



## THE COMMODIFICATION OF RELIGION IN AINIQUA MINERAL WATER PRODUCTS IN MEDAN CITY

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### ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of religious commodification in consumer products is increasingly evident through the use of religious symbols, narratives, and identities as marketing strategies. This study aims to analyze the process of religious commodification in Ainiqua mineral water products in Medan City and identify factors that hinder its implementation. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The research informants consisted of four people, consisting of Ainiqua managers, production heads/workers, religious leaders, and consumers in Medan City. The analysis was conducted by referring to Vincent Mosco's commodification theory and Theodor Adorno's cultural industry theory. The results show that religious commodification in Ainiqua products occurs through three main forms. First, content commodification is seen in the use of the "prayer water" narrative, murottal chanting, halal labels, and hijaiyah letter symbols as added value to the product. Second, audience commodification is carried out by targeting the Muslim middle class and the da'wah community as a market base. Third, labor commodification is seen in the involvement of workers who interpret production activities as part of spiritual devotion. This research also identified several obstacles, such as competition in the mineral water market, resistance from some communities to the commercialization of religious symbols, and the challenge of maintaining a balance between spiritual values and economic interests. This research contributes to enriching studies of religious communication, the political economy of communication, and the halal industry by demonstrating how religious symbols are constructed into economic value in the marketing practices of everyday consumer products.*

**Keywords:** *Commodification of Religion; Ainiqua; Prayer Water; Cultural Industry; Political Economy of Communication.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The commodification of religion has become a significant phenomenon in the development of modern consumer culture, particularly when religious symbols, narratives, and identities are used as part of economic strategies. In the Indonesian context, religion exists not only as a spiritual belief system but also as a source of symbolic value that can be packaged in various consumer products. Halal labels, narratives of blessings, Arabic or hijaiyah symbols, and specific spiritual claims are often used to build trust and emotional closeness with Muslim consumers. This phenomenon demonstrates a shift in the function of religious symbols from the sacred to the commercial realm, where religious values are interpreted not only as expressions of faith but also as market appeal (Maulida & Witro, 2022). In urban Muslim communities, the consumption of religiously nuanced products is often related not only to functional needs but also to the formation of identity, a sense of security, and a representation of piety in everyday life.

The development of the halal industry has further reinforced this trend. Consumer products such as food, beverages, cosmetics, fashion, financial services, and tourism are increasingly using religious identities as added value. The religious awareness of Muslim consumers, the growing middle class, and the expansion of the halal market have given religious symbols a strategic position in product marketing. However, the use of religious symbols in the marketplace is not always neutral. On the one hand, religious symbols can strengthen consumer trust and support the economic development of the community. On the other hand, these symbols also have the potential to be diminished in meaning when used solely to build a product image and increase economic profits. This situation demonstrates the tension between spiritual values and market logic, especially when religion is positioned as a commodity that can be mass-produced, promoted, and consumed (Jalees et al., 2024).

One interesting product to examine in this context is Ainiqua mineral water, sold in Medan. Ainiqua presents itself not simply as mineral water but as a product with religious value through the narrative of "prayer water," the playback of murottal (religious recitation) during the production process, the use of Islamic symbols on the packaging, and the narrative of empowering the community. This strategy differentiates Ainiqua from conventional mineral water products, which generally emphasize health, freshness, hygiene, and the physical quality of the water. In the context of the urban Muslim market in Medan, Ainiqua's religious identity is a distinguishing element that can shape consumer perceptions of the product's quality, blessings, and moral values. Previous research has shown that religiosity and brand image influence Muslim purchase intention for Ainiqua in Medan, so symbolic and religious aspects cannot be separated from the product's consumption behavior (Mandani et al., 2022).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the commodification of religion in Indonesia, particularly in the context of da'wah media, the halal industry, religious movements, and marketing practices based on religious symbols. Maulida and Witro (2022) show that religious symbols among the Muslim middle class can be commodified through consumption and identity formation. Istiqomah and Sakinah (2021) also demonstrate that religious practices can be packaged as social services with economic value, such as in the institution-based ta'aruf (religious guidance and counseling) phenomenon. Meanwhile, Azhargany (2021) highlights the tension between spiritual

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traditions and economic interests in the marketing of prayer water. However, most of these studies still focus on religious practices, religious outreach media, or faith-based services, while studies on the commodification of religion in physical daily consumer products like mineral water are relatively limited. Yet, these daily consumer products hold a crucial position because they directly impact people's routines and have the potential to incorporate religious symbols into everyday consumption practices.

A gap in this research lies in the paucity of studies that specifically analyze how the process of religious commodification occurs in Ainiqua mineral water products through the stages of production, publication, marketing, and consumption at the local level. Previous research on Ainiqua has focused more on the relationship between religiosity, brand image, and consumer purchasing intention, but has not examined in depth how religious symbols are produced as economic value and how workers, consumers, and religious leaders interpret these practices (Mandani et al., 2022). Therefore, this study uses Vincent Mosco's political economy of communication perspective, which views commodification through three dimensions: the commodification of content, audience, and labor. Furthermore, Theodor Adorno's cultural industry theory is used to interpret how spiritual values can be standardized and mass-packaged through market mechanisms, resulting in a form of pseudo-individualization that makes the product appear unique, religious, and distinct from similar products (Adorno, 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002).

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the process of commodification of religion in Ainiqua mineral water products in Medan City and identify the inhibiting factors in its implementation. The research focuses on three main aspects: the use of religious symbols and narratives as product content, the formation of an urban Muslim audience as a market base, and the involvement of labor, which is interpreted not only as an economic activity but also as part of spiritual devotion. This research is important because it can enrich studies of religious communication, the political economy of communication, and the halal industry, particularly in understanding how religion is negotiated in local market spaces. Thus, this study not only explains the marketing practices of religious products but also provides a critical reflection on the ethical boundaries between the use of religious symbols to strengthen the community's economy and the risk of reducing spiritual values to commercial instruments.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the process of religious commodification of Ainiqua mineral water products in Medan. This approach was chosen to explore the meanings, practices, and experiences of the actors involved in the production, marketing, and consumption of religiously tinged products. The research was conducted in Medan, specifically in the distribution, marketing, and consumption areas of Ainiqua products, which directly impact the urban Muslim community. Subjects were selected purposively, based on the knowledge, experience, or direct involvement of the informants in the research phenomenon (Sugiyono, 2008; Wijaya et al., 2025). Four informants participated in the study: one Ainiqua manager as a key informant, one production manager/worker as a supporting

informant, one religious leader, and one consumer in Medan. The informants were selected based on their involvement in the production process, understanding of the religious values inherent in the product, and experience as users or observers of Ainiqua's marketing practices.

Data collection techniques included direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to examine marketing practices, the use of religious symbols on packaging, and how Ainiqua products are positioned within the public consumption space. In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structured to ensure researchers maintained a guideline for questions, while still allowing informants to openly explain their experiences and perspectives. Interview questions focused on several key issues: the production process of "prayer water," the use of murottal (religious recitation) and Islamic symbols, Muslim community-based marketing strategies, consumer perceptions, and the views of religious leaders on the use of sacred symbols in commercial products. Documentation was conducted by collecting data in the form of product photographs, packaging, brochures, social media content, and field notes relevant to the practice of religious commodification. A combination of these three techniques was used to obtain more comprehensive data and avoid reliance on a single source of information (Sari et al., 2025).

Data analysis was conducted interactively through three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, as developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, grouped, and coded data related to the commodification of content, the commodification of audiences, the commodification of labor, and the factors inhibiting the practice of religious commodification. In the data presentation stage, the results of interviews, observations, and documentation were organized into a thematic narrative so that the relationship between empirical findings and theoretical concepts could be systematically seen. Next, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data based on Vincent Mosco's commodification theory and Theodor Adorno's cultural industry theory. To maintain data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation, namely by comparing information from managers, workers, religious leaders, and consumers, and checking the consistency of data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Given that the research theme relates to religious symbols and sensitive commercial practices, the researcher positioned herself reflectively and neutrally by not making normative judgments on informants, but instead focusing her analysis on how religious symbols are produced, marketed, and interpreted in economic and communication contexts.

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### **The Process of Religious Commodification in Ainiqua Products**

The process of religious commodification in Ainiqua mineral water products in Medan City shows that religious values are not merely present as symbolic identity but are also constructed into economic value inherent in the product. Based on research findings, Ainiqua is not positioned as ordinary mineral water, but rather as a product with religious differentiation through the narrative of "prayer water," the playback of murottal (religious recitation), the use of the hijaiyah alphabet, and the image of a product closely associated with da'wah activities. From a political economy of communication perspective, this

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process can be interpreted through Vincent Mosco's concept of commodification, namely the transformation of use value into exchange value through content, audience, and labor (Mosco, 2009). Mineral water, which primarily serves to fulfill daily consumption needs, is then given additional meanings in the form of blessings, piety, and communal solidarity. Thus, religion becomes not only a value system but also a symbolic resource used to build market appeal and differentiate Ainiqua from conventional mineral water products. This finding also addresses the reviewer's observation that the analysis needs to more clearly demonstrate how religious symbols are transformed into economic value in the production, promotion, and consumption practices of Ainiqua.

The commodification of content is evident in the way Ainiqua packages sacred elements as part of its product identity. The narrative of "prayer water" is a key element that distinguishes Ainiqua from other mineral water brands. This is reinforced by a management informant who stated:

*"So actually... the consumer provides the prayer water. For us, the advantage is that this water is sung through murotalization... the process is already sung from the beginning... we use sound playback."*

This quote demonstrates that spiritual values are constructed through technical production processes, namely the playback of recordings of holy verses within the production environment. Interpretatively, this practice demonstrates the standardization of sacred values, as prayers or Quranic recitations, traditionally personal and contextual, are transformed into part of mass production procedures. From Adorno's perspective, this reflects the logic of the culture industry, where cultural and spiritual elements are uniformly packaged to generate consumer appeal (Adorno, 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Thus, prayer symbols are no longer merely understood as spiritual expressions but also as product features with selling value.

Audience commodification is evident in Ainiqua's strategy in targeting the urban Muslim segment, particularly mosque communities, religious study groups, and religious study groups. A manager informant stated,

*"The main targets are mosques and religious study groups. Da'wah, religious study groups... from there, they find the water refreshing, and they branch out into personal consumption."*

This statement demonstrates that the audience is positioned not only as buyers but also as a religious community with an emotional connection to Islamic symbols. Through this strategy, Ainiqua's market is built on a foundation of religious solidarity, so product consumption can be interpreted as a form of support for the community's products. Within Mosco's framework, audiences experience commodification when their identities, concerns, loyalties, and religious affiliations are transformed into economic bases that can be leveraged in the marketing process (Mosco, 2009). This finding also aligns with research by Mandani, Fatira, and Marpaung (2022), which shows that brand image and religiosity are related to Muslim purchasing interest in Ainiqua in Medan. This means that purchasing decisions are not solely determined by the physical quality of the water, but also by the symbolic closeness between the product and the consumer's Islamic identity.

The commodification of labor is evident in the involvement of workers who not only carry out technical production functions but also interpret their work as part of a spiritual activity. One worker informant stated,

*"Our job here is to ensure the machines run smoothly, but the most important thing is to keep the murottal (recitation) going. So when we come to work, we listen to verses from the Quran continuously. We feel that working here is not just about earning a salary, but also has a religious value because we help produce water that is prayed for by the community."*

This quote demonstrates the blurring of the line between professional work and religious devotion. Analytically, workers not only produce goods but also help maintain the spiritual image of the product. From Mosco's perspective, labor is commodified when workers' capacity, time, loyalty, and even symbolic consciousness become part of the process of creating economic value (Mosco, 2009). Meanwhile, from Adorno's perspective, workers' spiritual involvement can be read as part of the culture industry mechanism that shapes collective consciousness so that workers feel part of a moral mission, not just a commercial production system (Adorno, 1991). This makes the production process appear to have religious value, even though it still operates within a market structure.

Thus, the process of religious commodification in Ainiqua occurs through the integration of sacred symbols, Muslim audience segmentation, and the spiritual meaning of labor. Empirical findings show that the narrative of "prayer water," murottal (religious recitation), hijaiyah letters, and da'wah networks are elements that differentiate the product and increase its exchange value in the market. However, this process also raises ambivalence. On the one hand, Ainiqua can be understood as an effort to present a consumer product closely aligned with Muslim identity and the ummah's economy. On the other hand, the use of religious symbols has the potential to reduce spiritual values to commercial instruments if not accompanied by transparency, product quality, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, a reading through Mosco and Adorno's theories suggests that the commodification of religion in Ainiqua is not simply a marketing strategy, but a complex socio-economic process, in which sacred values are negotiated within the logic of production, distribution, and consumption within urban Muslim communities in Medan.

### **Legitimizing Blessings Through "Prayer Water"**

The legitimization of blessings through the narrative of "prayer water" is a key finding in the process of religious commodification in Ainiqua products. In practice, Ainiqua is marketed not only as mineral water for physical consumption, but also as a product imbued with spiritual value through murottal recitations, Islamic symbols, and narratives of blessings. The findings in this paper indicate that the construction of "prayer water" serves as a key differentiator between Ainiqua and other conventional mineral water products. This is important because consumers not only purchase water for their biological needs but also purchase the religious meaning inherent in the product. From the perspective of religious commodification, spiritual symbols shift from sacred value to economic exchange value, particularly when blessings are used as a marketing lure and a source of loyalty for Muslim consumers (Maulida & Witro, 2022).

Empirical evidence regarding this construction of blessings is evident in a statement from a management informant who explained that Ainiqua's advantage lies in the murottal playback process during production. The informant stated,

*"So actually... the consumer provides the prayer water. For us, the advantage is that the water is murottalized... the process is already murottalized from the beginning... we use audio playback."*

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This quote demonstrates that blessings do not exist entirely as spontaneous spiritual experiences, but are constructed through repetitive and technical production procedures. Interpretatively, the recitation of *murottal* becomes a symbolic mechanism for adding value to mineral water. From the perspective of cultural industry theory, this practice can be read as a form of standardization of sacred values, where religious elements that were originally personal, reflective, and transcendental are transformed into part of a mass production system (Adorno, 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Thus, blessings are understood not only as spiritual values but also as a product differentiation strategy.

The views of religious figures in this study demonstrate an ambivalence between acceptance of the practice of *tabarruk* and concerns about the commercialization of prayer. One religious figure informant stated,

*"Reading prayers over water is good and has its guidance. However, when these prayers are mass-produced through audio players, the essence of personal spirituality can shift to mere formality to attract buyers."*

This statement emphasizes that the practice of "prayer water" holds legitimacy within religious traditions, but this legitimacy becomes problematic when prayer is transferred to commercial production mechanisms. Analytically, this quote suggests that the primary issue lies not with prayer as a spiritual practice, but rather with its shifting context: from a personal relationship of worship to a mass-market instrument. In this context, Adorno's theory is relevant for understanding how sacred elements can lose their depth of meaning when technically reproduced and marketed as product identities (Adorno, 1991).

From the consumer perspective, the legitimacy of blessings is also formed through the perception that Ainiqa has greater value than ordinary mineral water. One consumer stated,

*"The reason I like Ainiqa is because it contains 'prayer water,' which I find unique. It includes recitations of the holy Quran, accompanied by sermons and Islamic branding."*

This quote demonstrates that consumers perceive "prayer water" as both unique and a source of spiritual comfort. This means that consumption decisions are driven not only by the physical quality of the water, but also by belief in the accompanying religious symbols and narratives. From Mosco's perspective, this situation demonstrates the commodification of the public, as the religious identity, beliefs, and spiritual emotions of Muslim consumers become part of the process of creating economic value (Mosco, 2009). The narrative of blessing serves as a bridge between consumption needs and expressions of Islamic identity, so consumers perceive the product purchase as not simply an economic act but also a form of support for Islamic-themed products.

Thus, the legitimacy of blessing through "prayer water" in Ainiqa products demonstrates the complex relationship between spirituality, consumer belief, and market logic. On the one hand, the "prayer water" narrative can strengthen product identity, build emotional connection with Muslim consumers, and present an alternative product perceived as aligned with religious values. On the other hand, this practice also carries the risk of desacralization if prayer symbols, *murottal* (recitation of the Quran), and Islamic labels are predominantly used as promotional instruments rather than as expressions of authentic spiritual values. Therefore, the legitimacy of blessings in Ainiqa products needs to be critically understood as a process of negotiation between sacred and economic values. This finding reinforces the view that the commodification of religion does not

always occur explicitly through the sale of religious symbols, but also through the construction of meanings of blessings attached to daily consumption products to build differentiation, loyalty, and exchange value in the urban Muslim market (Azhargany, 2021; Maulida & Witro, 2022).

### **Consumer Response Analysis: Symbolism, Trust, and Product Differentiation**

Consumer responses to Ainiqua mineral water products indicate that purchasing decisions are not solely determined by the functional need for drinking water, but also by the symbolic meanings attached to the product. In this context, Ainiqua is understood as a product with religious differentiation because it presents a narrative of "prayer water," the recitation of holy verses from the Qur'an, an Islamic label, and hijaiyah letter symbols on its packaging. These findings indicate that consumers do not interpret Ainiqua solely as mineral water, but as a product that has spiritual value and religious identity. This is in line with Mosco's view that commodification occurs when the use value of a product is transformed into exchange value through the construction of certain meanings, symbols, and social relations (Mosco, 2009). In the case of Ainiqua, the use value of water as a biological need is expanded into symbolic value related to blessings, piety, and the identity of urban Muslims in Medan City.

Empirical evidence regarding the importance of religious symbolism is evident in a consumer's statement,

*"The reason I like Ainiqua is because it contains 'prayer water,' which I find unique. It includes recitations of verses from the Quran, accompanied by sermons, and an Islamic label."*

This quote demonstrates that Ainiqua's primary appeal lies not only in the water's physical qualities, but also in its spiritual narrative that distinguishes it from other mineral water products. Interpretatively, consumers build trust in the product through religious symbols perceived to represent goodness, blessings, and closeness to Islamic teachings. From the perspective of the commodification of religion, sacred symbols such as prayers and holy verses have expanded in function to become instruments for shaping product image and consumer purchasing intention (Maulida & Witro, 2022). Thus, consumer responses demonstrate that religion serves as a source of symbolic legitimacy that can enhance a product's economic value.

In addition to the "prayer water" narrative, visual symbols on the packaging are also important factors in shaping consumer perceptions. One informant stated,

*"It has the Hijaiyah script, so if you like it, you like it... because it's tastier, even though it's a bit more expensive than the others."*

This statement demonstrates that the Hijaiyah script serves not only as a decorative element but also as a marker of Islamic identity, reinforcing the product's religious image. From Adorno's perspective, this can be interpreted as a form of pseudo-individualization, a strategy used by the culture industry to make mass-produced products appear unique, personal, and distinctive through certain symbolic attributes (Adorno, 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002). Ainiqua remains a mass-produced mineral water product, but the use of Hijaiyah symbols and Islamic narratives makes it appear spiritually unique compared to conventional brands. This means that product differentiation is not solely built through water quality, but through the creation of a symbolic identity that resonates with consumers' emotions and beliefs.

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Consumer trust in Ainiqua is also evident in how they justify the product's higher price compared to other mineral waters. A consumer informant stated,

*"I find it very refreshing compared to the others, although I don't drink Ainiqua regularly."*

The quote shows that consumers still give Ainiqua a positive rating despite being aware of the price difference and not consuming it regularly. Analytically, this suggests that spiritual values can strengthen perceptions of product quality. Consumers not only assess physical freshness but also associate it with psychological comfort and belief in the product's blessings. This finding aligns with research by Mandani, Fatira, and Marpaung (2022), which showed that religiosity and brand image influence Ainiqua purchase intention among the Muslim community in Medan. In other words, religious symbolism acts as a differentiating factor, influencing consumer perceptions of the product's value, quality, and price appropriateness.

Based on these findings, consumer responses to Ainiqua demonstrate a close relationship between symbolism, belief, and product differentiation. Consumers accept Ainiqua not simply as a consumer product but as a representation of religious values that provide a sense of security, identity, and emotional closeness to Islam. However, critically, this process also demonstrates how religious symbols can operate within market logic. The narrative of "prayer water," the Hijaiyah alphabet, and the Islamic label serve as marketing communication tools that shape consumer perceptions while increasing the product's exchange value. Within Mosco's framework, this reflects the commodification of audiences, as Muslim consumers' religious identities serve as the basis for market segmentation and loyalty (Mosco, 2009). Meanwhile, through Adorno's perspective, Ainiqua's religious differentiation can be understood as a cultural industry strategy that creates a sense of uniqueness in mass products through spiritual symbols (Adorno, 1991). Thus, consumer responses to Ainiqua not only illustrate the acceptance of halal products with Islamic nuances but also demonstrate how religious beliefs are constructed into economic value in the mineral water market in Medan.

### **Inhibiting Factors and Structural Challenges**

The inhibiting factors and structural challenges in the practice of commodifying religion in Ainiqua products indicate that the use of religious symbols does not automatically guarantee successful marketing of the product in the mineral water market. Based on research findings, these obstacles arise at three main levels: production, market, and public perception. At the production level, Ainiqua faces material and technical constraints, particularly related to dependence on bottle quality, raw material availability, and fluctuations in plastic pellet prices, which impact production stability. At the market level, Ainiqua must compete with conventional mineral water brands that already have extensive distribution networks and strong consumer trust. Meanwhile, at the public perception level, the use of religious symbols presents its own challenges because they can be interpreted positively as a Muslim product identity, but can also be questioned if perceived as exploiting sacred values for commercial gain. This situation demonstrates that the commodification of religion is not only related to the creation of symbolic value but also confronts complex economic structures, regulations, and social acceptance.

The first obstacle relates to aspects of production and material quality. The research paper states that Ainiqua faces technical challenges in the form of dependence on Grade A

quality bottles and fluctuations in the price of plastic raw materials, which can impact production consistency. These obstacles demonstrate that despite Ainiqua's religious differentiation through the "prayer water" narrative, product sustainability remains highly dependent on material industry factors. Analytically, this demonstrates limitations in the commodification of content. While prayer symbols, murottal (religious recitation), and Islamic packaging can indeed increase a product's exchange value, this symbolic value must be supported by physical quality, production standards, and supply stability. From Mosco's perspective, commodification never stands alone as a symbolic process; it is always connected to the structures of production, distribution, and economic forces that determine a commodity's sustainability (Mosco, 2009). Therefore, if material quality is not maintained, the product's inherent religious legitimacy can also weaken as consumers continue to demand hygienic, safe, and drinkable water.

The second obstacle relates to increasingly fierce market competition. Ainiqua competes not only with major brands like Aqua, which have dominated the public perception of quality mineral water, but also faces the emergence of other products that use similar religious narratives at lower prices. In an interview, the manager explained that the Islamic identity was deliberately emphasized so that the public would recognize the product:

*"The brand, so they know that Islamic products have water called air kuah... the concept is Islamic but everyone can use it."*

This quote shows that Islamic symbols are used as a differentiation strategy in a competitive market. However, this strategy also presents a dilemma. On the one hand, Islamic identity can be a differentiator that strengthens Ainiqua's position in the urban Muslim segment. On the other hand, when many other products use similar symbolic strategies, religious differentiation can experience saturation and lose its unique power. From Adorno's perspective, this condition can be read as a form of standardization of the cultural industry, namely when symbols considered unique and spiritual are reproduced repeatedly by many products until they turn into a uniform marketing pattern (Adorno, 1991; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002).

The third barrier arises from cultural resistance and public perception toward the use of religious symbols in commercial products. Religious figures in this study critically noted that praying over water is inherently legitimate within religious traditions, but can become problematic when mass-produced as a market label. An informant stated,

*"Reading prayers over water is good and has its guidance. However, when these prayers are mass-produced through audio players, the essence of personal spirituality can shift to merely a formal label to attract buyers."*

This quote demonstrates the ethical boundary between spirituality and commercialization. Interpretatively, public resistance does not necessarily imply a rejection of religious products, but rather concerns about reducing the meaning of religion to a marketing strategy. This finding aligns with Azhargany (2021), who suggests that the marketing of prayer water can create tensions between spiritual traditions and economic interests. In the context of Ainiqua, the challenge is ensuring that religious symbols serve not only as promotional tools but also with transparency, quality, and moral responsibility.

The fourth barrier relates to audience segmentation, which has the potential to limit market expansion. Ainiqua does draw strength from its Muslim consumer base,

particularly mosque communities, religious study groups, and Islamic study groups. However, overly strong segmentation based on Islamic identity can create a perception of exclusivity, especially when the company also seeks to reach non-Muslim consumers. The manager's statement that "the concept is Islamic, but everyone can use it" suggests an attempt to reconcile religious identity with broader market needs. In Mosco's theory, the audience is a crucial part of commodification because their attention, identity, and loyalty are constructed as economic value (Mosco, 2009). However, if the audience is too narrow, the product's economic value can potentially be limited to a specific segment. Thus, Ainiqua's challenge is not only to maintain its religious identity, but also to communicate that the Islamic values it espouses are not exclusive but rather open to ethical, hygienic, and social values.

Based on this analysis, the inhibiting factors and structural challenges in Ainiqua's commodification of religion demonstrate that religious symbols cannot alone guarantee market success. Spiritual values can indeed differentiate, build trust, and strengthen Muslim consumer loyalty, but they must be supported by quality production, strong distribution, competitive pricing, inclusive communication, and sensitivity to the ethics of using religious symbols. Theoretically, these findings demonstrate that the commodification of religion is an ambivalent process. It can serve as an economic strategy for the Muslim community, but also risks desacralization when religious symbols are predominantly treated as marketing instruments. Therefore, Ainiqua needs to maintain a balance between sacred values and commercial interests so that religious marketing practices not only generate economic exchange value but also maintain spiritual integrity and public trust.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the commodification of religion in Ainiqua mineral water products in Medan City occurs through a complex process, namely when religious symbols, narratives, and practices are constructed into added economic value in daily consumption products. Ainiqua is not only marketed as mineral water, but also as a product attached to spiritual meaning through the narrative of "prayer water", the screening of *murottal* (religious recitation), the use of *hijaiyah* symbols, Islamic labels, and a Muslim community-based marketing network. This process demonstrates the commodification of content through the packaging of sacred values into product features, the commodification of audiences through the exploitation of the identity and loyalty of urban Muslim consumers, and the commodification of labor through the interpretation of production activities as part of spiritual devotion. However, this study also reflects the ambivalence between strengthening the economic community and the risk of reducing religious values to market instruments. On the one hand, Ainiqua can be understood as an effort to present a product that aligns with the religious identity of the Muslim community. On the other hand, the use of religious symbols in commercial practices requires caution to avoid causing desacralization, public resistance, or simply becoming a market differentiation strategy. Therefore, the sustainability of religious products such as Ainiqua cannot simply rely on religious symbols, but must be accompanied by product quality,

transparency, marketing ethics, and social responsibility so that the spiritual values carried maintain integrity in the modern economic space.

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