

From Religiosity to Representing Cultural Identity: Communication Approach in the Changes of Indonesia's Halal policy on Instagram

Mualimin^{1*}, Sri Sudono Saliro², Ari Yunaldi³, Rifqi Muhammad⁴

¹Sakarya Üniversitesi, Türkiye

²Universitas Tanjungpura, Indonesia

³Institut Agama Islam Negeri Pontianak, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas, Indonesia

*¹mualimin.mualimin@ogr.sakarya.edu.tr; ²srisudonosaliro@hukum.untan.ac.id;

³ariyunaldi34@gmail.com ; ⁴ananda.rhifqie@gmail.com

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Abstract

The article aims to emphasize the communication approach of the Indonesian halal certification authority on Instagram in explaining halal policy changes, including the halal logo change and the halal certification authority. The article's method is qualitative, with a content analysis approach. Data was collected by observing the official Instagram accounts of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH). The posts observed were from March to December 2022. The data obtained were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive qualitative analysis model: data display, data reduction, and conclusion. The study found that public communication implemented by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) on Instagram is aimed at convincing the public of the arguments for changing the halal logo and the authority of halal certification in Indonesia. The design and rhetoric of posts are aimed at building narratives and arguments that the new halal logo is more representative of Indonesian identity than the previous logo. The narration is also built to convince the public that the change in the authority to issue halal certificates to the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) is not to eliminate the role of the Indonesian Ulama Council but to make its role and function more explicit in halal certification. The study also found that the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) posted positive testimonials from influential public figures exposed to changes in logos and halal certification policies in Indonesia. These testimonials are used to legitimize arguments and narrations to gain public acceptance, approval, and trust.

Key Words: Halal Certification, Halal Logo, Halal Policy, Indonesian Halal Product Guarantee Agency.

Introduction

The halalness of food and cosmetic products is a crucial issue for Indonesians (Lücking, 2022; Rakhmani, 2024; Ratanamaneichat & Rakkarn, 2013). A survey conducted by Populix in 2023 specifically found that 93% of Indonesians consider the halal aspect of consuming a product (Indonesia Business Post, 2023). In this context, the halal guarantee is the primary consideration for Indonesians to buy food products, cosmetics, and medicines (Briliana & Mursito, 2017; Farhan & Sutikno, 2022; Pratama et al., 2023). The finding is reasonable because Indonesian Muslims view that the halalness of a product is not only associated with health and safety for use but also related to religious spirituality issues (Ruhaeni & Aqimuddin, 2023; Suryawan et al., 2022; Zulfa et al., 2023). An example of the importance of the halalness of a product is during the Covid-19 pandemic, although in emergency conditions, the certainty of the halal status of the Covid-19 vaccine greatly influenced the public's willingness to be vaccinated (Firdaus, 2022; Khoiri & Nasution, 2022; Mualimin, 2022; Muslimin et al., 2021).

The reality related to the importance of guaranteeing the halalness of a product requires an authoritative institution that has the authority to ensure the halalness of a product through its certification. In the Indonesian context, since 1989, halal certification has been the authority of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) as an authoritative Islamic institution in issuing religious fatwas, including halal fatwas. MUI's role became increasingly strategic with the issuance of Law Number 33 of 2014, which established MUI as a halal inspection agency (LPH) (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2023; Safa'at, 2022). This strategic role can be seen from the number of halal certificates issued by MUI until 2018, totalling 69,985 halal-certified products (Faridah, 2019).

In 2021, the Indonesian Government issued Government Regulation (PP) number 39 of 2021 concerning the implementation of halal product guarantees. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH), responded to PP number 39 of 2021 by issuing decision Number 40 of 2022 concerning the Halal Label. Through this decision, the authority for halal certification in Indonesia has officially changed from MUI to BPJPH as a government representative (Nahlah et al., 2023). Through the decision, the halal logo issued by MUI is also automatically invalid and replaced by a new halal logo issued by BPJPH. To accelerate the implementation of halal certification services, the Ministry of Religious Affairs also established halal study centres in each state Islamic university in Indonesia (Kementerian Agama RI, 2023).

Figure 1. Comparison of the MUI halal logo and the new halal logo





The change in the halal logo and the authority of halal certification by the Ministry of Religious Affairs has caused polemics and has been criticized by various elements of society, such as scholars and Islamic organizations in Indonesia (Claudia, 2022; Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2022; Suara Muhammadiyah, 2022; Tempo, 2022). Majni (2022) stated that the policy is viewed as eliminating the role of MUI as an authoritative Islamic institution in issuing religious fatwas, including halal fatwas. In parallel, according to Alam (2021), the policy is also criticized because it is feared that the certification carried out by the Ministry of Religion is only bureaucratically and administratively without genuinely paying attention to strict inspection and supervision of the halalness of a product. In their study, Rachman et al. (2022) stated that the change of the halal logo does not have much urgency in efforts to improve the quality of halal product guarantee services in Indonesia.

More massive criticism from the public against changes in the halal logo and halal certification authority was conveyed through social media. In their works, Puspita et al. (2023) and Ulya (2022) stated that the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policies regarding certification and changes to the halal logo even caused noise on social media, especially Instagram. Social media became a battleground for debating opinions between netizens who supported and rejected the policy (Rachman et al., 2022). The noises and debates, if ignored, can lead to polarization and opinion bias in society (Ulya 2022). In more extreme situations, it will create resistance and a narrative of blaming all policies made by the government, especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Criticism and rejection from the public indicate communication problems between the government and the public in explaining the intent and purpose of changing the logo and authority of halal certification in Indonesia. In line with Islam et al. (2023) findings, halal certification often faces a communication gap between policymakers and the public. Based on the background, this study aims to analyze the communication approach of the Indonesian halal certification authority through Instagram in explaining changes in halal certification policies, including the change of halal logo and the change of halal certification authority. The results of this study can provide academic literature and evaluation papers for the government, especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in communicating important and sensitive policies for the livelihood of the public.

Literature Review

The change of the Indonesian halal logo and the authority of halal certification is an interesting issue to be discussed among the public and academics. Various previous studies related to changes in halal certification policies can be classified into four study themes.

First, studies related to the meaning of the new halal logo design (Fitrianto, 2023; Ihzar, 2022; Indinabila, 2022; Muzzammil, 2023; Pugersari, 2024; Putri et al., 2023; Rachman et al., 2022; Riani, 2024; Sampoerno et al., 2022). Second, studies related to the construction of media coverage of changes in halal certification authority in Indonesia (Claudia, 2022; Khotimah & Mastika, 2023; Latei & Rini, 2020). Third, studies related to the contestation of religious ideology in the polemics of the change in halal certification authority in Indonesia (Muharramah, 2023; Saidi & Sazali, 2024). Fourth, studies related to public response and sentiment towards the change of authority for halal certification in Indonesia (Afandi et al., 2023; Celine, 2023; Hasan, 2023; Puspita et al., 2023; Wahyudi & Mardiyati, 2023).

Previous studies have focused more on the meaning of the halal logo and dialectics as a public response to changes in the halal logo and halal certification authority in Indonesia from MUI to BPJPH. In other words, there is still a gap in studies related to the Indonesian government's public communication in explaining the nature and purpose of the policy change to the public. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by focusing on the communication approach of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) on Instagram in explaining the reasons and urgency of changing the halal logo and changing the authority of halal certification from MUI to BPJPH. The aim of this study is in line with various previous studies showing that social media is very effective as a government channel in communicating various public policies to the public and even forming public opinion on government policies in Indonesia (Graham, 2014; Idris, 2018; Sari & Soegiarto, 2021).

Research Method

The study is a qualitative research with a content analysis approach. There are two data sources in the study. First, the official Instagram account of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (https://www.instagram.com/kemenag_ri). Second, the official Instagram account of the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH), which the Ministry of Religion authorizes to provide halal certification in Indonesia (<https://www.instagram.com/halal.indonesia/>). Data collection is done by observing the two Instagram accounts. The data collected are posts related to changes in the halal logo and the authority of halal certification since it was announced on 12 March 2022. Therefore, the posts observed were from March to December 2022. The data obtained were then analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2014): data display, data reduction, and conclusion.

Figure 2. Instagram homepage of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and BPJPH





Analysis

Since releasing the new halal logo on 12 March 2022, there has been debate from the public, both those who agree and those who reject the logo. The debate mainly occurred in the comments on the official Instagram accounts of the Ministry of Religion and the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH). Responding to the debate, the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) and the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs attempted to conduct public communication on Instagram to explain and convince the public regarding the reasons for the logo change. This study focuses on the communication approach taken by the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) and the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs to explain and convince the public regarding the change of the halal logo. Related to the focus, there are two findings in the study:

The New Halal Logo as a Representation of Indonesian Identity: A Narrative to Persuade the Public

The change of Indonesia's halal logo was first posted on social media on 12 March 2022 on the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) account. The post was responded by the public with various comments, either agreeing, rejecting, or questioning the reasons for changing the logo and the authority of halal certification. Ulya (2022) states that the release of the new logo caused noise on social media because there was a public debate in responding to the policy.

After the logo change, the Ministry of Religious Affairs explained to the public the philosophical basis of the logo and the reasons for changing the halal logo. The results of data collection found posts on changes to the halal logo and the authority of halal certification in Indonesia on the Ministry of Religious Affairs Instagram account amounted to 3 posts, and on the Instagram account of the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH),

there were 6 posts. All of these posts were made in March 2022. Of the 9 posts, explanations related to the reasons and philosophical basis for changing the halal logo dominate with 7 posts. Meanwhile, only 2 posts provide explanations regarding changes in the authority of halal certification in Indonesia. Specifically, the contents of these contents are as follows:

Table 1. Posts about changes to the halal logo and certification policies

Date	Post Link	Content
12 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbAToWxDwjY/	Official launch of the new Indonesian halal logo
12 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbAVDcrrQxA/?img_index=1	Explanation of the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia regarding the change of the Indonesian halal logo.
13 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbB7GW_L-X7/?img_index=1	The philosophical meaning of the new Indonesian halal logo. The logo has three components. Gunungan is identical to the typical Indonesian culture, namely Wayang. Surjan is a form of striped lines that depict piety. Calligraphy of the word Halal in Kufi style.
13 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbCtDamJmHf/	Characteristics of the new Indonesian halal logo.
13 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbCpF8hr83r/?img_index=1	Regulations regarding changes to the Indonesian halal logo and the rules for using the halal logo.
14 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbEmFJwpvmw/	Explanation of the philosophy of the new halal logo and the law that is the basis for the use of the halal logo.
15 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbHv7TMpzWE/?img_index=1	Explanation of Law Number 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Assurance regulates three parties involved in the Halal Certification process.
16 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbJNUwQhe2P/?img_index=1	Explanation of the three actors/institutions and their authorities in the halal certification process in Indonesia.
16 March 2022	https://www.instagram.com/p/CbJqUs7LKKK/?img_index=1	Public figure testimonials regarding changes to halal certification policies and the new halal logo.

Analyzing the content, this study found that the argument for the change of certification authority from MUI to BPJPH is to clarify the roles and functions of each institution in the halal certification process. In the 16 March 2022 post (https://www.instagram.com/p/CbJNUwQhe2P/?img_index=1) it is specifically explained that the authority of the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) in issuing halal certificates does not mean to monopolize the whole halal certification process and eliminate the role of the Indonesian Ulama Council. In this context, there is a distribution of authority



between 3 actors (institutions) involved in the certification process. First, the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) has administrative authority to examine documents and issue halal certificates. Second, the Halal Examining Agency (LPH) has the authority to examine and test product halalness. Third, the results of the examination from LPH then become a reference for the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) to issue a fatwa on the halalness of a product. The separation of the authority of the three institutions involved in the halal certification process is illustrated in the following figure:

Figure 3. Halal certification process in Indonesia



The study also found a pattern of repetition of specific terms and diction in posts related to the new Indonesian halal logo. In this context, the terms *Gunungan*, *Surjan*, *Wayang*, *Nusantara*, and the value of Indonesian-ness are diction that is always used in these posts. The pattern implicitly affirms the new halal logo design's strong relationship with Indonesian cultural identity. In other words, through these posts, this study found that the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs wants to explain that the new halal logo is not only a marker of the halalness of a product but also represents national values and Indonesian identity. This reflects an effort to strengthen awareness of the importance of the halalness of a product and make it an integral part of cultural heritage and identity.

The narrative on Instagram posts that the new halal logo represents Indonesian identity is basically an attempt by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to gain public legitimacy for the new logo. At this level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs may hope the narration will create a sense of belonging to the logo. At the same time, the public will also accept and be proud to use the new halal logo because they feel it is part of their national identity as Indonesian citizens.

Cultural and national identity pride is one of the psychological phenomena often found in people's social lives (Bouchat & Rimé, 2018; Sullivan, 2014). Some studies explain that individuals or groups tend to feel proud of the symbols, culture, traditions, and values in their lives. At the same time, humans tend to accept and agree more quickly with something related to their cultural identity (Al-Zadjali, 2024; Yin et al., 2023). In this context, the Ministry of Religious Affairs commodifies pride in cultural identity to make the public accept the explanation and reasons for changing the Indonesian halal logo by addressing the sense of pride in Indonesian identity.

Commodification of Cultural Figures and Religious Leaders as a Tool for Legitimizing Reasons for Changes in Halal Policy

The data in the study shows that posts related to the change in the halal logo are aimed at explaining the reasons and urgency of the policy change and as an effort to build public perceptions and acceptance of the policy. In his study, Mualimin (2022) states that to build positive perceptions, communicating public policies on social media must be packaged with engaging content and have aspects of influence and legitimacy. The view aligns with this study, which found an effort to build positive perceptions of changes in the Indonesian halal logo by using testimonials from public figures who have social legitimacy in Indonesian society. Specifically, there are 7 public figures whose testimonies are displayed regarding changes in the halal logo and the authority of Indonesian halal certification. Testimonials and profiles of these public figures are as follows :

Table 2. Content of testimonial posts about logo changes and halal certification policies

Public Figure	Occupation	Testimoni
Sujiwo Tejo	Culturalists	Wayang comes from many regions. There are wayang from Java, Sundanese wayang, Cirebon wayang, Sasak wayang in Lombok, Sigale-gale wayang, there is also one from Bali which has Gunungan. In my opinion, this halal logo represents the archipelago.
Taj Yasin Maimoen	Deputy Governor of Central Java	The new halal logo is based on transitioning from MUI to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which must also change its logo. Regarding the Gunungan symbol and so on, it raises part of the Nusantara symbol, so it doesn't matter.
Abdul Mu'ti	Secretary General of Muhammadiyah	The logo is not a substantive thing. Certainty and guarantee that products labeled as halal are truly halal are more important.
Ahmad Fahrurrozi	Chairman of the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama	PBNU sees the logo change as positive and following the authority of the BPJPH institution. The logo is easy for the public to read. What is important is that the substance of the product's halal process is guaranteed. The halal writing is legible in Latin letters. Depending on each person's perception, the logo may resemble Wayang or a mosque dome.
A Tholabi Kharlie	Dean of the Faculty of Sharia and Law, State Islamic University of Jakarta	The new halal logo uses the Kufi script. This script is not intended for reading and writing but for aesthetic purposes. Therefore, the aspect of readability or clarity of writing is not dominant. Moreover, this is used for a logo that considers appropriateness, harmony, and beauty. The old logo used the Naskhi script, which is functional for reading and writing.



Wan Jamaluddin	Professor of Islamic Civilization at Raden Intan State Islamic University of Lampung	The Indonesian halal label philosophically adapts Indonesian values, there is no need to question it because the process of creating a halal logo is in accordance with religious rules and Indonesian values.
Wawan Wahyuddin	Rector of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin State Islamic University, Banten	The new halal label issued by the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) is in line with Indonesian values and reflects Indonesian Halal. This new halal label uses artifacts and cultural patterns typical of Indonesia while still being based on Islamic law.

Public figures' testimonials support the halal certification policy changes made by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. These testimonials make three main arguments and key points. First, the new halal logo represents Indonesian identity. Second, the new halal logo emphasizes the aesthetic aspect, as seen in the choice of the Kufi script for the word "Halal." Third, the logo design is not a substantive issue in halal certification because the more substantive issue is the certainty and guarantee of the product's halalness.

The substance of the testimony is related to the reason for public rejection of the change in the halal logo on social media (Rachman et al., 2022; Ulya, 2022). Narratives such as the new logo being Javanocentric, the Halal writing being challenging to read, and no urgency to change the logo dominate conversations among netizens. At this level, the testimony of a public figure about the new halal logo posted by BPJPH on Instagram answers various comments of rejection from the public.

Figure 4. Netizen comments on the BPJPH Instagram account



Religious figures, cultural figures, and intellectuals have legitimacy according to their respective fields so that their views will be a reference for society. At this level, religious figures are often used as a reference in the interpretation of religious texts and doctrines for religious societies in Indonesia (Yani et al., 2022). Likewise, cultural figures and intellectuals are used as references to explain and solve various socio-cultural problems that exist in society. In this context, the post related to the testimonial represents the support of religious

leaders, cultural figures, and intellectuals for the new halal certification policy. On the other hand, the testimonial post is also a legitimizing tool for changing the halal logo and halal certification authority from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) to the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH). In line with this, Aagaard (2019) views that legitimacy and trust will impact public policy acceptance. Likewise, Tallberg and Zürn (2019) argue that the credibility of information sources determines the level of public trust in that information. Dellmuth and Tallbergh (2021) found that the higher the credibility of the elite, the higher the level of public legitimacy of the message.

Public figure testimonial posts also show the persuasive efforts made by the Ministry of Religion and BPJPH so that the public accepts changes to the halal logo and halal certification policies. Public figure testimonials are part of a communication strategy with a psychological approach that humans tend to be more accepting and believe something if there is a positive testimonial about the object. The success of these persuasive efforts will be even higher when the testimonials come from people with high credibility and exposure, such as public figures (Benoit & Kennedy, 1999; Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, it is reasonable for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to selectively choose testimonials from public figures to be presented in posts. The selected figures, such as Habib Ja'far, Sujiwo Tedjo, the leaders of Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama, basically have considerable exposure and influence on the formation of public opinion, especially among Muslims in Indonesia (Brown, 2019; Harjo, 2011; Syafrina, 2023).

Using public figures' testimonies to persuade the public is a strategy governments and political institutions in Indonesia use to shape public opinion on public policy. This strategy is also often referred to as celebrity endorsement, which is displaying positive opinions and testimonies from specific figures such as celebrities so that a positive opinion is also formed towards the policy. One example of the Indonesian government using this strategy is socializing and convincing the public of the importance of vaccination to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Alatas et al., 2024). This reality further reinforces the findings of several previous studies that endorsement in the form of public figures' testimonies to public policies can contribute to the formation of opinion and acceptance of these policies (Bond et al., 2017; Centeno, 2015).

Conclusions

The study found 9 posts from halal certification authorities communicating changes to halal certification policies in Indonesia. The content of the posts was dominated by the reasons and substance of the halal logo change, with 7 posts. The analysis of the 9 posts led to three findings related to the halal certification authority's communication approach on Instagram in explaining changes to halal certification policies in Indonesia. First, there is a consistent and repetitive pattern in the use of diction or terms in posts related to the substance of the new halal logo: Gunung, Wayang, Surjan, and Nusantara. The repetition of these terms shows that the posts are a persuasive attempt to convince the public about the new halal logo by narrating that the logo is more representative of Indonesian identity than



the previous logo. Second, the posts communicate that the change in authority for issuing halal certificates to the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) is not to eliminate the role of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) but precisely to clarify the role and function of this religious institution. Thirdly, to increase public acceptance and trust in the arguments and narratives regarding the reasons and urgency of the logo change and the transfer of halal certification authority, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH) posted positive testimonials from public figures who have great exposure and influence as a legitimizing tool for these messages and narratives. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that changes in halal certification policies in Indonesia are communicated using a persuasive approach by commodifying the influence of public figures and cultural elements in Instagram posts.

This study is limited to analyzing the public relations content of the Indonesian halal certification authority through Instagram posts in explaining changes in halal certification policy in Indonesia. For further research, analyzing public sentiment towards halal certification services in Indonesia is recommended.

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