity and philanthropy.

The cooperation is not one-way, as the foundations are not only taking advantage of the road-show concert profit. The cooperation demonstrates mutual relationship between entertainment marketing industry and Islamic activism that promises a mutual benefit. As for the Islamic foundations, the promotional support may gain public consciousness about their mission and the institution. While for the marketing purpose, such Islamic foundations may consolidate the exact marketing target, just like Indonesian Muslim audiences. The foundations also boost publications to attract wider audiences, especially middle-class Muslims who are aware of distributing their charity through the presence of the foundations.

One of the Islamic foundations, Yayasan Ali Jaber, belongs to a popular Muslim preacher, Syeikh Ali Jaber. Ali Jaber is a Saudi Arabian born who has been holding Indonesian citizenship since 2011. He used to teach Quran recitation in Madinah, the holy city of Muslims. Not much sufficient information regarding Ali Jaber's background back in Saudi Arabia, but his early popularity on Indonesian television screen was when he took part as one of judges in *Hafidz Indonesia*, a TV show

during holy month Ramadan with a competition of memorizing Quran (*hafidz*) among Muslim children as participants.

According to the release of Yayasan Ali Jaber's website, the ticket profit during Maher Zain's road-show concert tour will be distributed to support braille Quran donation movements across Indonesia (<https://www.republika.co.id/berita/senggang/musik/16/08/14/obw7df384-bersenandung-sambil-beramal-di-konser-maher-zain>). As well it will also be distributed for donation for producing digital Quran. The promotion also posted by Syekh Ali Jaber himself on his official Facebook page, suggesting the followers book the tickets through Yayasan Ali Jaber and give charity, supporting national movement for digital Braille Quran donation the blinds (<https://web.facebook.com/syekh.ajindo/videos/842982595838318/>). In addition, Syekh Ali Jaber demonstrated image-building in endorsing Maher Zain to his followers through an advertorial video. Uploaded by the official Facebook page of Ali Jaber Foundation, Sheikh Ali Jaber attributed Maher Zain as a Muslim preacher who is performing *syiar Islam* hence he contributed in spreading Islam. Also, Sheikh Ali Jaber referred Maher Zain's road-show in Indonesia as a *silaturrahim*, a friendly visit, hence Indonesian Muslims should attend. The image-building in such advertorial video put Maher Zain as a very important Muslim preacher, and Indonesian Muslims must welcome his presence to Indonesia by attending his concert. Even Syekh Ali Jaber suggested Indonesian Muslims attend the concert since it is an amal saleh in his Braille Quran movement.

The other distinguished Muslim figure is the founder of PPPA Darul Quran, Yusuf Mansur. Yusuf Mansur is known of his popularity as television preacher on charity and its business relation. He encouraged his twitter followers to purchase the tickets through PPPA. It is not surprising that the preacher engaged actively with his followers on twitter. The publication and encouragement for purchasing Maher Zain's road-show tickets offered special price. Especially targeting its

member, PPPA Darul Quran provides discount by 5% cut of ticket price, contributing to the ticket distribution. And through its Facebook page, PPPA Darul Quran inviting its followers to attend concert with persuasive narratives such as attending concert by giving charity (*Nonton konser sambil sedekah*) or giving charity by watching concert (*Beramal sambil nonton konser*) (https://web.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1158927310815147&id=150270401680848).

I would attempt to analyze this mutual relationship between Islamic foundations and their endorsement to Islamic music industry. Speaking about consumerism, major economic needs of capitalism is now shifting from production to consumption. Once a functioning system of capitalist production has been established, consequently stimulates the need for consumption. The strategy to encourage people to consume is now as strategic and as important as the strategy of production. The increased wealth and leisure time, support the ability of the haves to engage with commodities. Therefore, expansion of agencies such as design, advertising, marketing and public relations are growing.

Technology development and the ease of accessing media in modern societies also involved in rising people's consumption. This access of media is utilized by celebrities and public figures whose presence is to trigger consumption. With their numerous followers and fans in social media, they are among important figures who are able to determine the taste patterns of the society. they exert their influence over people's lifestyle and values or ideologies. Expansions of these agencies also encourage people to consume and support the emergence of popular culture that celebrates consumerism and hedonism as inseparable of current middle-class lifestyle.

Besides the aspect of capitalizing on their audience and their followers (*jamaah*), the popular Islamic preachers and foundations they own, have confirmed that Muslims make products marketed by

industry, as Muslim products and therefore should be consumed by Muslims. Farish A. Noor (Noor, 2015, pp. 283-302) called this under “Islamicate” term, which affirms Islamic commodities through the legitimacy they apply. In this case, Islamic commodities do not function to overthrow the capitalistic system. This approach strengthens the existence of popular Islam, which shows their interests both economically and discursively in a society that is still hegemony by the capitalistic system and modern developmental discourse.



FIGURE 1. Nonton Konser Sambil Beramal - Promotional poster from Rumah Zakat for Maher Zain Indonesian tour in 2016. Source: Website Rumah Zakat.

Further elaboration suggests that such actors contributed actively Maher Zain music industry machine are the active figures in voicing and advocating Islamic aspirations in Indonesia, both in value and practice into social activism. One example, Sheikh Ali Jaber is one of Muslim public figures who participated in series of rally of 'Defending Islam' (*Aksi Bela Islam*), consisting rallies and demonstrations to voice Muslims aspirations leading to supporting Muslim leaders in the constellation of 2016 Jakarta governor elections. This aspiration was reinforced by the case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok, who allegedly did blasphemy to the holy Quran. Consequently, the case invited resistance of Muslims to the Christian, Chinese descent candidate himself.

Meanwhile ACT (*Aksi Cepat Tanggap*) is a humanitarian organization focused on donations and donations that are widely allocated to the humanity, or perhaps especially in international level. Many of ACT's donations are targeted to the victims of Rohingya, Palestinian and Syrian conflicts. ACT even is able to collect donations for famine in Somalia. With massive activism abroad, ACT looks stronger in displaying the identity of Muslims globally, both in terms of cooperation, and the target of their donation. Not only addressing the conflict, ACT also directs its donations to mosque constructions abroad, such as the latest project in contributing the construction of a mosque in Seville, Spain with such nostalgia narratives to reclaim that Islam was once leading civilization in Europe.

In its action worldwide, ACT is often identified with transnational ideology. An assumption emerged that ACT volunteers were affiliated with ISIS behind their humanitarian action in Syria. The information was denied by Bachtiar Nasir, and called the assumption 'painful' to Muslim community (<https://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/16/05/05/>

[o6ov45394-menyakitkan-lembaga-kemanusiaan-yang-berangkat-ke-suriah-dicap-isis](#)). Bachtiar Nasir is a close person to ACT despite no official structural affiliation. The preacher often supports ACT activities openly and defended ACT from allegation that the institution is related to some extremist movements. Bachtiar Nasir himself is the central figure of the 212 rally, aspiring for Muslim leader in Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2016. He is also the central person of Hizbut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), endorsing the political agenda of re-establishing the Khilafah in Indonesia, which is now banned by the Indonesian government.

Such intersection between Islamic music industry and Islamic activism extended to capitalizing audiences in political agenda. Before 212 demonstrations emerged in 2016, Maher Zain had symbolised presidential candidate campaign who carried Islam politics in Indonesia. The 2014 presidential election divided Indonesian citizen to Prabowo-Hatta Rajasa and Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla as presidential candidates. Prabowo-Hatta was supported by a coalition of parties, PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*), a party that carries the mission of Islamism agenda through parliament and executive system. The coalition put Islamic symbolism through its campaign by gaining supports from FPI, and other Islamic preacher figures. In contrary, Jokowi-JK camp was more symbolizing nationalist image to their supporters.

In one of the event campaigns, Prabowo supporters held a concert featuring Maher Zain as guest star (<https://seleb.tempo.co/read/589663/prabowo-hatta-gelar-konser-maher-zain-di-istora>). The concert was fully sponsored by MNC group and the media tycoon, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, as one of Prabowo's supporters (<http://www.republika.co.id/berita/pemilu/menju-ri-1/14/06/30/n7zozr-prabowohatta-undang-masyarakat-hadiri->

[konser-maher-zain-gratis](#)). The audiences were mostly Prabowo-Hatta supporters; the approximated crowd was about 6,000 people in venue. However, Maher Zain does not explicitly call his arrival political since him seemed reluctant when Hatta Rajasa, the vice president candidate, asks him to promote a campaign gesture favouring Prabowo-Hatta.

By the descriptions above, we may conclude that the Islamic preachers using their symbolical capital to legitimate the Islamic music industry. Such legitimation is operated at least through two mechanism; firstly, by constructing image building of Maher Zain's personality to the eye of Muslim audiences. This creates an emotional bound to the audiences which is united under a term of Islamic ummah. Secondly, the legitimation is given through the Islamic institutions which fully supported the advertorial promotion for the concert and album. The presence of such *da'wah* and charity institutions provides moral legitimation for the consumers, convincing that such consumption activities will also mean a contribution for their fellow Muslims. It will also mean good deeds that will be rewarded by Allah.

There is a distinctive shift in the role of Muslim preachers in capitalizing the audiences for the sake of their Islamic activism interest. Mentioned by Sofjan (Sofjan, 2013, pp. 91-114), the preachers earn their credibility and authority through popular media such as television and social media. Mass media and capitalistic approach facilitate the audiences to affiliate themselves, from merely an audience to *Jamaah* (communal-congregational affiliation). Through such mechanism, the newly popular preachers can challenge the conventional authority of Islam in Indonesia, which was previously built through the intellectual tradition that belongs to *Ulema* or *Kiai*, with *pesantren* and *tarekat* as their communal basis.

The obvious power of how a pop star like Maher Zain can attract wide audiences massively could not be ignored. Maher Zain can attract and consolidate massive consumers, and by itself is a power. Huge fan base and large selling record in Indonesia seems promising to be calculated politically. Thus it made popular culture industry difficult to be ignored by social movements or political actors to keep them relevant, attractive and up to date to society and immediate constituent in particular (Heryanto, 2008). People taste in popular culture, especially in the case of the Islamic music industry, implies its prominence among the Indonesian public and the dominance of certain paradigms that people follow as part of their daily lives.

Conclusion

To sum up the discussion above, we may conclude that the Islamic pop culture industry in Indonesia is a growing trends and promising cultural capital to gain attention from Indonesian Muslim consumers. The expansion of pop culture industry, which is profit-oriented, is legitimated by Muslim organizations and leaders for gaining audiences and supports. It is necessary to be very careful in concluding that the industry has a dual importance to gain profit and simultaneously disseminate the ideology and values held by its supporting Islamic *da'wah* institutions. What can be assured, however, is that the pop culture industry becomes prominence for several Islamic *da'wah* institutions to make their Islamic *da'wah* activism works and impactful to Muslim society. In this case, the Islamic pop culture industry also becomes an effective engagement to achieve such Islamic *da'wah* activism interests. Such close relation is also supported by the emergence of Indonesian middle-class Muslims and the shifting of religious authority from traditional Kiai or Ulama to popular preachers.

Hence it is not surprising if certain popular Muslim preachers, as Yusuf Mansur and Sheikh Ali Jaber with their institutions, are willing to endorse and promote their support to musical performances like Maher Zain's road-show concert from their personal social media accounts. Further than their personal endorse, they also operate their institutions as agencies to promote the road-show concert across Indonesia. From this point of view, I would argue that Maher Zain's case may demonstrate the operation of Islamic *da'wah* activism in Indonesia in utilizing pop culture industry, by playing role in the capitalistic industrial system. In more details, the two sectors are supporting each other, as the prominence Muslim preachers successfully capitalizing the industry and its consumers through their Islamic *da'wah* institutions which favouring Islamic activism and their interests towards political Islam. Meanwhile for the industry, the involvements of the *da'wah* institutions provide legitimations to gain more consumers and emphasize the industry as part of Halal market in the eyes of the Muslim consumers.

Finally, as the study of popular culture is often perceived less significant compared to socio-political study, this intersection between pop culture industry and Islamic *da'wah* activism may prove that popular culture is significant in shaping the future of Islamic society in Indonesia and deserve more attention. The next discussion of this topic is whether or not the phenomenon will lead to moderate, open, or more conservative Islamic society.

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The author make substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The author seeks responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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