



THE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF SHALAWATAN TRADITION: STUDY ON THE PEKALONGAN AZ-ZAHIR ASSEMBLY



Mohammad Zuhurul Fuad¹ , Sujadi²

***Correspondence:**

Email:
zuhurulf@gmail.com

Authors Affiliation:

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri
Sunan Kalijaga
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Article History:

Submission: November 13, 2024
Revised: November 26, 2024
Accepted: December 26, 2024
Published: December 31, 2024

Keywords: Shalawatan, Industrialization, Religious Commodification, Local Tradition, Pekalongan.

Kata Kunci: Shalawatan, Industrialisasi, Komodifikasi, Tradisi Lokal, Pekalongan.

Abstract

This study aims to observe the phenomenon of reciting *shalawat* in the Pekalongan Az-Zahir Assembly. *Shalawat*, which was previously a private domain with a worship value, has gradually changed into an activity with a profit value. This qualitative study employs a socio-cultural approach associated with digital media. Continuing the research on the tradition of reciting *shalawat* in existing research, most of the existing themes only touch on the aspect of the influence of the *shalawat* tradition on people's behavior and also increase their love for their homeland. The commodification of *shalawat* in the Az-Zahir group is reviewed through three aspects: content commodification, audience commodification, and worker commodification. It can be understood that the relationship between the religiosity of commodities and the commodification of religion is complex and interdependent. Commodities are traded goods or services, while religion is a belief system that regulates human relations with God or a higher power. Although originating from different domains, both often influence and shape each other.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat fenomena pembacaan shalawat di Majelis Az-Zahir Pekalongan. Shalawat yang sebelumnya merupakan ranah privat yang memiliki nilai ibadah, lambat laun berubah menjadi aktivitas yang memiliki nilai keuntungan. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan pendekatan sosial budaya yang dikaitkan dengan media digital. Melanjutkan penelitian tentang tradisi pembacaan shalawat pada penelitian yang sudah ada, sebagian besar tema yang ada hanya menyentuh aspek pengaruh tradisi shalawat terhadap perilaku masyarakat dan juga meningkatkan rasa cinta tanah air. Komodifikasi shalawat di kelompok Az-Zahir ditinjau melalui tiga aspek yaitu komodifikasi konten, komodifikasi audiens, dan komodifikasi pekerja. Dapat dipahami bahwa hubungan antara religiusitas komoditas dan komodifikasi agama bersifat kompleks dan saling bergantung. Komoditas merupakan barang atau jasa yang diperjualbelikan, sedangkan agama merupakan sistem kepercayaan yang mengatur hubungan manusia dengan Tuhan atau kekuatan yang lebih tinggi. Meskipun berasal dari ranah yang berbeda, keduanya kerap kali saling memengaruhi dan membentuk.

INTRODUCTION

Shalawat is an activity of praising the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a form of love and prayer. Chanting *shalawat* is highly recommended in Islam (Q.S. Al-Ahzab – 56). As a religious practice, it has complex social and cultural dimensions. In the context of industrialization and digitalization, *shalawat* has undergone significant transformation. *Shalawat Azzahir* is part of the popular *shalawat* tradition in Indonesia. It combines religious lyrics with elements of traditional vocal art and music. This group has attracted attention because of its ability to combine spiritual messages with heart-touching aesthetics, making it an effective medium for preaching.



When looking at the pre-industrialization of digital media, *shalawat*, like *Azzahir*, was spread through local forums, such as religious study groups, mosques, or community religious events. Its influence was local and limited by the group's physical ability to be present in various places. It is in contrast to today, when many people create content for social media, with one of them transforming *shalawat* into a digital media industry, such as YouTube, Instagram, Spotify and online stores that provide merchandise.

The industrialization process allows *Shalawat Azzahir* to become a more structured and organized cultural product. Several aspects of industrialization have an impact on *Shalawat Azzahir*. With the existence of commercialization, namely the increasing demand from the community (Goletti et al., 2003), *Shalawat Azzahir* began to be recorded in the form of cassettes, CDs, and other digital products. This opens up opportunities for economic commodities that expand their reach and popularity. The standardization of production through the industrialization process improves the quality of music and video recordings, providing the audience with a more in-depth experience (Haeruddin, K., 2024). In addition, mass distribution in media companies plays a significant role in distributing *Azzahir* content to a broader market, reaching communities throughout Indonesia and even internationally.

In today's digital age, religious expressions have increasingly permeated online platforms, transforming traditional practices into digital content (Battista, D., 2024). *Shalawat Azzahir*, a prominent religious group from Pekalongan, exemplifies this trend by broadcasting their devotional performances through various digital media. Despite their widespread popularity, there is a noticeable scarcity of academic studies examining how such practices are commodified in the digital realm (Aroles, J. et al., 2020). The phenomenon of commodifying religious rituals is not new. Research indicates that religious elements such as the Quran, prayer, and charitable acts have been transformed into commodities, often driven by economic motives. In the context of *shalawat* assemblies, performances are sometimes structured akin to religious franchises, where charismatic figures and organized events contribute to a commodified religious experience. *Shalawat Azzahir*'s digital presence, characterized by professionally produced content and widespread online dissemination, reflects spiritual devotion and commodification intertwining. While rooted in religious tradition, their performances are packaged for mass consumption, raising questions about the implications of such commodification on the authenticity and perception of religious practices.

In the digital era, *Shalawat Azzahir* in the virtual world has brought revolutionary changes in how people access and enjoy *Shalawat Azzahir*. The presence of platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and social media makes it easier to distribute *shalawat* to a global audience. Millions of people can now watch videos of *Shalawat Azzahir* performances in just a matter of days. Groups like *Azzahir* can interact directly with fans on social media, increasing emotional closeness. Creative Innovation Digitalization encourages the incorporation of modern elements in the presentation of *shalawat*, such as visual effects, cross-genre collaboration, and adaptation of advanced production technology.

The latest developments in the discussion of *shalawat* no longer only debate whether or not it is permissible to do it but also reach into the socio-cultural aspects and the media used to spread it. This article analyzes how *shalawat* adapts to become

an industry with economic and cultural dynamics and its implications for Muslims' religious and social identities.

As the times changed, *shalawat* began to experience changes in value. *Shalawat* activities began to be commercialized, making them a commodity with economic and profit value. This commodification of *shalawat* can be seen from several aspects: musical, media, and economic. From the musical aspect, *shalawat*, which initially only used simple verses, began to be arranged in a modern way using modern tools. It makes *shalawat* more interesting and popular among the public. Furthermore, from a media aspect, *shalawat* began to be promoted through mass media, such as television, radio, and the internet. This makes *shalawat* more easily accessible to the public. From an economic aspect, *shalawat* began to be traded in CDs, DVDs, and merchandise turning it into a commodity that could generate economic benefits (Bekkering, D. J., 2011).

Until now, there has been lack of focus on shalawat tradition concerning social culture, economy, and digital media. Most writings only address one aspect (Taylor, L. (Ed.), 2001). When referring to the *Shalawat Azzahir* group, the discussion is more inclined toward preaching and the meaning of shalawat from a religious aspect (Aryani, S. A., 2017). Thus, the writer is interested in discussing the commodification of religion and religiosity commodities in the *Shalawat Azzahir* group.

The *shalawatan* tradition in Indonesia, primarily through the activities of the Azzahir assembly in Pekalongan, has undergone a visible transformation. Once grounded in purely spiritual and communal practice, this tradition has increasingly adopted the aesthetics and mechanisms of the market and digital culture. This literature review explores how concepts of commodification, digital religious space, and cultural transformation frame our understanding of Azzahir's evolution.

Goletti, Purcell, and Smith (2003) provided a foundational understanding of commodification as the process of turning cultural or social practices into marketable goods or services. While their work focuses on agricultural development, the underlying theory is adaptable to cultural phenomena like shalawatan, where spiritual acts are performed, recorded, and monetized. Williams and Nadin (2010) further challenged us to look at commercialization as embedded in a "whole economy," — highlighting how sacred practices can be subtly woven into capitalist systems under the guise of community engagement and creativity. Haeruddin's (2024) study of indie music in Makassar contributed relevant insight into how local traditions can be reshaped through digital platforms, emphasizing how production, branding, and community resonance play a role in the cultural economy.

Similarly, *shalawatan*, especially the Azzahir group, is not merely devotional — it becomes an aestheticized, branded, and consumable performance, reflecting market logic and localized spiritual identity. Aryani (2017) offered a sociological exploration of *shalawatan* as a "healthy-minded religious phenomenon," noting how its structure accommodates emotional and spiritual needs while fostering a sense of unity and resilience. Her focus on three major *shalawat* assemblies in Java aligns with the case of Azzahir, which similarly appeals to youth and urban Muslims, offering both religious fulfillment and a sense of cultural belonging. Meanwhile, Lail and Mawardi (2024) interrogated the intersection of *shalawat* and church music, locating both within the context of spiritual sweetness and pop culture. This matter reinforces the idea that

religious expressions today are deeply enmeshed with entertainment sensibilities, a theme central to Azzahir's public image, performances, and online persona.

The digitization of *shalawat* practices is also crucial to understanding their commodification. Battista (2024) proposed that digital spaces can become "sacred spaces" in their own right, where religious identity and participation are redefined through virtual engagement. This is evident in Azzahir's live streams, YouTube uploads, and social media clips, all of which use the screen and speaker to mediate the worship experience.

Bekkering (2011) and Hayes (2018) analyzed how religious preaching has transitioned from televangelism to online formats. The emergence of the "intervangelist" suggests a new kind of preacher who acts as both a content creator and a spiritual guide. This description could apply to Azzahir's charismatic leaders who navigate both spiritual and media realms. fLingel (2017) and Aroles et al. (2020) also offered a broader cultural lens, examining how subcultures and alternative spiritualities use digital tools for identity formation and community building. Their insights help frame Azzahir not as an anomaly but as part of a broader cultural shift where digital presence becomes integral to religious authority and growth — tracing historical precedents in the transformation of preaching from public square to pulpit and now to the digital world. These works underscore that while the platforms and aesthetics may change, the core intent of spiritual outreach persists — albeit shaped by the tools and economies of the time.

This change in the pattern of *shalawat* relations can cause several problems, namely increasing the exclusivity of *shalawat*. Social stratification in *shalawat* can increase its exclusivity. *Shalawat* can only be enjoyed by certain people leading to social inequality. Social stratification in *shalawat* can reduce its spiritual value. *Shalawat* becomes more emphasized on economic or ideological aspects, so its spiritual value is reduced.

When observing the music and melody in the *Shalawat Az-Zahir*, one notices a distinct musical style that frequently creates a serene atmosphere and moves the hearts of its listeners. The Az-Zahir Pekalongan *shalawat* often uses Javanese in its *shalawat* chants. This language provides a local and distinctive touch to the Pekalongan region. Traditional musical instruments such as tambourines generally accompany *Shalawat Az-Zahir*. This musical instrument provides a traditional touch to the chanting of the *shalawat*. The poetry or lyrics in the *Shalawat Az-Zahir* revolve around Islamic themes, praising and reflecting on the greatness of Allah, and praising the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The *Shalawat Az-Zahir* is often an event for large mass gatherings. Their *shalawat* events can be attended by thousands of people, creating an atmosphere of togetherness and love for the Prophet. The *Shalawat Az-Zahir* is known to provide peace and spiritual fragrance to its listeners. The chanting of this *shalawat* is not only musical but also spiritual.

This study uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research is a method of producing about observed behavior, either verbally or in writing. On that basis, qualitative is a scientific research method. The main instrument is the researcher's ability to understand concepts and initial understanding in his/her consciousness. Qualitative method analysis is inductive, starting from social problems in society and then combining them with theoretical concepts. The emphasis of research results using qualitative methods is on the specific meaning of the social reality in the *shalawatan*

tradition of the *Shalawat Azzahir* group. The second method involved conducting interviews with event organizer of the Shalawat Event from Purwokerto Banyumas to elaborate on the case of Azzahir Assembly. It was achieved through a combination of in-depth observation and interviews. In addition, this method allows for identifying various components that influence the change in the *shalawat* tradition, transforming it into an entertainment industry and an economic commodity, including the adaptation of the dynamics of society that continues to change.

The data analysis technique used in this study is the Miles and Huberman model, which has three important stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Salim, A., 2006). Data reduction focuses on selecting relevant and important data. Data presentation combines theoretical concepts with reduced field data (Sugiyono, 2020). Then, conclusions are drawn based on the relationship between the presented findings and show logical, coherent, and holistic results.

THE PROFILE OF AZZAHIR ASSEMBLY

Initially, this assembly was founded by Habib Ali Zainal Abidin Assegaf in 2004. Every Kliwon Friday, this assembly holds a reading of the Prophet's birthday after performing Friday prayers at his residence on Toba Street No. 53 Pekalongan, Central Java, which is now the Secretariat of the Azzahir Assembly. Over time, the assembly previously held on Friday afternoon was changed to Kliwon Friday night, and studies of fiqh and morals were added according to the direction of Al-Habib Muhammad Luthfi bin Yahya. In addition to the routine assembly held on Kliwon Friday night, the Azzahir Assembly also has routine activities and *maulid safaris* in several places, both in the Pekalongan Regency, around Central Java Province, and other cities. Every year, the Azzahir Assembly also holds the Maulid Akbar and Haul Al-Habib Seggaf bin Abubakar Assegaf, which are attended by lovers of the great Prophet Muhammad SAW. Initially, this assembly was only called the Maulid Assembly, but when they wanted to hold the Maulid Akbar, the congregation asked Habib Ali Zainal Abidin Assegaf to name his assembly. This assembly was finally named Azzahir, according to the name of his father's Islamic Boarding School in Probolinggo Regency, East Java, which was named Azzahir by his grandfather, Al-Habib Abu Bakar bin Muhammad Assegaf.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE SHALAWAT AZ-ZAHIR ASSEMBLY

The study of the true commodification of religion has become a popular topic among academics. As a teaching and guide for life, religion has become a commodity with profit value for many individuals (Vincent Mosco, 2014) (Balog, A., M. et al., 2014) (Kitiarsa, P., 2007). According to experts, discourse about religion becomes commodities with profit value, and it is called market religion. In the market of religion, there are agents called religious entrepreneurs (Balog, A. M., et al., 2014), where the agent tries to supply religion in a brand or packaging that consumers can accept. This action is then called the term supply-side religion, which means presenting religion in proper form with appetite in modern society so that they embrace religion (Mara Einstein, 2007).

Based on this idea, it is clear that religion is an essential need for society. This need is, of course, diverse. Some are present in the form of lectures, invitations, or even economic training. In this article, religion is presented through the tradition of reciting

shalawat. In the last decade, reciting *shalawat* has had its own appeal, not only in modern urban society but also in rural and traditionalist society.

Several aspects can be used to read the commodification of religion through the *Shalawat Azzahir* group. Referring to Vincent Mosco's thoughts, three things are categorized in the commodification of *shalawat*. Among them are the following:

"First is content commodification. Commodification in this category is the change of religious content into a commodity with a profit value. In the context of this study, *shalawat*, which was previously behavior-oriented towards worship values, changed to become marketable. Several aspects contribute to *shalawat*'s profitability. Firstly, the *shalawat* sung by Habib Ali Zainal Abidin Assegaf. Celebrity Habib Ali is noted for his greeting 'Habib.'"

Many believe Habib refers to someone descended from Sayyidah Fatimah, the Prophet Muhammad SAW's daughter. Habib's greeting has become more familiar in society and is identical to people who convey religious messages through reading *shalawat*. Furthermore, there is a belief in society that prayers recited by Habib have a stronger spiritual appeal than prayers read by those without the title Habib.

This matter shows a change in society's authority. Previously, religious authority was held by people with the title 'kiai,' 'gus,' and 'ustadz,' in religious lecture. However, in the context of *shalawat*, this authority has shifted to individuals with the title Habib. It can happen because the media creates a celebrity culture (Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019).

This culture differs from traditionalist scholars, who claim that the teachings they convey come from religious texts. However In celebrity culture, agents (including Habib) claim they only transmit Islamic teachings or a religious language called Religious Preaching (Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019).

Something similar also happened to *Shalawat Az-Zahir* group. Habib Ali's celebrity stems not only from his habib greeting but also from the role of media in promoting the group's popularity. In addition, the *Az-zahir* group's ability is also seen in mastering modern media. This mastery is demonstrated by their ability to administer social media platforms YouTube and Instagram. This skill then impacts marketing, resulting in the group's widespread acceptance by the public.

In addition, there is also an aspect of the content of the prayers that are delivered so that they can be widely accepted. At least, the chanting of *Az-Zahir* prayers is divided into three types: first, *shalawat*, for which lyrics and tune are already well-known to the public; second, *shalawat*, for which lyrics were created long ago, but the tunes have been arranged or renewed. Furthermore, they are often accompanied by poems containing messages of piety. Third, variations in tunes are created by the members of the group themselves.

The contents of the *shalawat* popularized by *Azzahir* have also been widely published as compilations of *shalawat* book for sale to society. As we know, the books sold have made the name of Habib Ali Zainal Abidin and the "Azzahir" Group, as famous *shalawat* group, and have become a trademark, increasing the attraction of their commercial books. This creates connection between

Azzahir's collection of *shalawat* books is marketed in conventional bookstores and sold through online stores at prices ranging from 50,000 IDR to 75,000 IDR. From an economic perspective, these mass-marketed books are assumed to be financially profitable, a principle commonly used in trade.

Picture 1: Shalawat Azzahir's Book

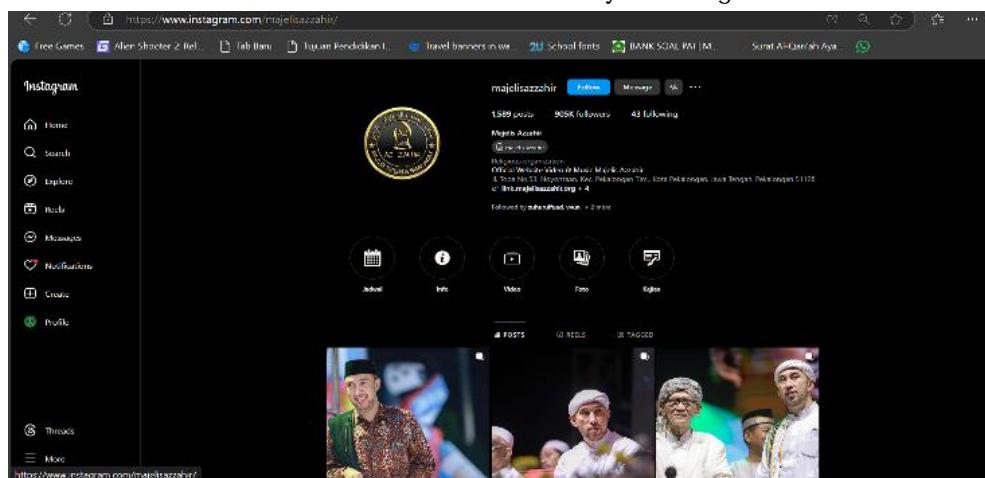


The second category is the commodification of the audience. In this category, audiences become commodities that can increase profit value. This can be seen through the media, such as TV, radio, or the internet (Vincent Mosco, 2014).

In context of this article, audience commodification is seen through the presence of the audience both offline and online. A marketable audience becomes a means of providing space for advertising (Anggrisia, 2020). Offline, this can be seen in the number of sponsors supporting offline events. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the average offline event attendance is in the tens of thousands.

Furthermore, the offline assembly basis is frequently used to endorse many parties. Az-Zahir frequently has events involving TNI (The Indonesian National Armed Forces), POLRI (Indonesian National Police), and local government members. This is simply a form designed to elicit sympathy from the society for the sponsored ranks. In addition, not infrequently, several educational institutions have also taken advantage of the name Az-Zahir to boost the electability or existence of the institution in society (Cut Asri & Moh Soehadha, 2022).

Picture 2: Screenshot of Azzahir Assembly's Instagram Account



Through his most active social media platform, Instagram, which has 905,000 followers, Habib Ali Zaenal Abidin and the Azzahir Council become societal role models and idols. With numerous positive comments on each Instagram post, Azzahir has captured the attention of netizens.

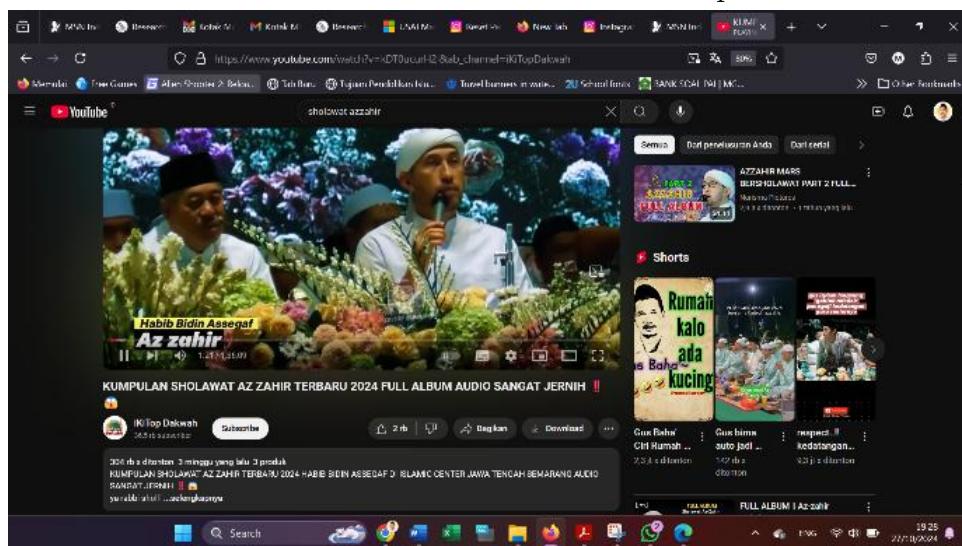
As for online content, the Azzahir Assembly has already penetrated digital music platforms such as iTunes or Spotify. Through YouTube, Azzahir, with the @MajelisAzzahir account, has 1.18 million subscribers and viewers reach around 300,000 up to 2 million views.

Picture 3: Screenshot Azzahir Assembly's YouTube Account



This is then reasonable when the account can achieve income from AdSense that comes in every video. As it is known that AdSense is on YouTube, no one will enter except an account that has reached 1000 subscribers with an average viewing of 4000 hours in one year. From the YouTube account, which has 1.3 million subscribers, AdSense from YouTube already fulfills the condition to get income from the uploaded video.

Picture 4: Screenshot of Azzahir's YouTube Reupload Account



Additionally, some people re-upload recordings of *Shalawat Azzahir* to earn AdSense. By re-uploading this, they also get income from YouTube from chanting *Shalawat Azzahir*. One of them is the *ikitop da'wah* account, which has obtained 36,500 subscribers with an average of 100,000 viewers of *shalawat* for the birth of a child each Azzahir video content.

The third category is the commodification of workers. It can be seen through a worker's hours, which are then commodified through wages or salary. This article

depicts the commodification of workers by all members of the Az-Zahir assembly. This is because all members, both visible and documented, contribute to making Az-Zahir content acceptable to all levels of society.

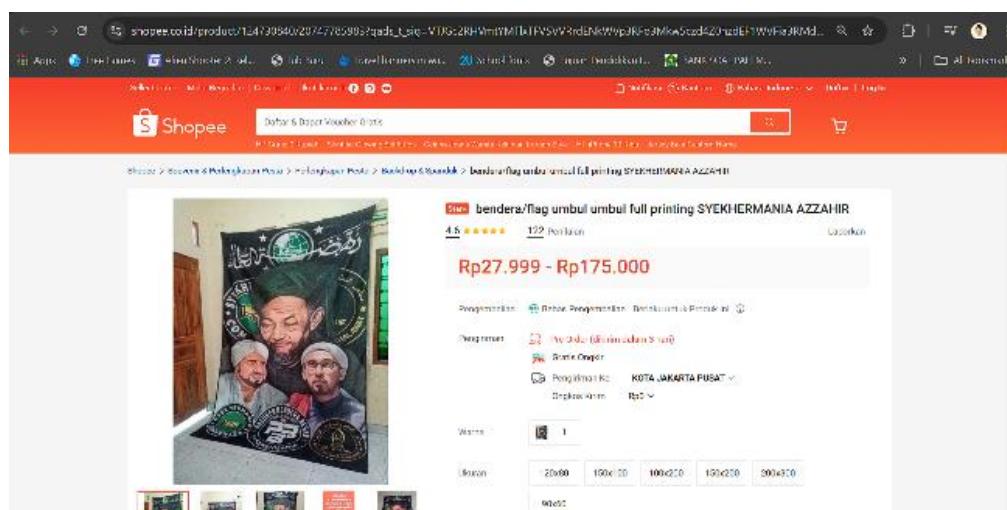
There is a lack of publicly available information on the salaries of personnel involved in the Az-Zahir Assembly because they do not expect material rewards but rather the blessings of *shalawat*. There is a perception that asking about honorariums in this matter is unethical. As religious assemblies that Az-Zahir grow rapidly, attract significant funding, and engage in commodity activities such as merchandise sales and sponsored events, they increasingly resemble formal institutions or companies. In this context, financial disclosure becomes important, especially when public donations or government supports are involved. The lack of salary transparency can raise questions about financial ethics, the distribution of organizational resources, and the potential exploitation of religious authority for personal gain.

However, a fascinating aspect of this worker commodification is the Az-Zahir Assembly produces the most content through the events that are being played. This means that the content uploaded to platforms like YouTube and Instagram results from a specific location. They get a lot of income from this content, which can be a profit opportunity for content creators.

Regarding hours of experience, for example, its Instagram account appears more than 15 times a month. Both domestically and internationally, someone who wants to invite the Az-Zahir Assembly must establish a fee of approximately 40–50 million IDR for each appearance. Based on internet searches and confirmed by interviews with people who have ever invited the Azzahir Assembly, it has a rate with a complete package model complete with a request for budget adjustment. The duration obtained from one event is around 3–4 hours.

When associated with the theory of Ronald Lukens-Bull (Pattana Kitiarsa, Routledge, 2008), several things are highlighted about the existence of commodity religiosity. Among them is merchandise identical to Azzahir Assembly, which is traded at every event held or through online stores. Some goods traded range from stickers, *koko* shirts, *peci/kopyah*, jackets, turbans, and even flags of various sizes. These items for *zahir mania* (the term for lovers of Az-zahir Assembly) are a source of pride and can create a sense of love for their idols. Through this merchandise, it can also be a marker of a person's piety when attending the *shalawat* assembly.

Picture 4: The Flag of Azzahir



Along with the advancement of technology, a professional sound system is an essential component of any Azzahir Assembly event. This sound system is an example of globalization being absorbed into religion. In addition, it adds a sense of solemnity on one side while making the event more energetic on the other. With a professional sound system, people who listen to the chanting of *Shalawat Azzahir* feel calm and serene. Some people feel happy just listening to it.

Furthermore, the use of a magnificent stage with lighting and magnificent decorations is also a form of including modern technology elements in religious activities. It is indisputable that there needs to be an attraction through a magnificent appearance to get the audience interested. Even in the decorations used in the event, not only with banner writing, some people rent videotrons or LED screens to add to the excitement.

DISCUSSION

The author's findings from the *Shalawat Azzahir* group are similar to the research of (Anggarisia, 2020) (Cut Asri & Moh Soehadha, 2022) about the existence of commodification in religious rites. All of them show that in today's world, religion is often reframed as a lifestyle and content product, influenced by media aesthetics, consumer culture, and youth engagement—raising questions about the authenticity and purpose of modern religious expressions. In the case of Azzahir group, *shalawat*, as a tradition that was initially private, has metamorphosed from being just a tradition of preaching and ceremonial activities praising the Prophet Muhammad SAW into an economically beneficial commodity. Not only does this apply to Azzahir group personnel, but the benefits are also received by people involved in other fields, such as stage rentals, lighting, decoration and professional sound systems. This matter creates a significant economic turnover.

The Azzahir Assembly in Pekalongan exemplifies a contemporary reassociation of traditional Islamic practice with the mechanisms of commodification. Initially rooted in communal worship and egalitarian spirituality, Azzahir's *shalawatan* is increasingly embedded in media—driven performance culture. Through large—scale concerts, professionally produced recordings, and social media dissemination, the group's devotional acts are no longer confined to spiritual edification but are now intertwined with market dynamics. This reassociation transforms the act of *shalawat* into a consumable religious product—where followers are not just participants in worship but also consumers of branded experiences. The incorporation of digital platforms, ticketed events, and merchandise further reinforces this shift, reflecting what Williams and Nadin (2010) describe as the commercialization of everyday life, where religious sentiment is recontextualized within economic frameworks. Azzahir's musical identity—combining local aesthetics with mass appeal—thus symbolizes of how sacred expressions adapt to and are reshaped by commercialized structures in the digital era.¹

Azzahir merchandise often features religious symbols personalized with the assembly's name or logo. This turns sacred symbols into commodities that can be owned privately. The sale of merchandise becomes a source of income for the assembly or the individual who produces it, turning religious practice into a business. Some

¹ Williams, C. C., & Nadin, S. (2010). Rethinking the commercialization of everyday life: a "whole economy" perspective. *foresight*, 12(6), 55-68.

merchandise products may exploit religious symbols for purely commercial purposes without regard to the religious values contained therein (Sa'dullah, A., 2023).

The role of digital media has increasingly made Azzahir famous and transformed from a *shalawat* group that was only known by the people around Pekalongan to being famous on Instagram, YouTube, and music platforms such as Spotify and MusicTube. This is a form of industrialization of the *shalawatan* tradition into profitable content. The existence of attributes labeled with the leader of Azzahir, namely Habib Ali Zainal Abidin (Habib Bidin), influences marketing. It is proven that flags or pennants with pictures of Habib Bidin are widely traded during *shalawatan* events and also in online stores. This shows a significant effect of the presence of Habib Bidin and the Azzahir group.

Unlike religious bands that use modern musical instruments, the Azzahir Group only relies on traditional instruments such as *Terbang*, *Darbuka*, and *Bass*. However, the skill of the players and the quality of the audio produced entertain the listeners and help them appreciate the strains of the *shalawat*. This shows that the *shalawat* tradition, when appropriately managed, has a selling value and can generate profits.

The *Shalawat Azzahir* group has significantly impacted reviving the trend of *shalawat* groups in society in various aspects. Its extraordinary popularity and appeal, supported by distinctive music, stunning vocals, and solemn presentations, have inspired the younger generation to form similar groups that use *shalawat* as a medium for preaching and art. In addition, Azzahir's ability to combine Islamic traditions with musical innovation creates opportunities for other groups to remain relevant in the modern era. Their active role in various religious events, such as the *maulid* and grand teachings, has also encouraged local communities to form *shalawat* groups to meet religious entertainment needs (Brevenda Yulia Akmal, B. Y. A., 2022). Azzahir's use of social media has also become an example of success in reaching a wider audience, which was then followed by new groups such as Gandrung Nabi Assembly from Blora, Sekar Langit Assembly with Habib Zaidan as the icon, and there is also the Alfata Al-Muntadhor group from Banyumas. This success has triggered a cultural domino effect, where many *shalawat* groups have made Azzahir a role model in building their image and quality. With all these influences, Azzahir has become not only a leading *shalawat* group but also an agent of cultural transformation (Karmela, S. H., & Yanto, F., 2021) that popularizes *shalawat* in society and creates a new generation of *shalawat* lovers in addition to the economic value that has become an entertainment industry.

In today's media-driven culture, religious groups like Az-Zahir have successfully blended spiritual practice with performance, branding, and mass appeal, creating a powerful online and offline presence. This model reflects a broader trend where religion is mediated through commercial aesthetics and public visibility. However, as digital trends change and followers become more critical of performative religiosity, there may be growing tension between spiritual sincerity and market-driven expressions of faith. Audiences might seek forms of religious engagement that feel more personal, grounded, and less commodified. Alternatively, religious commodification could adapt by becoming more subtle—relying on lifestyle branding or influencer culture rather than overt commercialism. The future of this phenomenon depends on how religious communities, especially youth, navigate the balance between meaningful faith and the demands of visibility in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the existence of religious commodification and religiosity of commodities in the *Shalawat Az-Zahir* group. Based on the discussion presented, this article can conclude that the commodification of *shalawat* occurs in the *Shalawat Az-Zahir* group through three aspects. First is the commodification of contents, which changes the chanting of *shalawat* into profit value. Second is the commodification of the audience, namely, making the audience have profit value through advertising both in online and offline media. Third is the commodification of workers, where all *Az-Zahir* members get income from online sources and offline events.

Besides the existence of commodification of religion, there is also religiosity commodity through merchandise identified with the Azzahir Assembly, such as stickers, *koko* shirts, *peci/kopyah*, turbans, and flags, which are traded both in *shalawat* events and online. The use of a professional sound system, magnificent stage layout and decorations create a special excitement in the Azzahir assembly *shalawat* event. This is a commodity included in religious activities.

It can be understood that the relationship between the religiosity of commodities and the commodification of religion is complex and mutually reinforcing. Basically, commodities are goods or services that are traded, while religion is a belief system that regulates human relations with God or a higher power. Although originating from different domains, both often influence and shape each other. This is what the author tries to explain in this article.

This article does not delve deeply into the broader social, cultural, and economic factors influencing commodification and religiosity. The author does not discuss much about how globalization trends or local market dynamics influence these phenomena.

REFERENCES

- Anggrisia, N. F. (2020). AGAMA SEBAGAI "KOMODITAS"? Memosisikan Majelis Shalawat sebagai Waralaba Religius. *TRILOGI: Jurnal Ilmu Teknologi, Kesehatan, dan Humaniora*, 1(1), 42–51
- Arifin, Y. *Habib Bidin Assegaf: Cahaya Shalawat dalam Nada Indah Az-Zahir*. DIVA PRESS.
- Aroles, J., Granter, E., & de Vaujany, F. X. (2020). 'Becoming mainstream': the professionalisation and corporatisation of digital nomadism. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35(1), 114–129.
- Aryani, S. A. (2017). Healthy-minded religious phenomenon in shalawatan: a study on the three majelis shalawat in Java. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 7(1), 1–30.
- Asri, Cut and Moh Soehadha. (2022) "Komodifikasi Agama: Studi Analisis Terhadap Tampilan Agama Di Instagram," *Mukaddimah: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 7(1), 98–113.
- Balog, A. M., Baker, L. T., & Walker, A. G. (2014). Religiosity and spirituality in entrepreneurship: a review and research agenda. *Journal of management, spirituality & religion*, 11(2), 159–186.
- Battista, D. (2024). The Digital as Sacred Space: Exploring the Online Religious Dimension. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, 15(29), 21–37.

- Bekkering, D. J. (2011). From 'Televangelist' to 'Intervangelist' The Emergence of the Streaming Video Preacher. *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 23(2), 101 – 117.
- Brevenda Yulia Akmal, B. Y. A. (2022). *Analisis Nilai Religius Pada Lirik Lagu Dalam Album Khazanah Shalawat Karya Ustaz Jefri Al Buchori* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Batanghari).
- Collamati, A., Vosko, R., & Zenthofer, A. (2016). *Preaching in a Digital Age. A Handbook for Catholic Preaching*, 254.
- Commodification of religion and the 'religionification' of commodities: youth culture and religious identity, Religious Commodifications In Asia Marketing Gods Edited by Pattana Kitiarsa, Routledge, 2008.
- Goletti, F., Purcell, T., & Smith, D. (2003). Concepts of commercialization and agricultural development. *Agrifood Consulting International Discussion Paper Series*, 8.
- Haeruddin, K. (2024). Musik Indie Makassar: Makna, Proses Publikasi, dan Lokalitas. *Emik*, 7(1), 79 – 89.
- Hayes, R. (2018). Digital and Analog Preaching in a Multi – media World.
- Kailani, Najib and Sunarwoto. (2019). "Islamic Televangelism in the Landscape of New Religious Authority," in *Ulama and Nation States: Reading the Future of Political Islam in Indonesia*. Yogyakarta: PusPIDep.
- Karmela, S. H., & Yanto, F. (2021). Pengenalan Seni Musik Tradisional Melayu Jambi Kompangan dan Hadrah Untuk Menumbuhkan Kepedulian Budaya Lokal. *Transformasi: Jurnal Pengabdian Pada Masyarakat*, 1(2), 66 – 77.
- Kitiarsa, P. (2007). COMMODIFICATION OF RELIGION AND THE 'RELIGIFICATION' OF COMMODITIES: Youth culture and religious identity. In Religious Commodifications in Asia (pp. 234 – 248). Routledge.
- Lail, M. J., & Mawardi, I. (2024). Intersecting Shalawat And Church Music On Spiritual Sweetness And Pop Culture. *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama*, 19(2), 257 – 278.
- Lingel, J. (2017). Digital countercultures and the struggle for community. MIT Press.
- Mara Einstein, Brands of Faith. New York: Routledge, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203938874>.
- Mosco, *The Political Economy of Communication: Building a Foundation* , 147.
- Mosco, Vincent. (2014). *The Political Economy of Communication: Building a Foundation* , *The Political Economy of Communication*. London: Sage Publication Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279946.n5>.
- Muqsith, I. A. Komodifikasi Shalawat (Studi Kasus grup Musik Shalawat The Swan Band) (Bachelor's thesis, Fisip UIN Jakarta)..
- Muzakki, "MENGHADIRKAN 'NABI': Antara Hasrat Dan Cinta Dalam Ritus Shalawat Bersama Pada Majelis Syubbanul Muslimin."
- Sa'dullah, A. (2023). *Komodifikasi Agama di media sosial: Studi kasus pada Pemuda Hijrah di Cicalengka Kabupaten Bandung*. Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.
- Salim, A. (2006). Teori dan Paradigma Penelitian Sosial (2nd ed.). Tiara Wacana. Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/06ATRE8sXvBE7NT1qqeHj7>
- Sugiyono. (2020). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (S. Y. Suryandari (ed.); 3rd ed.). Alfabeta.

- Taylor, L. (Ed.). (2001). *Preachers and people in the reformations and early modern period*. Leiden: Brill.
- Tunes: <https://music.apple.com/id/artist/habib-ali-zainal-abidin-assegaf/1617493112>
- Williams, C. C., & Nadin, S. (2010). Rethinking the commercialization of everyday life: a "whole economy" perspective. *Foresight*, 12(6), 55–68.
- Williams, C. C., & Nadin, S. (2010). Rethinking the commercialization of everyday life: a "whole economy" perspective. *foresight*, 12(6), 55–68.