

Uncovering The Symbiosis of Spirituality and Economic as Da'wah and Business Opportunities

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Abstract

The taklim (study) assembly in the mall area is a contemporary phenomenon that has become a trend among urban muslim communities. This article intends to describe the tendencies of taklim assembly as urban muslim popular culture and a symbiosis between spirituality and economic practice. This article is based on qualitative research with a case study method. This article shows that the taklim assembly in the mall area has shifted the tradition of the taklim assembly to meet the spiritual needs of the urban Muslim community amid modernity. The mall taklim assembly has formed a mutually beneficial symbiosis between implementing spiritual activities as dakwah and economic practices in malls as businesses. This illustrates for dakwah activists and business actors about opportunity for dakwah and business development in the partnership between mall stakeholders.

Keywords: *Spirituality, Popular Culture, Urban Sufism*

INTRODUCTION

In countries with a majority Muslim population, public places are always equipped with prayer facilities in prayer rooms or mosques. The availability of prayer facilities, such as a mosque or prayer room, is essential for Muslim tourists or visitors (Fajriyati et al., 2020). This also happens to malls as places visited by many people. Mall managers also provide mosques or prayer rooms as facilities that cannot be separated from the completeness of the building they build, even though the location of the prayer room is often placed in the parking basement or an uncomfortable peripheral position.

The role of worship facilities in public places, especially malls or shopping and recreation centers, is changing. Mosques or prayer rooms in malls, initially only positioned as transit places for praying, are starting to be managed as mosques. Some malls build mosques no longer in basements or locations around restrooms but on separate floors, with spacious rooms, good lighting and air conditioning facilities, and comfortable carpets with clean ablution areas.

This change does not only occur in the position and shape of the prayer facilities in the mall. The mosque in the mall is managed as a means of worship services for Muslims and as a meeting place for religious activities, namely taklim assemblies, Islamic studies, and various other activities. Holding taklim assemblies in mosques in mall areas is a current phenomenon that has become popular among urban Muslim communities. The taklim assembly is a manifestation of the spiritual activities of the urban Muslim community. The taklim assembly became the most fertile space for the development of urban sufism (Wanto et al., 2022). Similar things are also mentioned in various studies on urban sufism (Aditoni & Rohmah, 2022), in various forms regarding the spiritual activities of urban Muslim communities (Zamhari, 2013). The taklim assembly is a means for urban Muslims to get closer to Allah and simultaneously find solutions to the problems of their daily lives amid modernity. Spiritual activities are related to humanity (Kyani, 2021). Spirituality activities build their souls' development (Buenconsejo & Datu, 2023). Several studies link spiritual activities with the tendencies of urban Muslim communities (Becker, 2021).

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However, on the other hand, holding taklim assemblies in mall areas has mixed taklim assemblies as a form of spiritual religious activity that is ascetic and full of divine values, with malls as a representation of capitalism and modernity, which tends to encourage people to be consumptive. But in reality spirituality cannot be separated from other conditions in society (Luetz et al., 2023) . The increasing trend of spirituality in urban Muslim communities impacts increasing consumption. The increasing consumption of Islamic popular culture in Indonesia marks increasing Islamization among the Muslim majority (Rijal, 2022). In this case, the development of spirituality will align with the development of consumption in society. So, the taklim assembly in the mall area as a spiritual activity carried out in the mall environment will be related to consumption activities.

The trend of taklim assemblies in mall areas has shifted and can even replace conventional taklim assemblies in village mosques or community residential complex mosques. The taklim assembly was transformed into an institution for disseminating knowledge to provide and develop the religious knowledge of the congregation who came (Wanto et al., 2022). Even when it was held in a mall environment, the taklim assembly still acted as a forum for disseminating knowledge and Islamic values.

There is a polarization of Muslim communities in urban areas due to the formation of new identities among the congregation at the mall taklim assembly. The emergence of a new culture that forms a new group identity will separate members of that group from the old culture. The emergence of the taklim assembly in the mall area has created a self-identification among the congregation that they are part of a group different from other taklim groups.

Taklim assemblies in mall areas have become a commodity for mall managers and tenants as a potential particular market in their economic practices. Spiritual popular culture is often associated with commodification and commercialization. In the Islamic context, one indication of commodification practices is often found in producing various merchandise with Islamic labels and symbols in Islamic packaging or services related to spiritual activities. (Ahmadi et al., 2022). The taklim assembly is not just a religious and educational activity that expresses a Muslim's spiritual communication in the form of searching for information about the Islamic religion but also goes hand in hand with economic transactions in the form of buying and selling and recreation.

The phenomenon of taklim assembly in the mall area is a challenge for developing the study of religious life, both in the study of popular culture, spirituality, urban Sufism, and economic practices. The phenomenon of taklim assemblies in mall areas amidst various studies on the spirituality of modern Muslim society, both as popular culture and the issue of religious commodification, is the background for the research described in this article. The mixture of spirituality and modernity in the phenomenon of taklim assemblies in mall areas raises questions about the emergence of a new popular culture in the religious life of Muslim communities living in urban areas. One of the problems that will be described in this article is spiritual popular culture in mall taklim assemblies.

In the study of urban sufism, the rise of the spiritual movement in urban Muslim communities shows the intensity and actuality of the faith they want to achieve as a solution to life's problems. Spirituality is related to faith, not limited to belief in the supernatural. Even those who claim not to believe in God may, in one way or another, have some spiritual beliefs related to particular rituals and practices. (Giordan & Swatos, 2012).

The spirituality of urban Muslim communities is interpreted as the collective identity of the Muslim middle class to differentiate it from other middle classes. The affirmation of urban Muslim identity is demonstrated through the term hijrah (Mustofa et al., 2023). Hijrah was initially understood as a process of leaving behind past misguidance (jahiliyyah) and moving towards conditions following the Shari'a. In its development, hijrah refers to transforming a less religious individual into a more religious (Islamī) (Juliansyahzen, 2023). A society that has been patterned on modern life, which is applied in various global cultural practices that are not always in line with Islamic values, is trying to rediscover a way of life following Islamic teachings.

On the one hand, the Muslim community's religious patterns trend is a form of negotiation between spiritual values in Islam and global cultural forms and practices (Yusdani et al., 2020). The negotiation between spirituality, as practiced during the hijrah trend, and global cultural practices as part of modernity later emerged

as popular culture in religious life or spiritual popular culture. In the study of popular culture related to religious life, taklim assemblies in mall areas as a form of popular culture show that Islam is a dynamic tradition that can adapt to the times without abandoning the substantive values of Islamic teachings.

Theoretically and conceptually, this study is a development of studies on Popular Culture, Spirituality, Urban Sufism, and Economic Practices. The taklim assembly phenomenon in mall areas is seen as a popular culture about the spirituality of urban Muslim communities, which is then linked to economic practices. The taklim assembly in the mall area could become a new pattern that illustrates symbiosis or a mutually beneficial relationship between da'wah and business. Taklim assemblies at the mall will not only act as a popular culture that combines spiritual activities and modern life but also present da'wah and business in a supportive pattern of interaction with each other.

The article describes the mall taklim assembly as a popular culture in the religious life of urban Muslim communities, which includes a shift in the taklim assembly tradition and the formation of the identity of the taklim assembly group, which culminates in counterculture. This article will also describe a pattern of mutually beneficial relationships between da'wah and business.

METHODS

This article is based on research with a descriptive qualitative approach using the case study method. The subjects of this research are the taklim assembly community, which includes congregations, ustadz (Islamic teacher), taklim assembly managers, and mosque managers, as well as mall managers and tenants in two large malls in Jakarta and Bandung, namely the Nurul Iman Mosque Blok M. Square South Jakarta and the Grand Mosque Trans Studio Bandung.

Data collection techniques were carried out using in-depth interviews, observation, documentation studies, and literature reviews. Interviews were conducted with parties involved in the taklim assembly, including the congregation, ustadz, and mosque managers or taklim assembly managers. Apart from that, interviews were also conducted with mall managers and traders in the mall environment. Meanwhile, data analysis was carried out using data reduction, categorization, and presentation stages, accompanied by a triangulation process.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Shifting the Taklim Assembly Tradition: Fulfilling Spiritual Needs

The taklim assembly is a forum for increasing religious knowledge and developing religious life (Marzuki et al., 2018). The taklim assembly is a way for people to develop spirituality by getting to know and understand Islamic teachings, which become their guide in everyday life. Taklim assemblies are conventionally held in various mosques or community gathering places, usually in residential areas, both villages and residential complexes. Taklim assemblies can also be held incidentally or routinely by various communities at Islamic holidays, office receptions, weddings, etc. Taklim assembly is an Islamic educational institution that is able to play an active role in transmitting Islamic values comprehensively to the Muslim community (Zamhari, 2013).

The emergence of taklim assemblies in malls is a tradition that is different from the mainstream tradition but is starting to be widely followed or popular among certain groups. The large number of urban Muslim communities who participate in becoming part of this new style of taklim assembly community can indicate the existence of a popular culture that is shifting the tradition of local taklim assemblies based on geography and groups into a new taklim assembly, which is formed based on interests and tendencies in the process of spiritual search, which is different from the existing spiritual processes that have become mainstream.

Popular culture is generally understood to refer to cultural products and practices that are widely consumed and enjoyed by a broad audience (Bulfin, 2017). More broadly, when popular culture is also promoted by the media (Salahudin et al., 2021). The study held at the taklim assembly was also supported by youtube media coverage organized by the taklim assembly management and by the ustadz, who formed their respective content creator teams. When the taklim assembly in the mall becomes a spiritual activity that is much sought after and

enjoyed by many members of society, the mall taklim assembly can be categorized as a new cultural product and practice which is then referred to as popular culture.

Da'wah is an effort to apply pure Islamic teachings, modernize education, and promote humanitarian programs (Hakim, 2023). The processing of da'wah system products is a response to various phenomena regarding the needs and problems faced by the community as the target of da'wah.

The needs and problems that encourage urban Muslim communities to participate in various taklim assemblies cannot be separated from the modern situation that underlies them. A member of the taklim assembly in Blok M, Square stated that his presence at the taklim assembly was an effort to provide calm in his daily activities. Another congregation from the adult female congregation community at the Grand Mosque of Trans Studio Bandung stated that the taklim assembly had become a trend for housewives to fill their free time between their activities as housewives. These two statements show that the taklim assembly is an option for urban Muslim communities to take a break or fill the gap in their lives in modernity.

Taklim assemblies in malls are an option for urban Muslim communities looking for ways to emigrate to improve themselves and get closer to Allah. Taklim assemblies in malls allow urban Muslim communities to seek answers to all problems amid modernity. These two processes are often identified with hijrah. In general, hijrah aims to carry out religious teachings with intention and commitment and abandon what religion prohibits (Yudiana et al., 2021).

Fulfilling the spiritual needs that prompted the shift from conventional taklim assemblies to mall taklim assemblies is not only spiritual but also technical in terms of implementation. These technical matters are related to material and facility aspects. The material aspect is related to the choice of material model and the ustadz presented. Meanwhile, the facilities aspect is about the place and facilities where the majestic taklim is held.

The taklim assembly at the mall, with all its innovations, has fulfilled the hopes of the congregation to be able to attend religious studies with material and ustadz models that are different from conventional taklim assembly. The taklim assembly as a popular culture has built a new culture in the taklim assembly tradition that the congregation is active as voters and users who can choose their ustadz models and materials that suit their interests and needs.

At the mall taklim assembly activities, the congregation had the opportunity to meet their favorite ustadz. Apart from ustadz, who is popular on social media, the congregation also has the opportunity to meet ustadz, who are considered to have mastered a field of knowledge that is appropriate to the topic or theme,

The taklim assembly in the mall allows the congregation to choose topics or materials that suit their needs and religious tendencies. The congregation of mothers can choose to participate in studies that interest them, such as parenting issues, the Sakinah family or friendship. For the teenage congregation, you can participate in studies on topics related to the needs of teenagers with the theme "premarital studies". Meanwhile, the congregation has a more critical view and tries to find religious information based on references they can accept and believe are sources of reference for the true religion.

Regarding facilities, the mall is an active public place for urban communities, a place for urban communities to gather and engage in activities, including Muslim communities who are accustomed to modern life. This is based on considerations as conveyed by one of the organizers of the taklim assembly at the Nurul Iman Mosque Blok M Square, that the mosque in the mall environment has met several criteria, including 1) strategic location, 2) congregation capacity, 3) parking capacity vehicles, 4) facilities and comfort, 5) access to public transportation.

Counterculture: Formation of Spiritual Identity

Indonesian Islam has become a topic of ideological contestation, especially between views about Islam that are globally inspired and views that are rooted locally (Masduki et al., 2022). One aspect of popular culture is the existence of counterculture (Hasan, 2011, p. 218). The tradition of taklim assemblies in malls in some cases and its aspects have shown the existence of a counterculture that contrasts mall taklim assemblies with conventional taklim assemblies (which are local, traditional, and mainstream). Traditional taklim assemblies have been

replaced by mall taklim assemblies, which offer studies that better meet the congregation's needs for religious information, which is seen as having more reference.

Joining the congregation in a taklim assembly positions them as participants seeking knowledge and confirms themselves as members of the taklim assembly community. Every movement will be related to identity formation (Leichtman & Schulz, 2012). As members of a community, of course, the congregation is bound by their community's identity.

The taklim assembly in the mall area has developed into something that is popular among the Muslim community or can be identified as popular Islam. Popular Islam then developed into an identity and habitus in the case of the modern middle-class (Jati, 2015). This happened as a form of combination between the values of Islamic teachings and their involvement with modernization. Jati also explained that middle-class Muslims in urban areas want to be recognized as part of modern life, but on the other hand, they also want to adhere to the norms of Islamic law.

Popular Islam as a habitus is interpreted as a form of behavior that then develops into its habits that differentiate it from other classes (Jati, 2015). The emergence of popular Islam which is synonymous with popular culture is something that is specifically carried out by the middle class, especially in urban areas. This means that popular Islam, which later gave birth to popular culture, is a combination of the Islamic values held by urban middle-class people and the modern life they live.

The formation of spiritual identity is often represented by the word hijrah. Sunesti in Hidayat (2021) Hijrah is identified as a symbol inherent in the Islamic movement which is based on the purification of Islamic teachings. Hijrah has become one of Indonesia's most prevalent issues among the younger generation of Muslims (M. T. Rahman & Mufti, 2021). Many millennials think religion can help them become better and happier (F. Rahman et al., 2021). To demonstrate the power of religious reasoning in urban Muslim society, the concept of "hijrah" is used to create religious understanding (Mustofa, Juliansyahzen, and Hefni, 2023). This was also conveyed by informant 1, "city people are critical, if they are critical, of course they know all that (laws and teachings), what the references are, why this, why that" (interview with informant 1, Jama'ah Majlis Taklim). Meanwhile, the old path that they previously adhered to is in opposition. Conventional taklim assembly congregations tied to mainstream religious traditions have found a rival opposition in the form of taklim assemblies in mall areas, which raise the issue of purifying religious teachings following Islamic teachings by salaf scholars.

On the other hand, this fighting culture is also present in the aspect of the da'wah approach. The mall taklim assembly group, which presents a popular approach with various identity attributes and interests of modern young people, which presents a more cheerful and entertaining appearance and style, also gives rise to a counterculture that opposes the conservative taklim assembly culture approach. Local ustadz in village mosques are marginalized by the congregation's infatuation with popular ustadz in the mall's taklim assembly. Conventional taklim assemblies, which are managed simply in the form of lectures in village mosques, complex mosques, in alleys, find a match in the form of organizing taklim assemblies that are in strategic and easily accessible locations with large room capacity, ample parking, and comfortable facilities.

Symbiosis of Spirituality and Economic Practices

The mall taklim assembly is held at the mosque in the mall area or a shopping center. In previous times, shopping centers or malls in Indonesia generally provided facilities for worship for Muslims in the form of prayer rooms which were located in parking areas or basements with minimal facilities. The mosque used as a place for the taklim assembly in the mall looks very comfortable, spacious, and magnificent, complete with all air conditioning facilities, lighting, and various other accessories.

This cannot be separated from the role of the mall building management, both as the land provider and as the mosque's founder. The establishment of the Trans Studio Grand Mosque, which is located in the area of malls, hotels, and entertainment facilities, is intended as an effort to respond to the spiritual development trend of middle and upper-class Muslim communities in urban areas, of course, they are loyal customers and visitors of Trans Studio Mall which has indeed taken up the class segment upper middle. This trend leads to

commercialization and commodification efforts (Chukwuma Uhembe & Clement, 2014). The presence of the taklim assembly in the mall area significantly impacts the transaction process in the mall. The mall, which is used as the location for the taklim assembly, experiences a surge in the number of visitors when the taklim assembly is held, especially when the taklim assembly presents a guest speaker who is famous or has a large congregation of followers. After the taklim assembly, it is almost certain that the congregation will spread out to fill the food court outlets and clothing and household needs outlets. The parking building became crowded with vehicles and almost reached its limit.

The Blok M Square Building Manager said, "There is a lot of mutualistic symbioses (between the mosque and the mall), sir, parking, people eating if there was not this mosque, it would be quiet, sir" (interview with informant 2, mall building manager). This illustrates a pattern of mutually beneficial relationships in the phenomenon of taklim assemblies in this mall. The organizers of the taklim assembly get a study place that is strategically located, has a large capacity, and has comfortable facilities. Meanwhile, for the mall management, the presence of the taklim assembly congregation can also be seen as the arrival of mall visitors who, apart from attending religious studies, also shop and have recreation.

Taklim Assembly as Popular Culture and Dakwah Strategy

The key finding in this research is that the mall taklim assembly has become a popular spiritual culture with three dimensions: 1) a shift from the conventional taklim assembly to a mall taklim assembly, 2) the mall taklim assembly has become an opposition to the conventional taklim assembly which has given rise to a counterculture). 3) the mall taklim assembly becomes a meeting between modernity and Islam. The taklim assembly as a popular culture of spirituality in urban Muslim communities confirms a view of popular culture theory that traditional or old culture is then displaced or replaced by a new culture that is much in demand by the community (Hasan, 2011). In this case, urban Muslim communities and mall taklim assemblies are a new culture. The spiritual development of urban Muslim communities has led them to join various spiritual communities (Anis, 2013). The mall taklim assembly is a form of spiritual community that is immersed in popular culture.

Popular culture, including religious life, rivals conventional or mainstream culture (Wain & Lukito, 2021). Taklim assemblies held in mall areas become a rival or form a counterculture to conventional taklim assemblies, which are mainstream in society.

The existence of the taklim assembly in the mall area is a driving force or thing that conditions people who want to fulfill their spirituality to visit and spend time at the mall, then shop and have recreation in between their activities.

Mall managers use this situation as a business opportunity by investing in providing adequate and comfortable religious facilities in the malls they manage. The existence of consumption events in the mall area after the taklim assembly activities is not only seen as relieving hunger and fulfilling daily product needs but is also seen as an identity that shows their social class, which is different from other social classes who do not shop at the mall. Popular culture develops into a collective expression of a group (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). This situation opens up opportunities for the commodification of symbols of the Islamic community. How the process of Islamization is related to commodification (Juliansyahzen, 2023).

Islam is the only religion that maintains the balance between this world and the afterlife (Dayyan et al., 2019). The taklim assembly located in the mall is a representation of an abstraction that to a certain extent, Islamic values can coexist with modernity. Spirituality combined with the market (Utama, 2016). Even further, this becomes a silent commodification (Roose, 2020). The taklim assembly, which is positioned to represent Islamic traditions, can be held in the mall area, which is one of the icons of modernity,

This article can be an illustration for da'wah practitioners of the reality of taklim assemblies in mall areas and an illustration of the tendencies of the congregation of taklim assemblies in urban Muslim communities as a basis for developing da'wah and communication strategies in conveying the values of Islamic teachings. Da'wah is an articulation of Islamic values. (Yasin & Saibi, 2020). This research illustrates that urban Muslim society is a society that has a high spirit of spirituality amidst the various impacts of modernity. However, on the other

hand, they are a group that cannot be separated from modernity itself. This is in line with studies on the role of modernity in Islamic popular culture. (Cave et al., 2023).

Da'wah practitioners are required to be able to formulate a da'wah strategy that combines Islamic values with modernity. Developing integration between spirituality and modern progress (Luetz & Nunn, 2023). Furthermore, da'wah practitioners and managers of the taklim assembly can use the mosque in the mall environment with all its facilities and value as an opportunity to strengthen and expand da'wah.

CONCLUSION

Taklim Assembly and malls build a symbiotic relationship between da'wah and business activities. As a popular cult, The Mall Taklim Assembly is an effort to fulfill the spiritual needs of urban Muslim communities in several aspects. Firstly, as a spiritual and religious expression, and secondly, as an effort to find answers to various problems arising from the contradiction between modernity and Islamic values.

Mall taklim assemblies have become a spiritual popular culture with three dimensions: 1) Shifting from conventional taklim assemblies to mall taklim assemblies, 2) Mall taklim assemblies have become an opposition to conventional taklim assemblies which has given rise to a counterculture. 3) The Mall Taklim assembly becomes a meeting between modernity and Islam. 4) The mall taklim assembly becomes an expression of popular culture and the alternative strategy for dakwah implementation.

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