

A Contested Identity: Contemporary Representation of Indonesian Chinese-Muslims on Instagram

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Abstract

The existence of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia is surrounded by a heavily prejudiced belief that Chinese-ness and Islam are considered "unsuitable". Chinese Muslims, particularly 'converts-turned-preachers', are still considered a unique identity. However, the rise of online Islamic piety on Instagram has become one of many ways for Chinese Muslims' to represent themselves and, to some extent, "normalize" their identities. This paper discusses how Chinese-Muslim preachers, namely Felix Siau and Koko Liem, represent their versions of Chinese-ness and Islam on Instagram, a popular visual-based social media platform in Indonesia. This research uses Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to observe the preachers' identity narratives and ways to articulate their Chinese-ness and Islam on their respective accounts posts. It is shown that the heterogeneous stances and contesting interpretations on and about Chinese-ness and Islam in the Chinese-Muslim minority group are to some extent represented through the visual appearance and narrative on Instagram of both preachers. From these two figures, the researcher concludes that elements of Islamic religious identity tend to dominate and even fade ethnic Chinese identity in the negotiations between Chinese and Muslim identities. However, their Chinese-ness was strategically used and symbolically commodified to attract the masses. These two preachers become part of the heterogeneous spectrum of Chinese-Muslim representation in Indonesia and the "pavement" for a common image of the combination of the two identities in Indonesia.

Keywords:

Chineseness; ethno-religious identity; Indonesia; Islam; Instagram

Introduction

In Indonesia, the existence of Chinese-Muslim identity is often surrounded by contention around one's degrees of Chinese-ness and Islam. A person's mixture of ethnic minority and religious majority is generally seen as a unique phenomenon. As a result, an ethnic Chinese converting to Islam or becoming a '*mualaf*'¹ is generally equated with renunciation of their Chinese-ness. However, this is not always the case. Several Chinese

Muslims have successfully navigated ways of articulating, negotiating or even strategically harnessing their ethno-religious identity² to appeal to and secure their place as Islamic preachers within the Indonesian Islamic community.

In contemporary Indonesia, Islamic preaching is considered a way to accumulate

1 '*Mualaf*' is an Arabic term which literally refers to those who are interested in learning about Islam. This term is used in Indonesia to refer to Muslim converts (Hew, 2018a) despite their ethnicity or previous faith.

2 Being born Chinese is an inherently racial fact. However, this article used the term 'ethnic' rather than 'racial' identity to refer to the Chinese-Indonesian as ethnic identity were based on cultural tradition and values that are carried along over generations (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990 as cited by Umaña-Taylor, 2011 in Schwartz et al., 2011) and is heavily grounded in the socio-historical and culture of a specific country or region.

wealth and improve social status (Fealy 2008; Muzakki 2007 in Hew, 2018a). To put it bluntly, being a preacher is essentially a full-time job³. This existing red ocean of Indonesia's Islamic preacher market makes room for some Chinese-mualaf preacher figures like Felix Siau, Koko Liem, Anton Medan, and Tan Mei Hwa. These preachers are famously known for their 'unique' appearance and distinctive style of da'wah, making good use of their Chinese-ness and Islam to strategically position and differentiate themselves in the market. Their deliberate personal branding and extensive use of media outlets for transmitting Islamic preaching to the public cater to the surge of online piety and consumer culture in Indonesia's Islamic da'wah market. Notably, two Chinese-mualaf preachers like the then-TV famous Koko Liem and the tech-savvy Felix Siau turn to Instagram, a popular visual-based social media platform, to manage their persona and engagement with followers online. This article aims to closely compare two Chinese-Muslim preachers, namely Felix Siau and Koko Liem, on their ways of articulating, negotiating, and strategically using their Chinese-Muslim identity on Instagram.

Situating Chinese Muslims in Indonesia

Ethnic identity is generally seen from three streams of thought. The first is the primordialism view, also known as essentialist. Primordialism is based on 'the idea of belonging' in a group, specifically familial or kinship group (Appadurai, 1996, in Surya, 2018). In other words, this view emphasizes identity as 'descent-based' (Chandra, 2005 in Surya, 2018),

³ To be clear, I am fully aware of those Islamic preachers that is driven by their personal calling ('*hidayah*') or social cause, like helping people in need ('*amal*') with no intention to gain something in return other than God's favor ('*pahala*'). Thus, those preachers are likely to be excluded in this narrative. However, in this article, Chinese-Islam preachers mentioned were seen heavily from the economical perspectives based on their 'promotional' posts on social media and business ownerships other than preaching.

and consequently considers that ethnic identity is unchangeable as it is based on ancestral ties. In practice, this approach is somewhat used or adopted in how Indonesians imagined the 'pribumi' identity, especially vis-à-vis Chinese in the Indonesian context.

While the second view, known as social constructivism, is self-explanatory as it would result from social construction. Further, it suggests that ethnic identity is constantly constructing and re-constructing (Chandra, 2001, in Surya, 2018). It embraced that culture is essential and simultaneously accepts its inherent dynamicity. This view emphasizes becoming rather than being. In addition, its multiplicity of characteristics of individual identities and variables influence the formation of identity (Bayar, 2009 in Surya, 2018). Lastly is the instrumentalist view, which in a way, fills in the gap left by constructivist as it is viewed as the ethnic group strategically deployed to attain individual or collective goals (Spencer, 2017 in Surya, 2018). This approach highlights the significant role played by influential leaders in mobilizing identities, especially in politics.

However, there is also hybridity to describe the complex identity of the ethnic Chinese (Hoon, 2006a) and, to an extent, embrace cultural mixing and the emergence of ambiguous identities as its rejects rigid boundaries (Hew, 2018a). On this note, the notion of 'intentional hybridity' (Hew, 2018) is the opposite of 'organic hybridity', which helps to understand the role of intention in one's choice of representing their identity. This aligns with this article's approach to the two preachers' social media representation as promotional tools for their preaching job.

Later in this article, Chinese-Muslim seemingly 'unique' identity is associated with the reproduction of heavily politicized, ethno-religious conflicts between Chinese and Islam in the Indonesian socio-political context as well as the number of Chinese-Muslims in Indonesia.

The peculiarity of Chinese-Muslims is vastly influenced by Indonesia's history, which is familiar with conflicts between the Chinese and Islam. Shiraishi (1997) noted that, in Indonesia's pre-independence era, there were tensions between the Chinese people and the indigenous Muslims, especially in Java. Moreover, anti-Chinese policies and riots continued to break out from time to time (Heidhues, 1972, 2012; Suryadinata, 1976, 1999) until they peaked in 1998 (Panggabean & Smith, 2011; Purdey, 2002). This ethnic-religious conflict subsided significantly after the Reformation era, although some hateful sentiments recently returned (Setijadi, 2019). However, evidence of the existence of Chinese-Muslims in Indonesia can be traced back to the 15th century on the coast of Java (Lombard, 2005; Lombard & Salmon, 1993). This narrative links Admiral Zheng He's (Cheng Ho) voyage on the coast of Java with the spread of Islam (Al-Qurtuby, 2009; Tsai, 2018) to the theory of Islamization in China (Hew, 2018a). However, the contribution of Zheng He or the Chinese to Islam in the archipelago is still in debate⁴.

To an extent, Chinese-descent is still perceived as an outsider (Reid, 2009) or even treated as a foreigner despite being born and raised in Indonesia for generations (Hoon, 2006). The above-mentioned resulted in a heavily prejudiced and vulnerable position for Chinese-Indonesians as they are placed vis-a-vis the *pribumi*, an imagined identity for indigenous Indonesians. Interestingly, the social also played a pivotal role in the matter. The Chinese are homogeneously seen as "economic creatures" (Hoon, 2008), with access

4 Historian Slamet Muljana (1968, in Hew, 2018a; Suryadinata, 2019) once wrote a book, saying that Islam originated in China and was spread by the Chinese (Islamization from China). This possibility was rejected by the New Order regime as one of the influences of the then-Assimilation project, which was conducted to try to remove any remaining element of Chinese identity from the Indonesian Chinese population, while at the same time only acknowledging that Islam came from Arab or Gujarat (Suryadinata, 2019).

to high-ranked officials and privilege in the nation's economy. In Indonesia, this stereotype is often validated by the annual publication of Indonesia's conglomerates, which consistently shows Chinese business people on the top of the list⁵. These continuous depictions of the Chinese instilled a sense of resentment and, to some extent, even hatred towards them by the *pribumi*.

Secondly, the number of Chinese Muslims in Indonesia is relatively low. Scholars have different estimated numbers, as there was no official record of the Chinese nor the Chinese Muslim population in Indonesia⁶. Arifin et al. (2017) estimated from the 2010 Census, the Chinese population was only 1.20 percent or roughly 2.8 million out of 236.7 million Indonesian, while Mackie (2005, in Hew, 2017) assumes the population of Chinese at 2-3 percent or around 5-6 million. Moreover, the majority of Chinese are non-Muslims. Yahya (2005, in Hew, 2018) argues, that there are approximately 30.000 to 50.000 Chinese Muslims across Indonesia or about 0.5-1 percent of the total Chinese population. Arguably to these conditions, Chinese Muslims could identify themselves as a *double minority* (compared to the number of Chinese and Indonesia population) and a *minority within a minority* (compared to the number of Chinese and Chinese non-Muslim groups).

5 It is common to have an annual publication listing names of conglomerates in Indonesia. Chinese-Indonesian businessmen are usually on the top of this list, like Robert Budi Hartono and Michael Hartono (co-owner of PT Bank Central Asia and Djarum), the Widjaja family enterprise, Anthoni Salim, Susilo Wonowidjojo, and Boenjamin Setiawan (Fajri, 2022).

6 Since the Reformation era, the Government of Indonesia has conducted 3 (three) population censuses in 2000, 2010, and 2020. The very first census was conducted during the Dutch East Indies colonial rule, and the few following censuses stopped during the New Order era. Indonesia's Statistic Body, or BPS had recently released the results of the 2020 census, in which its implementation was constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the 2020 results do not present any population data based on ethnicity (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020)

In this light, conversion to Islam could alleviate the burden or compensate for the "disadvantage" of being Chinese. According to Reid (2009), being a Muslim could significantly ease the resentment towards one's Chinese-ness in Indonesia. On a similar note, Hew (2018) argues that being a Muslim could help a Chinese escape his or her ethnic minority membership as they partake in the religious majority group in Indonesia. Conversion to Islam could even have economic and cultural leverages. For example, Jones (2021) wrote about the *mualaf chic* phenomenon in addressing Ayane Jihye Moon, a Korean in Indonesia famously known for her *mualaf* status and beauty, which made her a substantial sympathetic Indonesian fan base on social media. This phenomenon also occurs in the case of Larissa Chou, a divorcee of Alvin Faiz, son of the late famous Indonesian preacher, Ustadz Arifin Ilham. Her *mualaf*-by-marriage story, beauty, and short-lived marriage scandals have become her social currency as she is also emerging as an Instagram celebrity in Indonesia. This intersection of *mualaf* status, fame, and social media show Indonesia's precarious yet lucrative rabbit hole of mediated Islamic piety.

Untangling Indonesia Islamic Preacher Market: From TV Personas to Social Media Magnets

The preacher market of any religion in Indonesia and around the world has always relied heavily on media (Hew, 2018; Musa, 2020; Hew, 2012 in Sai & Hoon, 2012; Sakai & Fauzia, 2014). However, the Islamic preacher market, in particular, is attracting more attention with its rapid and continuous adaptation to the latest technological advances available. In addressing this matter, Barendregt (2009, in Husein & Slama, 2018) has argued that communication technology in Indonesia has gone through a kind of '*domestication*' within the Islamic community producing more eye-catching examples of Islamic digital

religiosity practice. Even so, this way of 'consuming religion' has emerged in the last decades and coincides with the growth of the Muslim middle class (Slama, 2018). Moreover, Fealy and White (2008, in Slama, 2018) posit that Indonesian Muslims have extended their expression of faith and even flaunted it on their social media accounts. Regarding the issue, (Arifianto, 2019) stated that in a country undergoing a religious revival such as Indonesia, the so-called religious entrepreneurs aiming to be the new Islamic authorities tend to deepen their Islamic knowledge and be skillful at articulating it through new technologies, such as social media.

In the early 2000's Indonesia, the mediated Islamic preaching practice has been going since the surge of television with the rise of the first 'television preachers', like Abdullah Gymnastiar (AA Gym) and the late Ustadz Jefri Al-Buchori (Uje) (Arifianto, 2019). In around the 2010s, second-wave generations television preachers appeared with much more lively and entertaining formats, like Ustadz Nur Maulana (known for his catchphrase, "*Jamaah, Oh Jamaah*" translated as "Pilgrims, oh Pilgrims"; Mama Dedeh, Ustadz Yusuf Mansur, the late Ustadz Arifin Ilham, and many others. Recently, Habib Husein Al-Jafar, Hanan Attaki, Gus Baha, and Khalid Basalamah are famously known for their extensive social media presence and massive online following.

Many observers have extensively researched this phenomenon of television and social media preachers as one of the main themes in reading Indonesia's contemporary Islam. However, in my observation, those mentioned preachers are mainly of 'native' Indonesia originating from Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi with a hint of Arabian-Hadrami descent. This created an opportunity seized by Chinese-Muslim preachers, mainly with their *mualaf* status, to liven up and differentiate themselves in Indonesia's dense market of Islamic preachers.

There has been an increase in media-savvy Islamic preachers in several countries, including Indonesia (Hew, 2018b). Over the years, these Chinese-Muslim preachers have appeared in conventional and new media. The surge of television catapulted Anton Medan, Tan Mei Hwa, and Koko Liem into stardom in the early 2000s as the archetype of Chinese-Muslim television preachers. They have appeared to preach on numerous Islamic shows broadcast on nationwide television. They are seen as high-profile Chinese *mualaf* preachers in contemporary Indonesia (Hew, 2012 in Sai & Hoon, 2012).

Anton Medan or Tan Kok Liong is a popular or rather controversial figure. He was born in 1957 and is notoriously known as a *preman* or gangster. He spent 18 years in prison due to his involvement in robbery, drugs, and illegal gambling. In 1992, he converted to Islam, took an Islamic name, Muhammad Ramadan Effendi, and devoted himself to preaching service among prisoners and prostitutes. His before becoming popular with the wider public on television. His redemption story had become his selling point. As a Chinese-Muslim figure, the media frequently asked about his view and commentary. Unlike Koko Liem or Tan Mei Hwa, he did not have any preaching show for himself. However, he did actively involve as Chairman of the *Persatuan Islam Tionghoa Indonesia* (Indonesian Association of Ethnic Chinese Muslims, or PITI) and did not transition to social media. In early 2021, Anton passed away from health issues.

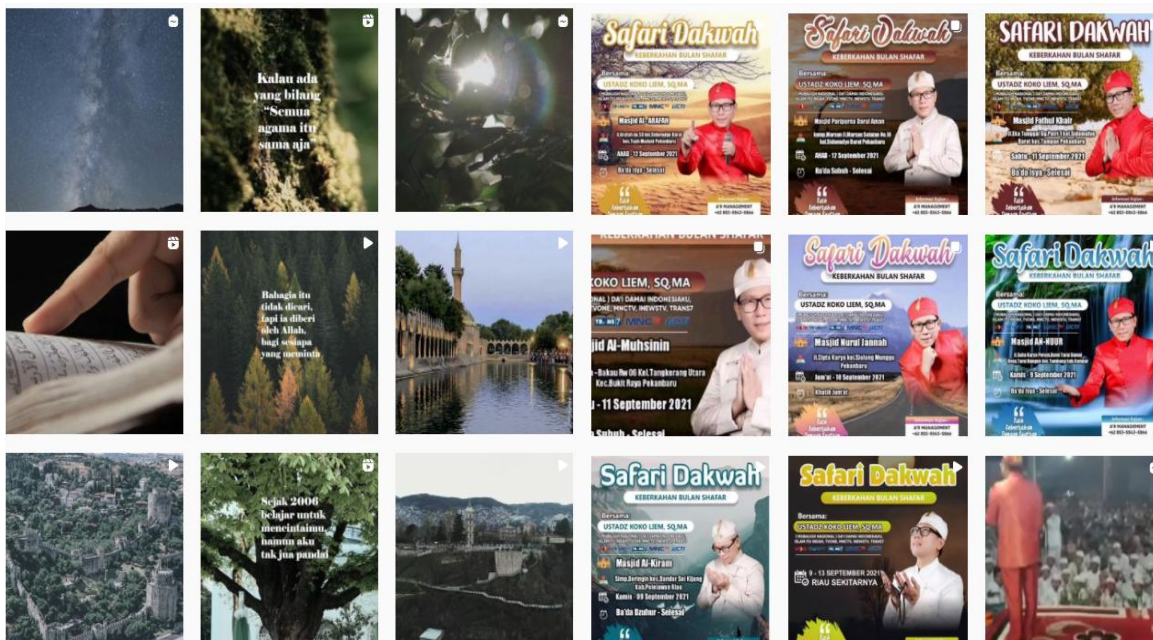
Tan Mei Hwa or Ida Astuti is a famous preacher from Surabaya, East Java. Born in 1968, Tan Mei Hwa is known for her Chinese origins and entertaining preaching style incorporating singing and dancing. In the past, during Ramadan, she hosted a religious program on JTV, the biggest local television in East Java. However, Tan Mei Hwa's media popularity had declined gradually long before the COVID-19 pandemic struck. She reportedly

had to temporarily give up preaching as no preaching offer was available. She transitioned to Instagram but was not that popular, with less than 2000 followers online.

Koko Liem was born Liem Hai Thai in 1979 in Dumai, Riau, within a Buddhist family. At 14, he converted to Islam and took the name Muhammad Utsman Ansori. Unlike any other Chinese *mualaf* preacher, Koko Liem had taken proper Islamic education. He was trained in a *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and continued to pursue Islamic studies at Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Quran (PTIQ) until he graduated with a master of Al-Quran interpretation. In his early career, Koko Liem appeared on several national television stations, like MNC TV, Indosiar, SCTV, TV One, and Trans TV. With his skill in memorizing Quran verses, he competes on *Mimbar Dai*, a nationwide TV show on TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia). He even appeared as *kyai* (Islamic scholar) on an episode of 'Kiamat Sudah Dekat 3', an Indonesia *sinetron* (shorts for '*sinema elektronik*', an Indonesian TV drama series) containing Islamic teaching that aired during Ramadan. Although his TV popularity has declined, Koko Liem has already transitioned to social media, notably Instagram, in the last few years with around 24 thousand followers.

In contrast, Felix Siauw took on social media from the get-go and transformed himself into one of the leading social media preachers in contemporary Indonesia. His extensive use of social media and advanced knowledge of digital marketing had become his distinctive feature in the Chinese-*mualaf* preacher market. His Instagram even has 4 million followers. Felix Siauw was born in 1984 in Palembang, North Sumatra. He was initially Catholic but converted to Islam in 2002 after learning about it from his acquaintances affiliated with Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an Islamic group now banned and disbanded by the Indonesian government. He started his *da'wah*

Figure 1.
Overview of @felixsiauww (left) and @ustadz_kokoliem (right) Instagram posts



Source: Instagram @felix_siauww and @ustadz_kokoliem, accessed on September 28th, 2021

activities while studying at Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) and continued until he became known to the public in 2012. By far, he still uses his Chinese name despite admitting that he no longer carries out the Chinese traditions.

Overall, these preachers are well-known to be part of the heterogeneous representation of Chinese-Muslim identity in Indonesia, which to an extent have 'essentialized and strategically used' their Chinese-ness as well as a form of celebration of inclusive Chinese identity in contemporary Indonesia (Hew, 2012 in Sai & Hoon, 2012).

Methods

This study observes Instagram uploads by two Indonesian Chinese-Muslim preachers, Felix Siauww (@felixsiauww) and Koko Liem (@ustadz_kokoliem). These two figures are selected for their relatively high popularity and social media activity⁷, compared to

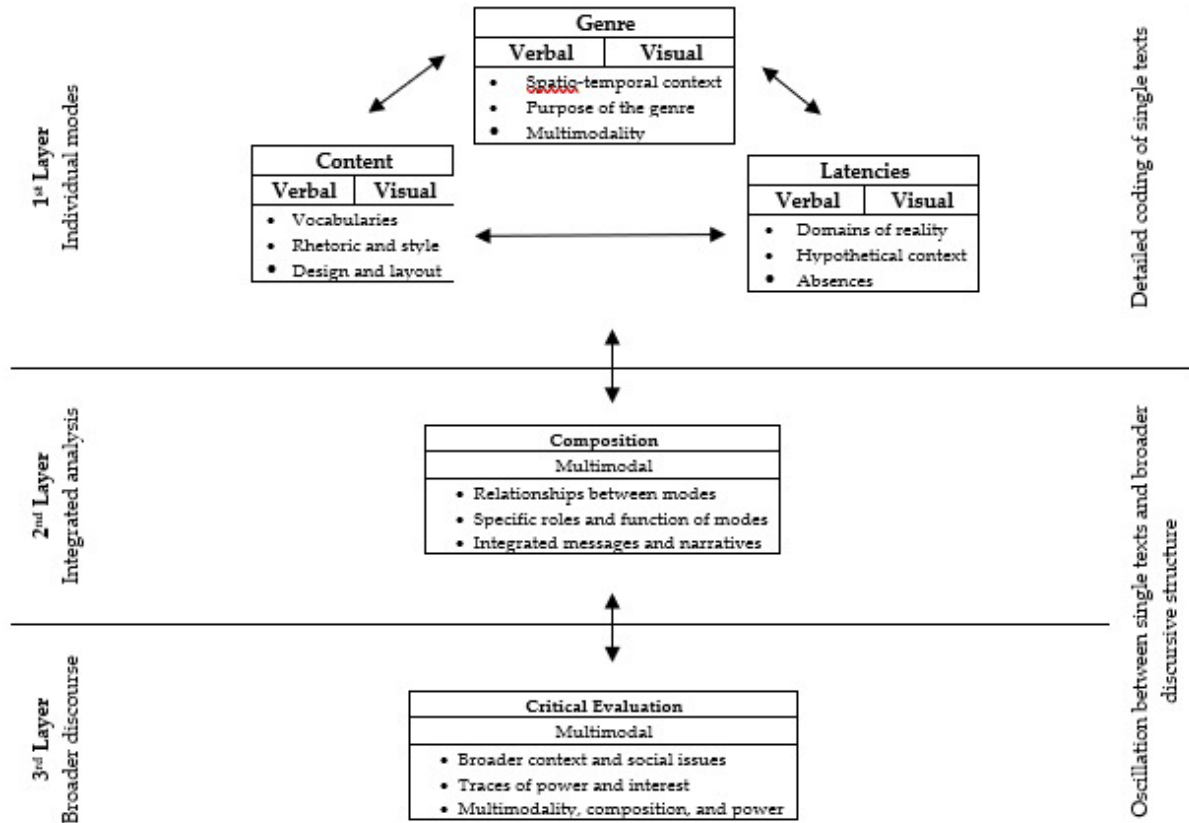
other Chinese-Muslim preachers mentioned earlier. Furthermore, this research utilized Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), a strain of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which accommodates visual and other modal as data (Jancsary et al., 2016) to understand and expose these preachers' distinct and deliberate strategic use of visual and narration on Chinese and Islam identity.

This method affords the multimodality of language, including the visual, as it is one of the prominent resources for the social construction of reality and the storage of social knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1967 in Jancsary et al., 2016). Even visual modes could be understood as a culturally shaped and culturally given semiotic resource (Kress, 2010:79 in Jancsary et al., 2016) with the assumption that such social reality is deliberately constructed by its actor as their means to achieve a certain interest

the authentic presence of the public figure or entity it represents (Meta, 2022). However, as Meta stated, this badge is not a symbol to show importance or authority. In addition, not all public figures have verified badge, which is the case for Koko Liem.

⁷ In Figure 1, it is shown that Felix Siauww's Instagram account is verified (blue-ticked badge/icon), while Koko Liem is not. This means that Instagram confirmed

Figure 2
Overview of the MDA methodological approach



Source: Jancsary et al., 2016

and further, potentially meaning-making (Berger and Luckmann 1967 in Jancsary et al., 2016). Thus, multimodality discourse analysis observes the different functions of different modes and their inter-relationships (Machin and Mayr 2012; Unsworth and Cléirigh 2009, in Jancsary et al., 2016). While for the critical side of this method is heavily related to the questions of CDA, which asked “how things are, why they are the way they are and how in any way, could they be different (Fairclough 2010; Wodak 2011a, in Jancsary et al., 2016).

This research's object are Instagram posts uploaded by both accounts from September 1 to September 25, 2021. There are a total of 31 uploads⁸, consisting of 10 uploads by @

felixsiau, in which all of them are videos (audio-visual-texts), and 21 uploads by @ustadz_kokoliem consisting of 8 videos (audio-visual-text) and 13 multiple (carousel) photos posts (see Figure 1). All of these posts have a caption (verbal text) related to them. Visual elements included in the analysis are: profile photos, posts (photos and videos), and the text elements are verbal text written in photos and videos and captions. The interactive elements (likes and comments) were not included as they did not represent the preachers' view and were not relevant to this research

This approach uses an idealistic yet flexible 3-layers analysis with its guiding questions. The first layer focuses on genre, latencies, and content; the second is about composition, and the third is about the critical evaluation of the overall modalities to expose the producer's underlying meaning, motives, and power. As

⁸ These posts are available for public-access and is not yet edited or deleted of the respective pages as of May 20th, 2022, as it were first uploaded on September, 2021.

for the genre and content, I noticed that the preachers are making content customization to match the visual-based characteristics and the user demographic of Instagram, while the latency issue is not necessarily needed further investigation in this research. Lastly, the second and third layers include a closer look at the composition and hold for a critical evaluation of the broader context of the overall objects.

Overall, the visual elements are observed in the preacher's profile picture and posts. While the text elements observed are in their profile page and post's caption. The first aim is to understand their ways of articulation and negotiate their inherent Chinese identity as well as Islamic preachers, while the latter is to understand their narration style of da'wah as Islamic preachers.

In an earlier study, Veum & Undrum (2017) used the same approach to understand how people make meaning through the semiotic practice of shooting digital self-portraits (selfies), adding captions, and sharing these multimodal texts on Instagram. In an Islamic context, Hew (2018b) had quite extensively explored Felix Siau's propagation style on social media. His work provides an

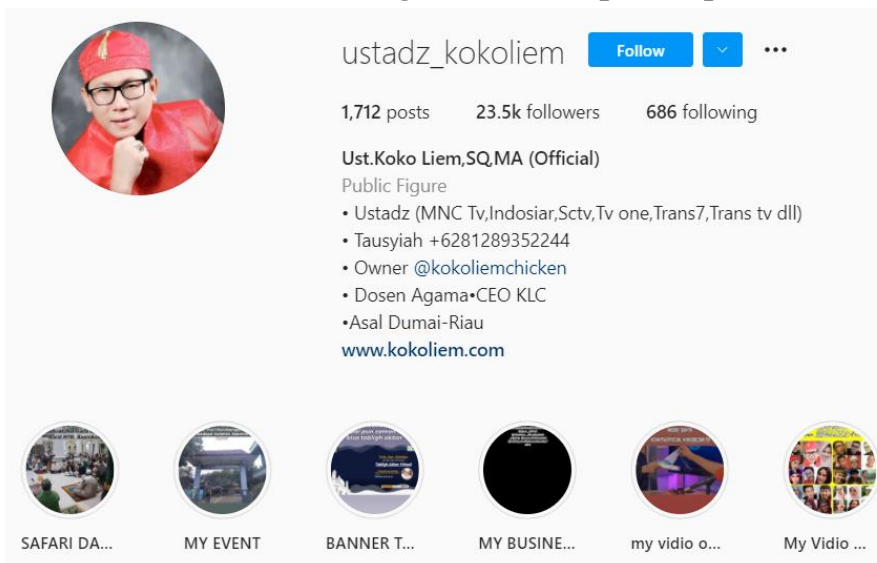
exhaustive framework to further analyze Chinese-Muslim preachers on social media. In another study, Hew (2017) had been contrasting Felix Siau and Anton Medan as he touches on Indonesia's political sphere and these preachers influence it. Mustapha & Abdul Razak (2019) did a study contrasting two globally-known Islamic preachers, Yusuf Islam and Zakir Nnaik's propagation styles give insights in conducting this reearch. Notably, a previous study by (Hew, 2018b) observed and compared Felix Siau with Anton Medan but not based on Instagram. In conclusion, there has not been a study of Indonesian Chinese-Muslims preachers that specifically contrast Felix Siau and Koko Liem, or even discuss their style of strategically articulating their identity and preaching on Instagram.

Results

Visually Contrast Appearances: It is Either Stereotypical or Indifferent

Felix Siau and Koko Liem display two contrasting versions of Chinese-Muslim preachers on their respective profile pictures and uploads discussed below. In general, they represent two Chinese-Muslim figures

Figure 3.
Koko Liem's Instagram account profile photo



Source: Instagram @ustadz_kokoliem, accessed on September 28, 2021

Figure 4.
Screenshots of Koko Liem's TV appearances in his early career



Source: YouTube.com, accessed on February 4th, 2022

with different religious backgrounds and contradicting personalities: Felix Siauw, who is indifferent to his Chinese-ness and Koko Liem, who seems "stereotypical". Underlining these differences, I believe that these preachers have rigorously defined their representation to better exemplify their Chinese-ness or Islam to a certain degree that would benefit them.

In his profile picture (see Figure 1, top), Liem is looking directly at the camera, smiling with his hand supporting his chin, looking confidently with his black-framed glasses on. His photo background is a standard Indonesia photo studio gray-ish backdrop, exhibiting his effort in ensuring he is looking properly to his audience. However, his stereotypical Chinese attire stands out the most with full-on red *Tang suits* (*Tang Zhuang*, translated 唐装 is a traditional Chinese set of clothing for men), including a skullcap. This attire has been his preaching trademark since his early career on television shows, way before he transitioned to social media. To confirm this, I look into several old YouTube videos from back in the 2010s where Koko Liem has been consistently building his persona as Islamic preacher, while visually emphasizing his Chinese-ness.

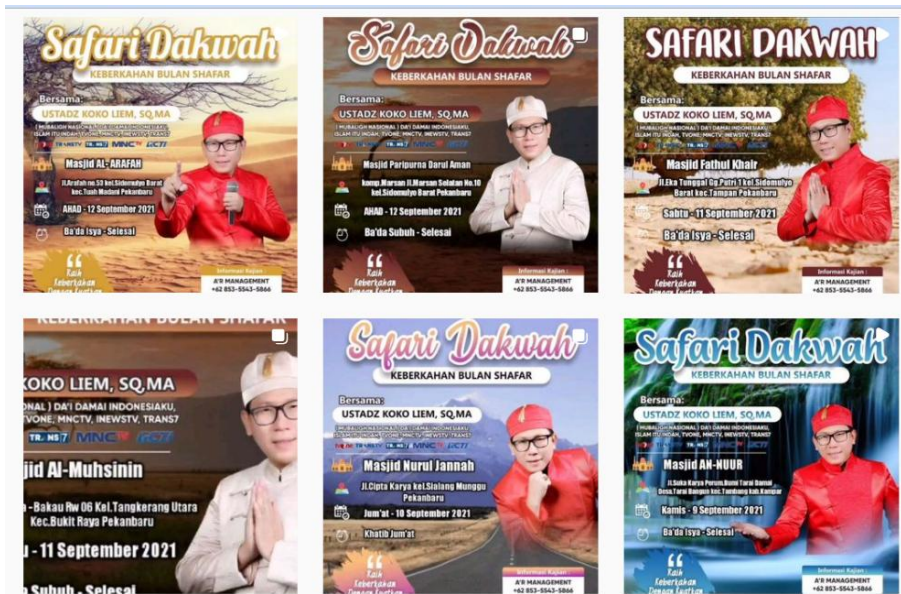
Figure 5.
Screenshot of Koko Liem's old SMS advertisement of Lampion Hati



Source: Hew (2018a:137)

Another artifact of Liem's 'trademark' appearance also appeared in Hew's (2017) book, in which he attached a picture of Koko Liem wearing a green *Tang suit*, posing with both hands open to promote his SMS religiously-themed service called *Lampion Hati* (*A Lantern for the Heart*). This service offers

Figure 6.
Photos of Koko Liem in Tang Suit



Source: Instagram @ustadz_kokoliem, accessed on February 4th, 2022

Islamic-based advice, teaching, and ringtones to his subscribers.

Other than his Tang suit, I would like to also address his choice of color. From my observation, I concluded that Koko Liem has strategically emphasized his Chinese-ness through the symbolism of color association in his Instagram profile picture and posts. Culturally speaking, the color red is heavily used in various objects of Chinese traditional rituals, such as lanterns and *hong bao* (red envelopes), during the Chinese New Year, with various metaphorical meanings mainly associated with happiness, prosperity, and kindness (Huang, 2011). This also applies amongst the Chinese-Indonesian or, arguably, Chinese overseas. On another note, Huang (2011) also notes the political connotation and historical value of the color red (*'hong se'*) that could symbolize revolution and socialism, but this is less likely the case in this context.

This color association also appears in his other posts during September 2021, where Liem uses the Tang suit with other colors like green and white. In my observation of his Instagram

post, those colors were all chosen deliberately, mainly to further represent his Islam or Chinese-ness persona. For example, the color green (*'akhḍar'*, in Arabic), white (*'abyad'*), black (*'aswad'*), red (*'ahmar'*), and yellow (*'aṣfar'*) is explicitly mentioned in the Holy Quran with their respective symbolic Islamic meanings in a study by Hirsch (2019). The color green is said to represent birth even to an extent. The Prophet Muhammad's favorite color, the color white, symbolizes true believers' faith, as well as positive and pureness. Conversely, the color black symbolizes sadness and even dirt or bad luck (Rabab'ah 2014 in Hirsch, 2019). Red symbolizes duality, which has ambivalent meanings (positive, as the colour of love as well as negative and positive at the same time, like the color of fire, war, and blood). Lastly, yellow symbolizes vegetation, hellfire, as well as the color of the cow that Moses was commanded to sacrifice (Fatani, 2005 in Hirsch, 2019).

Other colors used but with no direct association to Islam are considered used for the aesthetic, as I argue that within Indonesia's context, being a preacher could also sometimes

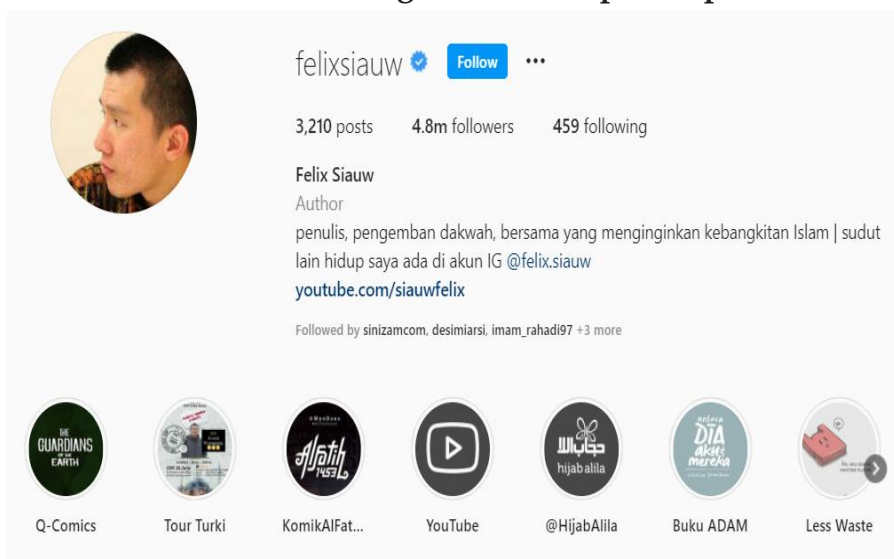
means being an 'entertainer' in terms of visual appearance. However, this could be the case for Koko Liem, yet definitely not for Felix Siauw (or other Islamic preachers, in general), who chose not to associate clothing with any stereotypical or latent symbolic meaning.

As for Felix Siauw, in his profile picture, he is looking indifferent with nothing to signify his Chinese-ness but his inherent Chinese look, with slanted eyes and a yellowish skin color (see Figure 1, bottom). He is posing sideways as if this photo was candidly taken while still maintaining to look serious yet confident in his gaze. Unlike Koko Liem or any other Islamic preacher in general, Siauw is known for consistently wearing batik shirt, instead of *baju koko* and *peci* (Indonesian-Muslim typical shirt and skullcap). Since 2011, Felix has been known for wearing a batik which was designed and produced by The Batik House of Priyo Atmodjo, run by one of his friends (Hew, 2018a). According to Eifert (2012), batik has a high value in Indonesia's culture and is heavily loaded with symbolism with different motives and colors having their own meaning. For example, brown colors were seen as the official colors of the Japanese royal courts, while green

stands for Islam. There was also assimilation from the Chinese when they introduced red-colored dye and patterns from China to the indigenous Indonesians. His choice of batik also rarely indicated any Chinese-aculturated motifs, like the Chinese mythological animals, like a dragon and a phoenix (Hong Bird/*Feng Huang*), or floral prints like the peonies or chrysanthemum (Retiyanti, 2020).

However, Hew (2018b) points out that wearing batik doesn't equate to Felix's endorsement of Indonesia's founding principle, Pancasila. It is widely known that Felix is one of the main public endorsers of the 'khilafah' (caliphate) ideology, a stream of ideology in Islam that encourages the enforcement of the Islamic/shari'ah law to replace the current 'declining' democracy in Indonesia and elsewhere. However, turning Indonesia into an Islamic state is impossible as that means they would have to overturn Indonesia's constitutional laws and nation-building history. Thus in Indonesia, this ideology and its supporting organizations was dismissed by the government, including Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in 2014 which Siauw was also actively involved. Following the ban, Siauw no longer

Figure 7.
Felix Siauw's Instagram account profile photo



Source: Instagram @felix_siauw, accessed on September 28th, 2021

Figure 8.
Felix Siauw's old appearances in TV shows



Source: YouTube, accessed on February 4th 2022

publicly endorsed HTI even though he did not deny his past affiliation. However, he subtly consistently incorporated his strict Islamist view in his posts or opinions. Ahnaf (2017, in (Hew, 2018b)) Interestingly enough, this message resonates with the younger, urban, tech-savvy Muslim audience caught in the Islamic revival ('hijrah') wave in Indonesia. Additionally, his casual appearance is designated to cater to his younger audience. Hew (2018b) said that his clothing style makes him appear 'down-to-earth and brings him closer to the hearts of many youths'.

In conclusion, Koko Liem's deliberate decision to wear traditional Chinese clothing reaffirms his Chinese identity and, to an extent, emphasizes it. Furthermore, it appears that Koko Liem uses his Chinese-ness strategically and specifically to differentiate himself from other Chinese-Muslim or Islamic preachers. It is different with Felix Siauw, who does not give out or try to build an association, between himself and either Chinese or Islam, through clothing. However, both preachers' Instagram biodata mainly highlighted their identities as Islamic preachers. Felix Siauw

describes himself as '*penulis, pengemban dakwah, bersama yang menginginkan kebangkitan Islam*' (translate, a writer, a preacher, and one who stands with those who desire the revival of Islam). Meanwhile, Koko Liem also describes himself as an ustadz (Islam preacher) who has appeared on various Indonesian national television stations. In addition, he makes apparent his identity as a religion lecturer with bachelor's and master's degrees. Therefore, it is seen that Felix Siauw emphasizes more on his Islamic identity rather than his Chinese-ness while Koko Liem is doing the opposite but not to an extreme.

The Religious-Capitalist: Full-Time Preacher and Businessmen

In this part, I would like to highlight these preachers' use of Instagram to deliver da'wah as part of their religious ministry and their extensive line of business as entrepreneurs. As preachers, Felix Siauw and Koko Liem use their Instagram to regularly upload their short-version da'wah videos or photos, often complemented with Quranic references in the

caption. However, to an extent, their Instagram persona and posts also serve as a promotional tool for their businesses. Interestingly, most of these businesses strategically use their Islam preachers' status with their followers as their main prospected consumers. In my observation, Felix Siau's use of Instagram for preaching and promotional marketing is way more sophisticated and engaging than Koko Liem.

Out of 10 uploads in September 2021, I noticed Felix Siau only uploads teasers or trailers for his YouTube videos or his opinion on the latest religious or political situation in Indonesia. On these observed posts, Felix rarely refers to a Quranic verse as most of them are opinions or his 'religious interpretations', which is as convincing as da'wah to his online followers. His casual, easy-to-understand yet persuasive writing style blurred the line between his opinions and da'wah on captions.

As an entrepreneur, Felix also often strategically uses his Instagram to promote his extensive line of businesses, such as *Hijab Alila* (@hijabalila, a hijab brand he runs with his wife, Ummu Alila); *AlFatih Studio and Press* (@alfatihstudios, a creative studio he founded with his follower-turned-colleague, Emeraldal Noor Achni to promote visual da'wah); *YukNgaji* (@yukngajiid, Felix's da'wah community and free/paid Islamic training courses); *Komik Alfatih* (@komikalfatih1453, Islamic comic books publishing agency), *Terang Trip* (@terangtrip, Islamic-themes tour and travel agency), *Seblak Koko* (@seblakkoko, his franchise brand for a traditional snack franchise named after his son), and even co-authored and published at least 8 books, including *Beyond the Inspiration* (Siau 2010), *Khilafah remake* (Siau 2014), *Udah Putusin Aja* [Cut it out already] (Siau and Noor Achni 2013) and *The Art of Dakwah* (Siau and Noor Achni 2017). For example, he was actively promoting his *Heritage of Ottoman* tour package, a ten-day-long Islamic historical trip in Turkiye visiting the Utsmani Empire

remnant organized by Terang Trip. In another September 8th post, he mentioned that he and his team ate *Seblak Koko* during his Turkiye trip. For his other businesses, like *Hijab Alila*, *Yuk Ngaji*, and *Komik Alfatih*, he made them a *highlight*, a feature to highlight Instagram stories or posts to make them easier to find and accessible from his profile page. While it is reasonable that these businesses aim to promote and financially sustain his da'wah activities (Hew, 2018), his ways of commodifying Indonesia's growing religious piety, especially among tech-savvy Islamic youths. This blatantly showcases Indonesia's growing Muslims middle-class consumer culture trend.

In this regard, Felix's 4 million Instagram followers could be seen as his prospective buyers. Interestingly, this situation creates ripple effects in which his followers buy Felix's products because they resonate with their Islamic identity and adherence to Felix's view and teaching. For example, his hijab brand, *Hijab Alila*, which only sells Sharia-style hijab, surprisingly has around 750 thousand followers on Instagram. While the information on their sales is confidential, this prompts Felix's Muslim women devotees to buy them. A similar transpires with *Terang Trip*, with around 34 thousand Instagram followers. This travel agency offers a very limited slot trip that departs monthly with prices ranging from 20 to 30 million rupiahs to Turkey. Besides its 'Islamic historical value', this trip 'sells' Felix Siau's acting as its guide tour during the 10-day trip.

As for Koko Liem, in 17 out of 20 uploads, he is seen promoting his Safari Dakwah, a series of preaching visits to numerous mosques in his hometown, Pekanbaru, Riau, Sumatra Island. In other posts, he is showing his visit to his Islamic spiritual teacher's tomb, Teuku Zulkarnaen, and a gym session with his trainer. In his Safari Da'wah posts, Liem is seen wearing only red or white Tang suits with various courteous, if anything, Islamic poses. In those posts, he mentioned his visit schedule to

Figure 9.
Koko Liem's Safari Dakwah post



Source: Instagram @ustadz_kokoliem, accessed on February 4th, 2022

each mosque and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) around Riau, Sumatera Island. While it is unclear whether or not he is getting paid for his Safari Da'wah, it is safe to assume that these posts serve as his da'wah promotional tool.

In my observation, Koko Liem is an example of the evolution of media utilization and personal branding of Indonesia's Chinese Islamic preacher. In his early career, Koko Liem presented himself as "Illusionist Da'i", preaching Islam while occasionally performing magic as his distinctive traits (see Figure. 3) in his appearances on national TV in shows, like Sapa Indonesia (Kompas TV), Obat Hati with Rina Nose (Indosiar), and Bukan Empat Mata (Trans7). However, he has consistently tailored his stereotypical appearance emphasizing his Chinese-ness through his Tang suits (as mentioned in an earlier chapter). However, he no longer uses the "Illusionist Da'i" persona as he transitioned to social media in recent years, as seen in his Instagram posts. He sticks with his wide-known identity as *ustadz* (Islamic scholar) and Bachelor's and Master's graduate in Islam formal education (his SQ and MA degree).

Koko Liem owns a business but not as many and mediatized as Felix Siauw. On his profile page and his story highlight labeled 'My Business', he mentions that he owns Koko Liem Chicken (KLC), a fried chicken restaurant located in Cibubur, West Java. On his profile page, he tagged @kokoliemchicken, but this account is inactive. In his story highlight, he tagged @kokoliemchicken.cibubur, and this account is active with minimum activity and only 169 followers. He also mentioned that he is the CEO of KLC, or Koko Liem Center (@yayasan_koko_liem_center_jkt) with around a thousand followers, a foundation (*yayasan*) function to handle his services, like *tausiyah* (Islamic lecture), shooting, events, and other Islamic-related activities. In his Instagram posts, he rarely promotes his Koko Liem Chicken or Koko Liem Center, unlike Felix Siauw, who occasionally inserts his business in captions.

Composing Message That "Sells"

In this last chapter, I would like to compare these preachers' way of customizing messages that 'sells' to their market audience, meaning

how they compose their visual aesthetic and textual elements in posts. Overall, Felix Siauw's posts are visually and textually refined, neat, and highly persuasive, with clear market-positioning to the urban, tech-savvy youth. At the same time, Koko Liem's visual and text elements are conventional, less persuasive, and rather unclear in market-positioning. In my observation, this has to do with their generational gap, audience scope and, digital marketing skills.

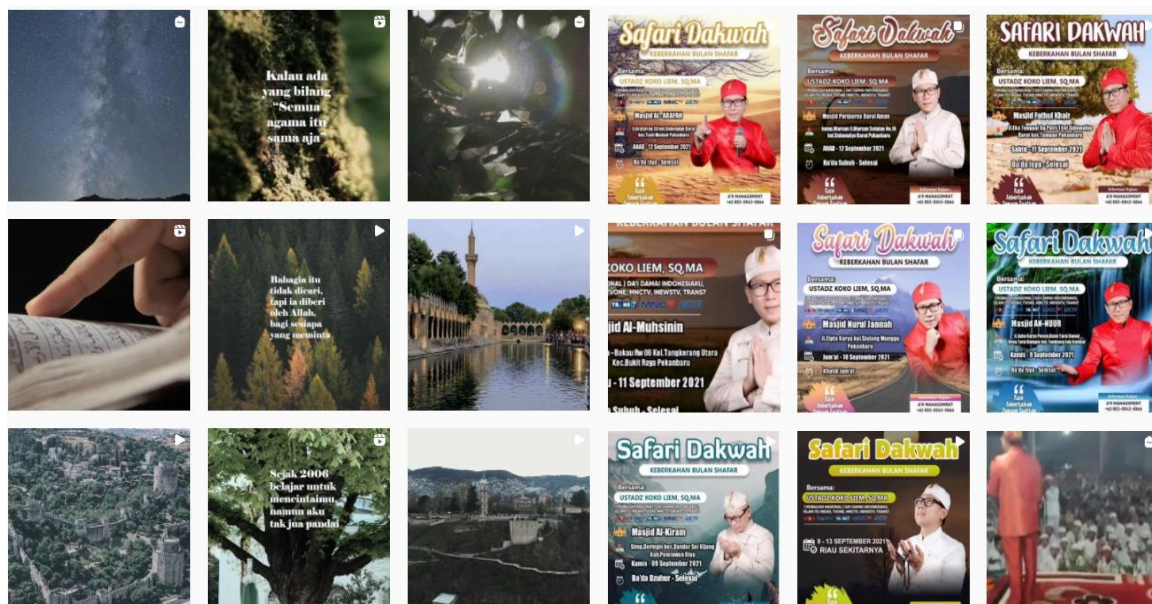
Explicitly, the difference between Felix Siauw and Koko Liem's "market" of da'wah can be seen from their Instagram uploads' distinct visual packaging. From the uploads observed during September 2021, none of @felixsiauw's posts could be associated with his Chinese identity, contrary to Koko Liem's consistent stereotypical Chinese visual.

From the visuals of his Instagram uploads, Felix Siauw seems to focus on working on content that adapts to the market tastes of his followers, many of whom are young people, especially women under 35 years of age, who live in urban areas with a low level of religious knowledge (Hew, 2018b; Khairina, 2020). In the

researcher's observation, Felix Siauw's uploads tend to contain dramatic cool-tone color visual compositions with poetic impressions to build an atmosphere of "moving" or "heartwarming" beauty. According to Hew (2018b), Felix's beautification strategy is to package his Instagram uploads to make them look "eye-pleasing". In contrast, Koko Liem displays a different visual packaging through his uploads, which tend to be less aesthetic with simple video composition, color tone, and fonts.

According to the researcher, their difference is caused by two factors. First, Koko Liem's da'wah target market is those outside the capital. Despite being well-known at the national level through his appearances on various television stations, during September 2021, Koko Liem seemed to spend more of his time doing 'Safari Da'wah' (mobile preaching) by visiting various mosques and Islamic boarding schools (*ponpes*) around Pekanbaru and Dumai, Riau Province, all the way to East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara Province. He stated that these visits were to strengthen and increase faith (*'iman'*) and immunity (*'imun'*) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is also

Figure 10. Felix Siauw (left) and Koko Liem (right) Instagram post aesthetic



Source: Instagram @felix_siauw and @ustadz_kokoliem, accessed on September 28th, 2021

mutually influenced by the number of new followers of @ustadz_kokoliem, as many as 23,500. Meanwhile, Felix has become a nationwide sensation right from his first public appearance by acknowledging his affiliation to HTI. Combined with his social media approach, his market is comparably wider than Liem's. Felix Siauw is observed to have been uploading his visit to Turkey, to explore the Ottoman heritage as part of a tour package by the *hijrah* tour service @terangtrip. Felix managed the hijrah travel business with his wife, Ummu Alila (@ummualila). His visit to Turkey was also uploaded to his YouTube account, Felix Siauw. Felix's 4.8 million followers also influence this diversity in Instagram content.

The second factor relates to Felix Siauw and Koko Liem's age and background of growth and development up to the process of them knowing Islam. Their background is considered to have greatly influenced both preachers' adoption of technologies, which later gives implications to the way they represent themselves on Instagram. Felix Siauw converted to Islam in 2002 at the age of 18, with experience in preaching within recitation events (*pengajian*) during college. This was while also studying marketing and training his writing ability by developing a blog. Regarding technology adoption, Felix Siauw is more set and mature in digital capabilities, both visual and text. Meanwhile, Koko Liem converted to Islam at the age of 15 in 1994, an era that was unfamiliar with social media. From the two, Koko Liem was the first to jump in and be known through conventional media, especially national television.

However, there are some similarities in @felixsiauw and @ustadz_kokoliem's captions. Both preachers almost always embed short *da'wah* meant for concise reflections in each upload caption. The themes of reflection vary, ranging from advice in giving alms, reminders to be grateful, advice to carry out the obligation to pray, to advice on how to live together in

a household following Islam teachings. An example is Koko Liem's caption on September 10, 2021 (translated) below.

صُرِّبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ أَيَّنَمَا تَقِفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلِ مِنَ اللَّهِ
وَحَبْلِ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَبَاءُؤُا وَبَغَضِبِ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَصُرِّبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ
الْمَسْكِنَةُ

"They are filled with humiliation, misery wherever they are, unless they have a good relationship with Allah and nurture good relations with fellow human beings, and They get the wrath of Allah (not getting *ridho*) so that they are always filled with misery" (QS. Ali Imran: 112). The verse above can be understood that establishing a good relationship with Allah is to perform the five daily prayers and to establish good relations with fellow human beings by giving obligatory alms, which is *zakat* on the property, then others alms such as *sunnah* alms and staying in touch with their fellows. In conclusion: Those who do not carry out the 5 prayers a day and do not give obligatory alms (*zakat mal*) will be filled with humiliation and misery (many debts and many calamities) and others. #safariidakwahkokoliem #yayasankokoliemcenter #kokoliemchicken

There is also Felix Siauw's caption in his post uploaded on September 13, 2021 (translated) below.

How weird I am, already knowing that happiness is only given by God, but instead to humans, I ask. #notetomyself #searchofhappiness #dasaraku

In addition to reflection-themed captions, there are also captions containing Felix's response to current debates around Islam that are being discussed in Indonesia. For example, on September 14, 2021, Felix Siauw

uploaded his response to an opinion of a former Indonesian musician who "spiritually migrated"—the actual word used is '*hijrah*', a recently popular term in Indonesia referring to a process in which one resolves themselves to become more positive ("more Islamic")—and said that music is forbidden 'haram' according to Islam. This response caused a stir in the Indonesian Muslim community until it was discussed in a popular podcast talk show on YouTube. In his Instagram caption, Felix wrote (as translated):

Close Your Door, Not Your Mind.
My daughter Alila Shaffiya, is at the tahfidz boarding school, I know exactly how difficult it is to memorize the Qur'an because I forgot more than I memorized. That's why when I was allowed to visit Alila, I tried to keep her from listening to music, I was worried that her memorization would be disturbed. But I think that music is allowed, of course with some conditions. Therefore, I still listen to music, as well as still trying to increase my memorization of the Qur'an. The point is, I can't possibly listen to music while memorizing the Qur'an. I have friends who take a different opinion, saying that music is haram. They quoted the opinion of scholars, that music and the Qur'an will not unite in the heart of a human, also took the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an, which says that music makes one neglect and is a part of evil. For me that's fine because Islam is cool, it teaches every Muslim to accept different opinions, as long as it's an Islamic opinion. My friend and I are still together at times, when they're around I don't listen to music, nor do they ever force and insult me, who still listens to music. Tolerance is not a theory in Islam, but a practice since pronouncing the shahada. We accept physical differences, different views, even different branches of worship, as long as everything is

still based on the Qur'an & Hadith, there is still a basis and direction from scholars who master the field. The weird thing is, there are those among humans, who boast of tolerance but can't even accept different points of view. Even more, they make fun of those who strive for goodness. If we can't be good, at least love goodness. If it is difficult to memorize the Qur'an, at least respect and appreciate the difficulty of the students who are memorizing the Qur'an. #respect #santritahfidz #AlQuran

From the captions above, it can be seen that the language styles of the two are very different. Felix Siauw tends to use spoken language that is easily understood by young people or regular Instagram users in general. Meanwhile, Koko Liem tends to focus on the message's meaning, conveyed without translating it to certain characteristics and vernacular of the language on Instagram.

Discussion

The result shown above described and analyzed two Chinese Muslim preachers' (Felix Siauw and Koko Liem) contrasting ways of articulating, negotiating, and even strategically utilizing Chinese-ness and Islam through Instagram posts modalities (visual and verbal text).

In my findings, their representation of Chinese and Islam is evident within the interplay of their visual aesthetic and verbal-textual choice. I believe these choices are heavily correlated with their personal background, social media marketing knowledge, and their respective audience/target market. As a lived experience, personal backgrounds, which include factors like age group, Islam-learning journey, and initial contact with Chinese-ness during their childhood, may have constructed their identity, as Chinese-Indonesian and a Muslim, and to an extent, their decision on

the best possible way of representing the identities in their own terms. While on their Islamic identity, as a Muslim and a preacher, their path of education, both academically and spiritually, shaped their knowledge and consolidated their Islamic understanding and interpretation differently as seen in their text narration (captions).

However, I sensed that they played a different game when representing their identities as Chinese-Islam preachers on social media. As I mentioned earlier about how a preacher is counted as a job, the visible trajectory of either Chinese or Islam identity shown on these preachers' respective Instagram accounts' can be seen as promotional and personal branding tools, besides just for preaching purposes. Their media knowledge and experiences come into play and, to an extent, help them navigate how to represent themselves and appeal to their online audience base. While this may seem like an instrumentalist approach, I argue that they were more of a result of Chinese-Islam identity hybridization in Indonesia. However, in a way, being a Chinese Muslim preacher, or a Chinese, or Muslim, in general, should also be seen as a process of 'becoming', rather than just 'being' that is still open to possibilities of trajectories in the future.

Further, we could expect a Chinese-Muslim preacher to emphasize more on their Chinese-ness in a stereotypical way, as demonstrated by Koko Liem and Tan Mei Hwa or indifferently like Felix Siau. It is also expected that a Chinese-Muslim preacher to "sell out" his/her mualaf story or Islam-learning journey as their persona's "backbone". On a more interesting note, we could expect an entrepreneurial trend of these preachers to sustain their religious work. However, this could also lead to a more lavish, consumerism trend in Islam as these preachers are almost certainly influenced their audience (at the same time, their target market) to consume their products. In the upcoming years, it is safe to

say that we could expect numerous Islamic preachers to appear as the increasing trend of mediatized religious practice (particularly, Islam) in Indonesia is fascinating to watch. Specifically, we could expect another Chinese-Muslim preacher uprising as it is still pretty much a blue-ocean market in Indonesia.

Conclusion

In general, Chinese-Muslims are positioned as a 'minority within a minority' in multicultural Indonesia. However, the emergence of social media, particularly Instagram, provides a new space for Chinese-Muslims to display their long-repressed identities. Through Instagram, their identity is acceptable since the mualaf status attracts the sympathy of the Indonesian Islamic community. The existence of two Chinese-Muslim preachers on Instagram, Felix Siau and Koko Liem, presents two versions of identity from the heterogeneous spectrum of Chinese-Muslim identity in Indonesia. The Chinese-ness shown by Felix Siau and Koko Liem is limited to their natural physical appearances and chosen symbols for work purposes. From these two figures, it can be concluded that their Islam identity is more dominantly displayed, even used as their main identity. Islam identity is far more decisive in both Felix Siau and Koko Liem's views and behavior in their life than in their identity as Chinese.

The notion that Chinese-Muslim is the identity of "foreign migrants" must be dispelled because the historical evidence does not support it. This impression arises instead because of the socio-economic-political-cultural dynamics of Indonesia, which from the past until now do not place the Chinese as identical with Islam and vice versa.

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