

Analysing Child Bullying Case from the Perspective of Media Political Economy and Islamic Communication in *Ihya Ulum Al Din* **by Al Ghazali**

Lailiya Nur Rokhman¹, Ihwan Huda Al Mujib²
*lailiyanurrokhman@unmuhjember.ac.id*¹, *mujib@polije.ac.id*²

Affiliation: Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember¹, Politeknik Negeri Jember²

Abstract

The rise of child bullying cases has been the media spotlight. News about bullying grabs the attention of the public. One of the cases that caught the public's attention was the bullying case of Audrey, a junior high school student in Pontianak in 2019. This research aimed at discussing the case from the perspective of media political economy and Islamic perspective communication. This study focused on discussing the case from two different perspectives: media political economy and Islamic perspectives. Numerous news reports regarding the issue were analyzed in this descriptive qualitative study. The results found that the commodification of the case was resulted from various issues involving the news media, victim, and public. It was also revealed that there were four aspects of communication prohibitions based on the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din* that were potentially violated regarding the case.

Keywords: News Media, Child Bullying, Commodification, Islamic Communication

Introduction

The way how information is presented by news media has changed in recent years. Undoubtedly, the emergence of digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram has brought significant influence on this. On one hand, this makes news updated faster than before. On the other hand, this also leads to some issues that trigger critics. For instance, there is a phenomenon in which news media seem to purposely formulate news headlines to get public's attention and clicks, also known as clickbait (Sirusstara et al., 2022). This seems to confirm a quote stating that bad news is good news. Consequently, any bad news that potentially attracts people's attention becomes the main interest to be reported by news media, including the major ones. One case that caught the public's attention was the bullying case experienced by Audrey, a junior high school student in Pontianak, in 2019 (Tempo.co, 2019). This case even led to a movement of people who sympathized and hoped that this case would be investigated thoroughly. However, in the end, after several years of this case going viral and becoming a public concern, it was discovered that this case was just a lie. The "victim" manipulated the story of her bullying to gain public attention and sympathy.

The crucial part, regarding the explanation above, is related to the critics on how the media should function as accurate and reliable sources of information. The news regarding Audrey's case became headlines for a quite long period of time due to the fact that this led to increased views and visits, especially for online media, which became one of their main concerns. Unfortunately, the private data and identities of both victims and alleged perpetrators of bullying became public consumption so that the public could respond to the case, more specifically attack the alleged perpetrator's social media. This

demonstrated how the privacy of children who got involved in legal cases of bullying was no longer protected. Based on data from *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia* (Indonesian Child Protection Commission), 87 violations of child protection were recorded due to bullying cases (Tara, 2023). As a result, the presentation of information about cases of child abuse in the mass media, both conventional and digital media, is no longer considered child friendly.

Through a political economy approach, namely Mosco's commodification of content (Mosco, 2009), this research aimed at analyzing how the privacy of children as perpetrators and victims of bullying became public consumption. Besides, this paper also discussed the Islamic perspective regarding the topic by referring to the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din* written by Imam Al Ghazali, a great Muslim scholar.

Media and Child Bullying

As mentioned earlier, media plays an important role in people's lives. Although printed newspapers are not read as much as they used to be, online media, today, get great attention and are accessed by the public more. Various news items delivered through both traditional and online media on the one hand provide the latest information about what is currently happening for the audience. However, how news is delivered in society also shows the practice of commodification of news subjects. One of them is in the news of bullying cases involving children as victims and perpetrators.

The concept of commodification is one of the domains of the political economy approach of mass media. Mosco (2009) states that commodification is a term that refers to the process of transforming newsworthy events into exchangeable value. In commodification, communication is used to affect the mindset of the audience through all media products so that people consciously or unconsciously agree with what is presented. According to Mosco (2009), commodification in communication has several forms, namely: content commodification, audience commodification, worker commodification and immanent commodification.

Content commodification occurs through the conversion of media content into marketable products. This commodification relates to the process of transforming messages and a set of data into a system of meaning to produce a marketable product. This commodification process, according to Mosco (2009), is the process of transforming messages from a collection of data into a system of meaning of a marketable product. In content commodification, the commodification process begins when messages are transformed by media actors using existing technology into a meaningful interpretation system to become a message that can be sold in the market. In the context of mass media, commodification can be considered as the process of presenting information that is carefully displayed in the media according to the standards of the entertainment industry and has appeal while creating certain profits thanks to advertisers and sales.

One of the commodification of content that can occur is in the news, especially the commodification of privacy. Privacy itself is an abstract concept that contains many meanings, one of which is about individual rights to determine the extent to which a person is willing to open himself to others or not. The various aspects of privacy found in the public sphere through the mass media show that the media has developed into a cultural industry that can consistently and widely fulfil false public needs. In the world of mass media, commodification is the process of transforming broadcasted information

to meet the standards of the entertainment industry and increasing its appeal to generate profits for advertisers and the media.

Mass media has a significant influence on society's culture through the dissemination of private information to the public through techniques of massification, standardization and commercialization purposes. In the view of mass culture, these conditions are considered as commodification that has been packaged in a structured manner by media leaders. In this situation, mass media has shown a shift from public space to media space. This shift can be seen in the ability of mass media to integrate the practice of conversations about privacy areas into the media space. Therefore, the public has unconsciously inhaled symbols and signs that are learnt, which are then indoctrinated as facts that can be accepted by common sense.

Communication in the Perspective of Kitab Ihya Ulum Al Din

Regarding communication, Islam regulates how people should communicate each other in daily life including the nature of communication (Al Mujib, 2018), not only between humans with the God, but between Muslims themselves (Ghani, 2004). This proves that the contribution of Islam in the study of communication science is very large (Syahputra, 2007). For sure, this is not to claim that Islam is the only religion that regulates the way to communicate.

Islamic rules related to communication do not only exist in the Quran and hadith. The explanation regarding the topic can also be found in several *kitab kuning*, literally translates to yellow books, written by scholars which have been the references of Islamic teachings, including communication, for decades especially in Indonesia. One of the books that discusses the norms of communication is the book of *Ihya' Ulumudin* by Imam Al Ghazali.

There are 20 communication prohibitions in the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din*. All of these communication prohibitions are based on the Quran and Hadith. The communication prohibitions are as follows:

1. Useless communication
2. Over-communication
3. Communicating badness
4. Arguing and debating each other
5. Hostility
6. Manipulation in communication
7. Communicating using foul and degrading words
8. Singing and calling to misbehavior
9. Joking in communication
10. Cursing
11. Insulting and ridiculing in communication
12. Leaking secrets
13. Breaking promises
14. Lying and swearing
15. Gossip
16. Pitting people against each other
17. Inconsistent in communication
18. Flattering
19. Miscommunicating
20. Various complicated issues in communication

Research Method

This research tried to dissect how content commodification was carried out in the production process of the cultural industry, in this case the commodification of children's privacy based on the news about bullying cases. To help analyzing the problem, this research used the concept of commodification in political economy with a communication approach that referred to the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm allowed the writers to view reality as something mediated by the relationship between power and data that cannot be separated from ideology. Ideology itself is a set of doctrines, myths and beliefs that organize and hegemonize individuals, groups, and society. Society is seen as a system of domination in which the powerful use the media to dominate those below them (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

This research focused on a bullying case that went viral in 2019, namely the bullying case that occurred to Audrey, a junior high school student in Pontianak, which was featured on major news media in Indonesia. To analyze the content of the case, the writers employed descriptive qualitative research methods. This descriptive qualitative research was used to provide a specific description of the situation, social setting, or relationship that focused on the questions of "how?", "who?", "how did it happen?" and "who was involved?" (Neuman & Edina, 2013). This qualitative descriptive method was based on a case study of the news reports of the bullying case in various news media with the principle that case studies use as many data sources as possible to investigate individuals, groups, or organizations (Wimmer & Dominick, 2009). Moreover, the validity of this research data was based the goodness criteria of which includes trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, 2015).

Results and Discussion

As stated by Mosco (2009), the idea of commodification is related to the idea about mass production; how commercial interests or economic determinism control social relations of power. Valuations of status and image, for example, mingle with the financial value of goods and labor. News agencies buy and sell news, turning it into a commodity. Economic relations between social groups can be seen from the perspective of the news audience: information about education levels and social groups is sold and bought. As a result, advertising rates on commercial television are based on this data. Therefore, commodification and market effects are widespread.

The basic principle of the commodification above could also be seen in the Audrey bullying case. The news about how a female junior high school student was bullied spread quickly and gained public attention. The fact that there were 12 high school students as alleged bullies made the incident potential news to be aired. Consequently, news media, including the mainstream ones, responded by reporting it. This even attracted higher attention when there was a lawsuit on the case. Interestingly, the news media did not only concern about the case, but also the responses and comments made by people especially internet users. For instance, the case triggered a hashtag of #JusticeforAudrey that became a trending topic at that moment.

That the case of Audrey was responded massively online was related to the fact that online media was preferable with 85% of population chose online news media (Kristina & Setiawan, 2021). The massive responses regarding the news was quite acceptable because the case was related to bullying act to a junior high school student by 12 senior high school students with numerous physical injuries, at least as explained by the victim. This potentially led to sympathy and, even, anger from the internet users. Surely, such potential was seen promising by the news media, especially the online ones.

As implicitly explained before, in the context of content, information is often treated as a profitable product. Therefore, to make sure that the news is accurate and reliable, fact-checking is always a crucial part that should never be ruled out. This aspect is often criticized especially the online news media (Kristina & Setiawan, 2021) because there were issues related to the accuracy and validity of the news spread online. Unfortunately, this was what happened in the Audrey bullying case. The news tended to be presented from one side, the victim's perspective. The competition to be the first to present the led to unnecessary responses in which many internet users attacked the alleged perpetrators' social media accounts. This seemed to obscure the substantial aspect of the news, the bullying case itself. The alleged perpetrators were now the new targets of hatred especially after their identities were exposed to public.

The case continued to a new stage, in which after examined further, from the press conference delivered by the police regarding the results of the postmortem, the medical report showed different data compared to the victim's explanation previously. Unfortunately, the detail about the medical report did not get sufficient portion, even after the Ministry of Education and Culture tried to clarify the case based on the facts found in the medical report (Ariefana, 2019). The idea of balance in presenting issues or problems, viewpoints, and conflicts seemed to be ignored. This was not only seen problematic from the perspective of media political economy but also from the perspective of Islam.

The commodification of media by using bullying as content is a potential violation of communication from an Islamic perspective. As explained, there are several communication prohibitions written in the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din* and the case of Audrey presumably violated four aspects. The violations were not only involved the news media but the victim and audiences as well.

The first issue was related to the manipulation made by the victim. As explained, the victim made up a story that she got physical bullying from 12 students which made her suffer from various injuries including the one on her private area; the one that triggered most public attention. The fact that the medical report revealed different data, stating that the victim was physically unharmed, led to the conclusion that the victim manipulated her story. Al Ghazali in his book said that manipulation in communication is a very despicable.

The commodification carried out by the news media could also be categorized as violation regarding the prohibition of communication in the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din*. There were at least four prohibitions that were considered violation made by the media in this case. The first prohibition was useless communication. The news regarding the case did not provide any educational value and waste of time especially when taking public responses into account. This, according to Al Ghazali, was considered useless. Al Ghazali explains in his book that the most important treasure owned by every Muslim is time. Therefore, when a Muslim does not use the time for meaningful activities, it is considered as a loss.

The second potential prohibition violated by the media was communicating badness. Reports on cases of bullying could be categorized into one of the communications in badness. In Islamic view, discussing good experiences, events,

matters, and etc. is seen to be more valuable and meaningful. Therefore, discussing about bad things is considered prohibited.

The third potential prohibition violated by the media is leaking secrets. This was related to the personal identities of both victim and the alleged perpetrators. The secret in question was the privacy of the people involved in this case. From Islamic perspective, the best way to avoid this issue is by only reporting limited personal data of people involved. One of them is by only providing initials instead of the names of them. Al Ghazali explains that this violation is against human rights and potentially harmful that may lead to greater problems in the future.

The fourth potential prohibition violated by the news media regarding the case related to the aspect of various complicated issues in communication. The media tried to reveal everything that happened in this bullying case. The fact that the news media reported almost every aspect related to the case was considered unnecessary. The facts surrounding the case were found quite complicated so that the news media did not necessarily expose all of them. Therefore, this is considered to be violating one of the prohibitions of communication written by Imam Al Ghazali. Al Ghazali explains that there will be no one who knows a lot about something. When a person feels that he knows a lot about something, he has been tempted by the devil to feel that he knows the most and is the most righteous.

Conclusion

From the findings and discussion that have been described, it can be concluded that there was a commodification of children's privacy in the Audrey bullying case. The bullying case that occurred was not only between the perpetrators and the victim but also from the audience who responded on this case to the alleged perpetrators. The fact that the victim was considered as the one that also contributed to the commodification by manipulating her story made the case even more promising for the news media. This led to criticism regarding the insufficient fact-checking process. Surely, the implication for the future is obvious, news media should be more concerned about checking facts before publication.

The case being discussed could also be seen from the Islamic perspective. Based on the book of *Ihya Ulum Al Din* by Al Ghazali. In this case, the prohibition of communication from an Islamic perspective also occurred covering four aspects. These included useless communication, communicating badness, leaking secrets, and various complicated problems in communication. The overall truth of this case then became biased due to the audience's partiality towards one of the parties. The possibility of hoaxes occurring as in this case was then very likely to occur if it was not investigated properly and reported in detail.

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