

# Political Economy of Media and the Dual Role of Islamic Television Broadcasting in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of the political economy of media on the dual role of Islamic television broadcasting in Malaysia, which functions as both a religious institution and a commercial industry. However, previous studies have focused more on program content and da'wah messages, while empirical investigations remain limited on how the structure of political economy shapes the institutional and industrial roles of Islamic television. The objective of this study is to analyze the effects of commodification, structuration, and spatialization on the institutional roles and the industrial roles of Islamic television broadcasting in Malaysia. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design, with data collected through 22 in-depth interviews involving producers, station management, and Islamic television personalities, supported by a focus group discussion (FGD) with four informants consisting of an Islamic TV personality, two academics in broadcasting, and senior station management, as well as field observations. Data were analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti version 7.1, while the validity of findings was strengthened through data and method triangulation as well as informant verification (member-checking). The findings show that commodification turns Islamic content, broadcast slots, and religious personalities into commodities; structuration reflects the influence of government regulation, partisan politics, and institutional governance in shaping the identity of Islamic television; while spatialization emphasizes digital reach, audience interactivity, and narrowcasting strategies. In conclusion, the three dimensions of the political economy of media create tension between the ideals of da'wah and the realities of commercialization, thereby demanding a more sustainable institutional–industrial balance to ensure the continuity of Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Political Economy, Media Organization, Media Institution, Media Industry, Islamic Broadcasting.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of broadcasting media in Malaysia has undergone significant transformation, from the establishment of Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) to the emergence of Islamic-oriented channels such as TV AlHijrah in 2010 and Astro Oasis as a subscription-based channel focusing on da'wah and Islamic entertainment content. This evolution illustrates the nation's commitment to positioning television not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a vehicle of education and da'wah capable of influencing the Muslim community in Malaysia. Moreover, this development aligns with the government's aspiration to establish Malaysia as a hub for Islamic content creation in the Asia-Pacific region (Alit, Sakri, & Azmi, 2025).

Despite these developments introducing a new narrative into the media industry, criticisms of the quality of Islamic TV programs remain persistent. Contemporary studies indicate that religious programming is often perceived as overly academic, monotonous, and lacking in creativity, thereby failing to capture the interest of wider audiences (Mazaya & Rahman, 2025). Viewers have also questioned the overall quality of these programs, noting that many are presented in the form of forums or lectures without the aesthetic appeal required to compete with mainstream entertainment programs. This has positioned Islamic TV stations with the central challenge of balancing scholarly rigor with engaging presentation styles.

These criticisms underscore the complex dual role of Islamic television. As an institution, it is entrusted with disseminating Islamic values, contributing to religious education, and strengthening the image of Islam in the public sphere. However, as an industry, Islamic TV stations cannot escape the demands of the market, the need to attract advertisers, and the imperative of generating profit for operational sustainability. The tension between institutional missions and industrial motives has, in turn, affected the consistency of quality in Islamic TV programming in Malaysia.

In explaining this dynamic, the political economy of media provides a robust analytical framework. Mosco (2009) highlights commodification, structuration, and spatialization as the core dimensions shaping media operations, while Smythe (1960) introduces the concept of the “audience commodity,” emphasizing the exploitation of audiences as products for advertisers. Both frameworks are highly relevant in evaluating how Islamic TV stations navigate between da‘wah agendas and commercialization strategies.

The contemporary media landscape in Malaysia further amplifies the relevance of this analysis. Following the 15th General Election (GE15), the media industry has faced increasingly complex political challenges, including regulatory controls and partisan influences over media direction (Reuters Institute, 2024). Additionally, the growth of digital platforms and global streaming services has reshaped audience behavior, compelling traditional television, including Islamic channels, to compete with YouTube, Netflix, and local streaming platforms offering more interactive and personalized content.

Recent studies also reveal that Muslim audiences are becoming desensitized to the quality of infotainment programs on television, as they continue to consume them despite recognizing their poor content quality, with entertainment value taking precedence over substance (Mazaya & Rahman, 2025). This phenomenon presents a significant challenge for Islamic TV stations to ensure that da‘wah messages are not overshadowed by commercialization pressures and the intense competition within the entertainment industry.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for empirical research that specifically examines how commodification, structuration, and spatialization influence the dual role of Islamic TV as both an institution and an industry. Such analysis is crucial not only for understanding the current challenges faced by Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia but also for formulating more sustainable strategies that balance da‘wah objectives with commercial viability in the digital broadcasting era.

## **Problem Statement**

Previous studies on Islamic media in Malaysia have largely emphasized aspects of content, audience reception, and the da‘wah messages conveyed through television. This focus is undeniably important as it demonstrates how Islamic media can influence religious understanding within society. However, the overemphasis on content has overshadowed a more fundamental dimension namely, the influence of the political economy structure on the direction of Islamic media institutions and industries which has received limited attention in current research (Zaharom, 2023).

Within the framework of the political economy of media, Mosco (2009) identifies three crucial dimensions: commodification, structuration, and spatialization, which directly shape the operations and orientations of media organizations. Commodification highlights how content and audiences are transformed into commodities for profit, structuration refers to the influence of political and economic power on media organizations, while spatialization examines the expansion and distribution of content across geographical boundaries. Yet, there remains a scarcity of empirical studies in Malaysia that investigate how these three dimensions operate simultaneously in the context of Islamic television, which must function both as a da‘wah institution and as an industrial entity (Alit, Sakri, & Azmi, 2025).

Moreover, the political economy of government influence on media institutions often creates imbalances in media roles. The state holds significant power in determining media direction through policies, regulations, and development agendas, particularly to safeguard national stability and ensure information dissemination in line with national priorities. Nevertheless, this influence raises questions regarding the level of media freedom and

its implications for the quality and objectivity of content, especially for private organizations bound by the necessity of generating profit (Mansor & Hassan, 2021).

In the context of Islamic media, this dilemma becomes even more complex. Islamic television stations face a dual role: as social institutions responsible for transmitting da'wah values, religious education, and the image of Islam; and as commercial industries that must attract viewers, generate advertising revenue, and sustain operations. This tension creates a conflict between the government's interest in controlling content for political stability and the industry's need to produce creative, fresh, and entertaining programming that appeals to audiences and advertisers (Mazaya & Rahman, 2025).

Advances in digital technology and globalization further complicate this landscape. The presence of digital platforms and borderless streaming services has challenged the dominance of traditional broadcasting media, including Islamic TV, underscoring the importance of spatialization. Global competition pressures Islamic television stations to adapt their broadcasting strategies, even as they remain constrained by domestic structuration under government regulation (Reuters Institute, 2024). This makes balancing commercial demands with social responsibilities an enduring challenge that the Islamic media industry in Malaysia has yet to fully address.

Based on the context discussed, a clear research gap exists that necessitates in-depth empirical assessment of how the dimensions of the political economy of media shape the trajectory and dual role of Islamic television in Malaysia. While earlier studies have emphasized content, audience reception, and da'wah messages, there remains a lack of research examining how market pressures, government control, and the expansion of digital media collectively shape the identity of Islamic television as both a da'wah institution and a commercial industry. The key research question, therefore, is how commodification, structuration, and spatialization affect the dual role of Islamic television broadcasting in the local context. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze the effects of commodification, structuration, and spatialization on the institutional and industrial roles of Islamic television broadcasting in Malaysia. This analysis will clarify the balancing mechanisms between da'wah obligations and commercial pressures that constitute the central challenge for the sustainability of Islamic media in the digital era.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review discusses the theoretical foundations and previous studies related to the political economy of media as well as the contextual development of Islamic television in Malaysia. Such a discussion is crucial in identifying existing knowledge gaps and in establishing a conceptual basis for understanding the dual role of Islamic television as both an institution and an industry.

### Political Economy of Media in Malaysia

Within the framework of the political economy of media, Mosco (2009) emphasizes three key dimensions that shape the communication landscape: commodification, structuration, and spatialization. Commodification refers to the transformation of media content into commercial products marketed to audiences and advertisers; structuration explains how political and economic power relations influence media organizations; while spatialization highlights the role of technology in expanding the reach of information across geographical boundaries. This understanding resonates with Smythe's (1960) notion of the "audience commodity," which views audiences not merely as information recipients but as commodities sold to advertisers. Meanwhile, McChesney and Schiller (2003) argue that global capitalism has reinforced corporate dominance in the media industry, thereby narrowing the space for media autonomy to function as an independent social institution.

Beyond Mosco's framework, complementary approaches offer additional insight. Mediatization theory explains how religious practices are reshaped when mediated through television and digital platforms, thereby altering rituals, authority, and audience engagement (Hjarvard, 2016). Bourdieu's cultural production perspective clarifies how producers, presenters, and religious figures negotiate their symbolic capital within institutional hierarchies of power (Couldry, 2012). Critical discourse analysis further demonstrates how program scripts,

language, and visual framing construct meanings that oscillate between spiritual authenticity and commercial appeal (Fairclough, 2010). These perspectives enrich the analysis by showing that Islamic broadcasting is simultaneously structured by economics, politics, culture, and discourse.

This perspective is supported by contemporary studies in Malaysia, which reveal that media institutions operate within a complex ecosystem where market, political, and ideological interests intersect (Zaharom, 2023). Similar dynamics are observed internationally. Research on Indonesia’s *MNC Muslim TV* highlights how Islamic programming navigates audience demands while facing competition from mainstream entertainment (Haryanto, 2021). In Turkey, *TRT Diyanet* has been evaluated as a state-backed religious channel balancing political legitimacy with public service broadcasting (Çoban, 2020). Studies on *Iqraa TV* and *Peace TV* in the Middle East demonstrate how da‘wah is globalized through satellite broadcasting yet simultaneously exposed to the pressures of branding and marketization (Echchaibi, 2019). These examples confirm that the dual pressures of institutional legitimacy and commercial viability are shared challenges across Muslim-majority nations.

Although Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia has an institutional mandate to deliver values of da‘wah and education, market realities nevertheless pressure these stations to tailor their content to audiences that are increasingly entertainment-oriented. As emphasized by Mazaya and Rahman (2025), Muslim audiences now tend to watch infotainment programs despite recognizing their poor quality, as entertainment becomes the primary motivation in viewing choices. This illustrates how the dimension of commodification directly shapes the content of Islamic television in Malaysia, raising ethical concerns about reducing religion to a commodity for mass consumption.

In addition, structuration plays a crucial role because the government retains significant power in steering the direction of media through broadcasting policies, regulatory frameworks, and content oversight. Mansor and Hassan (2021) found that political influence and tight control over the media often restrict editorial creativity and limit media freedom, thereby negatively impacting industry development. This highlights that Islamic television must balance its da‘wah mission and market strategies while simultaneously operating under the constraints of state institutional control, similar to patterns observed in other Muslim-majority contexts where political power exerts influence over religious broadcasting.

Finally, spatialization has become increasingly relevant as digital media enables content distribution without geographical boundaries. This phenomenon extends the reach of Islamic media to global audiences, but at the same time demands adaptation to international competition and technological standards. The Reuters Institute (2024) reports that Malaysian viewers are increasingly shifting to digital platforms rather than traditional television, pressuring broadcasting institutions to accelerate digital adaptation. In this context, Islamic TV stations must strike a balance between maintaining da‘wah identity and adopting digital industry strategies to avoid being left behind in the tide of media globalization. This transition can be understood through Mosco’s (2009) political economy framework, complemented by mediatization and cultural production theories, which collectively highlight how commodification, structuration, and spatialization interact with broader cultural and discursive processes.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework of the Political Economy of Media (Mosco, 2009)

Dimension	Definition	Application in Islamic TV Malaysia
Commodification	Media content, airtime, and audiences as commodities	Islamic content packaged as products; da‘wah personalities branded as icons
Structuration	Power relations and institutions shape media	Government control (LPF, MCMC), partisan influence, institutional guidelines
Spatialization	Expansion of media across space and technology	Digital expansion, audience interactivity, <i>narrowcasting</i> for niche markets

Table 1 summarizes how Mosco’s three dimensions are applied in the context of Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia. It illustrates that commodification transforms Islamic content into marketable products, structuration

emphasizes the influence of government and institutional control, while spatialization opens opportunities for digital expansion and audience interactivity. Collectively, and when complemented with perspectives from mediatization and cultural production, these dimensions underscore that Islamic television constantly negotiates between its institutional mission of da'wah and the industrial demands of commercialization, shaping the analytical framework of this study.

### Islamic Media in Malaysia

Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia began gradually and in a limited fashion, primarily during religious celebrations such as Hari Raya Aidilfitri and Hari Raya Aidiladha. As early as 1965, Televisyen Malaysia had already aired the call to prayer (azan) and special programs for Islamic festivals, yet Islamic content during regular programming was almost absent. These early developments reflected the government's sensitivity to interethnic relations in a multireligious nation, as well as the imperative of maintaining social harmony (Karthigesu, 1994). Although efforts were made to increase the airtime of religious programming through Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM), Islamic content remained limited due to political and economic constraints that shaped broadcasting policies at the time (Zulkiple, 2010).

The Islamic resurgence of the 1970s brought significant change to the broadcasting landscape. This resurgence, influenced by international Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Iranian Revolution, prompted the government to expand Islamic content in the mass media. Pressure from Islamic organizations, particularly Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), further accelerated government initiatives to enhance Islamic programming, including the establishment of RTM's Religious and Da'wah Unit, which was tasked with producing religious programs in a more systematic manner (Chandra, 1987).

These efforts were reinforced by government policies such as the Islamic Values Policy (1985) and Islam Hadhari (2004), which laid a stronger foundation for the production of Islamic television programs. Under these policies, programs such as the call to prayer, Qur'an recitations, and religious lectures were given more consistent airtime on mainstream channels such as TV3 and RTM. The policies also paved the way for the creation of dedicated Islamic channels, notably Astro Oasis in 2007 and TV AlHijrah in 2010. Both channels became important milestones in producing more structured, comprehensive, and shariah-compliant Islamic programming (Alit, Sakri, & Azmi, 2025).

Nevertheless, Islamic television broadcasting in Malaysia has not been free from challenges concerning quality and creativity. Ongoing criticisms highlight that many Islamic programs still rely on talk show, forum, and lecture formats, which often lack visual aesthetics and contemporary narrative approaches. Research by Mazaya and Rahman (2025) shows that Muslim audiences increasingly perceive religious programming as "less creative" compared to popular entertainment offerings, thereby undermining the competitiveness of Islamic programming in the broadcasting market. Similar critiques are evident internationally. For example, research on Indonesia's *MNC Muslim TV* highlights the struggle to balance da'wah with audience demand for infotainment (Haryanto, 2021), while studies on Turkey's *TRT Diyanet* show how state-backed Islamic broadcasting must navigate between political authority and public legitimacy (Çoban, 2020). Middle Eastern channels such as Iqraa TV and Peace TV further illustrate how Islamic content is globalized through satellite and digital streaming but simultaneously exposed to pressures of branding and commercialization (Echchaibi, 2019).

Moreover, the forces of media globalization and the dominance of commercially driven entertainment place additional pressure on Islamic content producers. Islamic television now faces the dilemma of balancing its social responsibility as a conveyor of da'wah values with market pressures to attract audiences and advertisers. Ethical concerns are also raised as da'wah personalities are increasingly commodified as celebrity figures, risking the dilution of religious authenticity for commercial gain. This aligns with mediatization theory, which argues that religion is reshaped when subjected to the logic of media production and consumption (Hjarvard, 2016). Rozalafri (2020), similarly argues that Islamic media producers should no longer be viewed merely as creative auteurs but as da'wah agents who set agendas, shape audience thinking, and fill media spaces with Islamic values of quality. Even so, the growth of Astro Oasis and TV AlHijrah demonstrates that Islamic programming has significant economic value and the potential to continue expanding, provided that content

strategies and creativity are enhanced in line with changing audience preferences and the evolution of digital media technologies.

### **The Dual Role of Islamic Media**

Islamic television in Malaysia functions as an institution that disseminates values, education, and da'wah, in line with the nation's mission to strengthen Islamic identity within society. This role positions television as an important agent of socialization, responsible for conveying moral messages, shaping audience attitudes, and reinforcing religious understanding (Rozalafri, 2020). Within this institutional framework, Islamic television programs are expected to meet shariah standards, provide spiritually educational content, and foster social solidarity among Muslims.

However, Islamic television cannot escape its role as an industry operating in a competitive and commercial broadcasting market. As an industrial entity, television must pursue ratings, attract advertisers, and generate revenue to sustain operations. This has led to religious programs often being blended with entertainment elements to retain audience appeal, such as through edutainment approaches or the branding of religious personalities as media celebrities. Mazaya and Rahman (2025) emphasize that although Muslim audiences are aware of the weaknesses in the quality of Islamic infotainment programs, they continue to watch them because entertainment value is the main attraction, thereby illustrating how commodification shapes content. Ethical concerns are also raised when da'wah figures are commodified as celebrity preachers, risking the dilution of religious authenticity for the sake of commercial gain.

The tension between institutional and industrial roles has long been a dilemma in Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia. As an institution, Islamic TV must safeguard the credibility of da'wah and religious education; yet as an industry, it is bound to the demands of advertisers and audience preferences. Mansor and Hassan (2021) argue that political and economic control over media in Malaysia exacerbates this dilemma, as television stations must submit not only to market logic but also to state structuration that determines content direction. Similar tensions are evident internationally: Indonesia's *MNC Muslim TV* demonstrates the challenge of balancing da'wah with market competition (Haryanto, 2021), Turkey's *TRT Diyanet* shows how state-backed Islamic broadcasting negotiates political legitimacy and public service (Çoban, 2020), while Middle Eastern networks such as Iqraa TV illustrate how global satellite broadcasting expands da'wah yet subjects it to commercial branding pressures (Echchaibi, 2019).

While many studies have evaluated the content and da'wah messages of Islamic television, few have empirically examined the relationship between the dimensions of the political economy of media and the institutional and industrial functions of Islamic TV, particularly in the context of post-privatization and the digital era. The shift of broadcasting landscapes to digital platforms, along with global competition, requires Islamic TV stations to adopt new strategies. Theoretically, this aligns with mediatization theory, which suggests that religion is reshaped when subjected to the logic of media institutions (Hjarvard, 2016), and with Bourdieu's cultural production perspective, which highlights how producers and preachers negotiate symbolic capital within power structures (Couldry, 2012). Yet academic studies on how these transformations affect the balance between institutional and industrial roles remain limited (Zaharom, 2023; Reuters Institute, 2024). Hence, an empirical assessment of this issue is urgently needed to clarify the mechanisms of balance between da'wah responsibilities and commercial pressures faced by Islamic media in Malaysia.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and interpretations of Islamic media actors regarding the dual role of Islamic television within the framework of political economy. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to uncover the meanings ascribed by producers, station management, and Islamic television personalities to the pressures of commodification, structuration, and spatialization in the production and distribution of content.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with 22 informants, comprising three main groups: producers of Islamic programs, management of Islamic television stations, and da‘wah-oriented media personalities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of relevant experiences, and further expanded through snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. In addition to interviews, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with four informants: an Islamic TV personality, two academics specializing in broadcasting, and senior management of Islamic television stations, in order to capture the dynamics of collective perspectives. Field observations were also carried out on production and broadcasting processes to obtain contextual data (Mansor & Hassan, 2021). To ensure the trustworthiness of findings, the study applied several strategies. First, data triangulation was implemented through the combination of interviews, FGD, and observation. Second, member-checking was performed by returning summary analyses to selected informants for verification. These strategies not only strengthened the validity of the study but also enhanced the credibility of the findings in the academic context (Rozalafri, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017).

The data obtained from interview transcripts, observation notes, and FGD outputs were analyzed thematically using Atlas.ti version 7.1. Both deductive and inductive approaches were employed: deductive coding was guided by the theoretical dimensions of political economy of media (commodification, structuration, spatialization), while inductive coding was based on emergent themes from the field data. This coding process generated key categories and subthemes that illustrate the interaction between institutional and industrial factors, as well as the political-economic pressures on Islamic television content (Alit, Sakri, & Azmi, 2025).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study shows that the three dimensions of the political economy of media commodification, structuration, and spatialization directly influence the form and direction of Islamic television in Malaysia. Table 2 presents a summary of the findings by dimension.

Table 2. Findings by Dimension

Dimension	Key Findings	Practical Manifestation
Commodification	Islamic content is commercialized	Da‘wah programs are reformatted into edutainment to achieve ratings
Structuration	Content is shaped by institutional and political control	LPF guidelines, post-GE15 sensitivities
Spatialization	Reach is expanded to digital platforms	Broadcasting via YouTube, Facebook, mobile applications

The dimensions in Table 2 illustrate that commodification transforms Islamic content, airtime, and religious personalities into commercial products. This finding is consistent with Smythe’s (1960) “audience commodity” thesis, where viewers are positioned as marketable assets for advertisers. Similar trends are visible in Indonesia, where Islamic infotainment programs often blur the line between da‘wah and celebrity culture (Haryanto, 2021). In Malaysia, the popularity of edutainment formats reflects the negotiation between religious authenticity and commercial viability (Mazaya & Rahman, 2025).

Structuration highlights how government control, institutional policies, and partisan politics continue to shape Islamic television content. The influence of state institutions such as LPF and MCMC reflects what Mansor and Hassan (2021) describe as a persistent tension between political power and media autonomy. Comparative evidence from Turkey’s TRT Diyanet shows similar dynamics, where state-backed Islamic broadcasting reinforces political legitimacy while constraining creative independence (Çoban, 2020). In the Malaysian case, post-GE15 sensitivities have further heightened editorial caution, especially in content dealing with religious authority and interethnic harmony.

Spatialization underscores the growing importance of digital expansion and audience interactivity. Islamic

television has extended its distribution to YouTube, Facebook, and mobile applications, echoing global patterns where religious broadcasters increasingly rely on digital platforms to sustain audience engagement (Echchaibi, 2019). Reuters Institute (2024) confirms that Malaysian audiences now prefer digital access to religious content, pressuring broadcasters to adopt narrowcasting strategies for specific segments such as youth, women, and urban professionals. This mirrors developments in the Middle East, where digital da'wah channels strategically target niche audiences with tailored content (Hjarvard, 2016).

Taken together, these findings affirm that Islamic television in Malaysia operates within a complex political economy that constantly negotiates between institutional obligations of da'wah and the industrial imperatives of ratings, advertising, and profitability. The integration of commodification, structuration, and spatialization demonstrates that the dual role of Islamic media is not merely theoretical, but a lived reality shaped by global market forces, state regulation, and digital disruption.

### **Commodification**

The findings indicate that ratings are the primary determinant of the sustainability of Islamic television programs. Managers and producers emphasized that while da'wah objectives remain central, program success is ultimately measured by audience numbers. In this context, the audience is regarded as a valuable commodity because it determines sponsorship and advertising rates. This aligns with Smythe's (1960) notion of the "audience commodity," where viewers are not only recipients of messages but also economic assets sold to advertisers (Rozalafri, 2020). Similar trends have been observed in Indonesia, where Islamic infotainment programs are packaged to attract advertisers by blending religious themes with celebrity culture (Haryanto, 2021).

Furthermore, Islamic content is increasingly perceived as a marketable product. Religious programs such as lectures, forums, and talk shows are adapted to meet market preferences. The use of Islamic-themed entertainment (edutainment) has been popularized to widen audience appeal, often merging spiritual content with entertainment value. Mazaya and Rahman (2025) confirm that Muslim viewers frequently consume Islamic infotainment despite recognizing its weaknesses, since entertainment remains the primary motivator. This demonstrates that the logic of commodification reshapes da'wah functions into entertainment formats that can be marketed. Comparable cases are found in Turkey, where religious television integrates lifestyle segments to sustain audience interest (Çoban, 2020).

The study also found that airtime and Islamic personalities have themselves become commodities. Prime-time slots are traded as exclusive, high-value spaces, while da'wah personalities are elevated as media brands. These figures not only act as conveyors of religious knowledge but are also commercialized as icons with strong audience-pulling power and sponsor appeal. This phenomenon underscores how religious authority is commodified into symbolic capital that bridges spiritual values with economic profit. Such commodification echoes global scholarship that highlights the tension between religious authenticity and commercial imperatives in Islamic media (Echchaibi, 2019; Hjarvard, 2016).

### **Structuration**

The dimension of structuration reveals how the government and regulatory bodies such as the Film Censorship Board (LPF) and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) play significant roles in determining the direction of media. The privatization policies of the broadcasting sector in the 1980s opened opportunities for private stations; however, government oversight continued to constrain media autonomy. Mansor and Hassan (2021) emphasize that political control over the media in Malaysia frequently restricts editorial freedom and creativity. This reflects broader debates in global media studies, where scholars argue that state structuration often reshapes the media into instruments of political legitimacy rather than independent watchdogs (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Hafez, 2013).

Beyond institutional control, partisan politics also influences content. The shifting political landscape after the 15th General Election (GE15) demonstrated how media became a contested space for competing party

narratives. In the context of Islamic television, this directly affected the selection of content, the topics highlighted, and the modes of delivery. The findings reveal that program producers must carefully balance da'wah messages with political sensitivities so as not to jeopardize relations with authorities or alienate target audiences (Zaharom, 2023). Similar dynamics are also evident in post-communist and Middle Eastern contexts, where partisan capture of broadcasting institutions is a common strategy to regulate religious or ideological discourse (Jakubowicz, 2010; Hafez, 2013).

Institutional governance also emerged as a crucial factor shaping the identity of Islamic TV. The management of Islamic television stations imposed strict internal guidelines regarding shariah compliance, the selection of personalities, and the content permitted for broadcast. While these guidelines are important in preserving the integrity of Islam, they also limit producers' creativity in developing new formats. As a result, a tension arises between the institutional need to safeguard the authenticity of da'wah and the industrial requirement to produce competitive and engaging content. This tension mirrors wider global patterns where religious broadcasters must balance institutional legitimacy with commercial logics under restrictive political environments (Çoban, 2020; Echchaibi, 2019).

### **Spatialization**

The findings indicate that Islamic media have expanded their reach to digital platforms in response to shifting audience viewing patterns. Islamic television programs are now broadcast on YouTube, Facebook, and mobile applications, allowing audiences to access content without being bound by traditional airtime schedules. This phenomenon corresponds with Mosco's (2009) concept of spatialization, namely the expansion of media operations across spatial and temporal boundaries. It also resonates with Castells' (2010) notion of the *network society*, in which digital technologies restructure communication flows and enable religious media to transcend national boundaries.

In addition to expanded reach, audience interactivity has become a new factor influencing Islamic TV broadcasting strategies. Viewers are no longer passive but actively provide feedback through comments on social media and streaming applications. Producers use this feedback as input in shaping future content. The Reuters Institute (2024) reports that this trend has become increasingly evident in Malaysia, where audiences prefer to consume religious content through digital platforms rather than conventional television. Similar patterns are observed in other Muslim contexts, such as in the Middle East and North Africa, where Islamic media outlets utilize digital platforms to bypass state-controlled broadcasting and directly engage with audiences (Echchaibi, 2019).

Spatialization has also encouraged narrowcasting, or the targeting of specific market segments. Islamic channels are now more inclined to produce programs for particular audiences such as youth, women, or modern Muslim families. This strategy enhances competitiveness in an increasingly crowded market but also poses challenges in ensuring that da'wah messages are not fragmented or overly commercialized. The rise of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and platform capitalism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019) illustrates how digital logics reinforce niche segmentation, often privileging profitability over inclusivity. This phenomenon reflects a shift from general broadcasting to focused broadcasting driven by the logic of political economy, a trend also documented in Indonesian Islamic television where narrowcasting strategies cater to specific Muslim subcultures (Haryanto, 2021).

### **The Dual Role Model**

The findings of this study reveal that the three dimensions of the political economy of media commodification, structuration, and spatialization intersect to shape the dual role of Islamic television in Malaysia. Commodification manifests through the prioritization of ratings, the packaging of Islamic content as marketable products, and the elevation of da'wah personalities as media brands. This corresponds with Smythe's (1960) notion of the audience commodity, where viewers are simultaneously receivers of messages and economic assets for advertisers. The adaptation of da'wah into edutainment formats highlights the pressure of market logic, illustrating how religious content is reconfigured to sustain audience engagement and financial viability

(Haryanto, 2021).

Structuration highlights the embedded influence of political and institutional control over Islamic broadcasting. The government, through agencies such as the Film Censorship Board (LPF) and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), retains regulatory authority that constrains editorial autonomy. Findings also show that partisan politics, particularly after the 15th General Election, intensified media’s role as a contested space for competing narratives. This reflects Mosco’s (2009) emphasis on structuration, where relations of power and institutional arrangements determine the media’s operations, often curbing creativity while reinforcing conformity to ideological frameworks (Mansor & Hassan, 2021; Zaharom, 2023).

Spatialization, meanwhile, underscores the transformative impact of digital platforms on Islamic television. Programs distributed via YouTube, Facebook, and mobile applications allow audiences to consume religious content beyond traditional airtime schedules, thereby expanding reach and interactivity. Producers increasingly rely on audience feedback through digital channels, reflecting a global trend where spatial and temporal boundaries of media are dissolved (Reuters Institute, 2024). Narrowcasting strategies also emerge as stations target youth, women, and niche Muslim segments, a process consistent with Mosco’s (2009) spatialization, which highlights the reconfiguration of media across space and technology.

Taken together, these dimensions illustrate the persistent tension between Islamic television’s institutional role and its industrial function. From an institutional perspective, Islamic television is entrusted with disseminating authentic da’wah, providing religious education, and reinforcing Islamic identity (Rozalafri, 2020). From an industrial perspective, however, it is compelled to pursue ratings, attract advertisers, and remain competitive within a saturated broadcasting ecosystem. This duality reflects McChesney and Schiller’s (2003) argument that capitalist logics dominate contemporary media industries, narrowing the space for autonomy and reshaping media institutions into commercialized entities. The findings thus affirm that Islamic television in Malaysia is engaged in a continuous negotiation between normative religious ideals and market imperatives, embodying both institutional responsibilities and industrial realities.

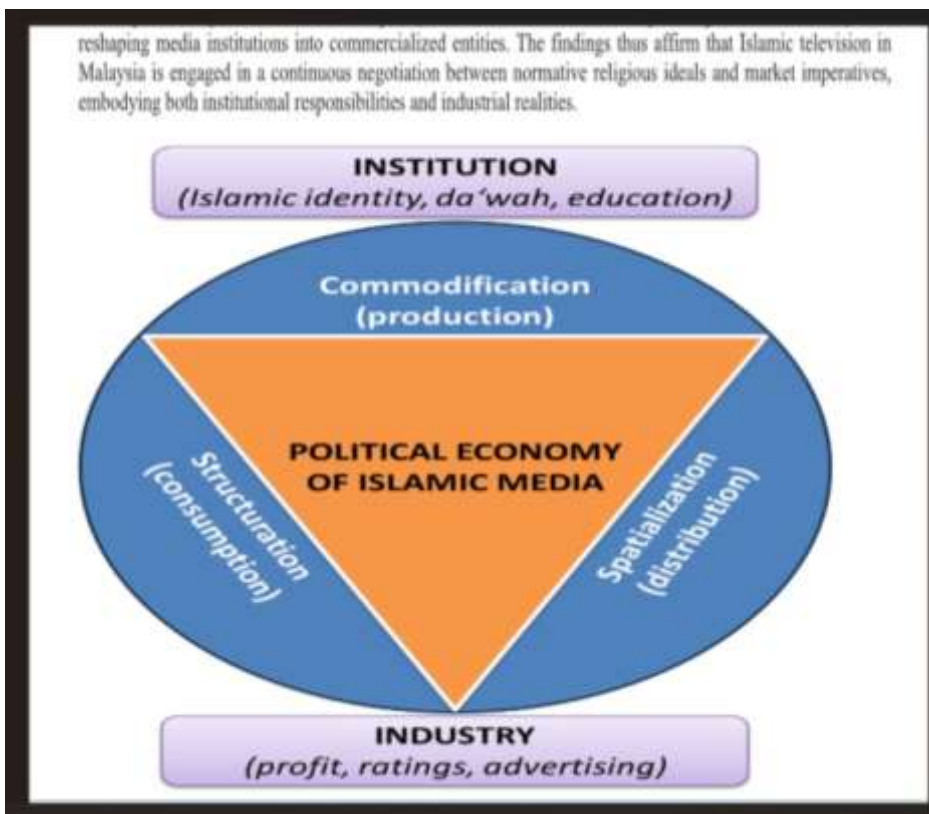


Figure 1. Political Economy Model of the Dual Role of Islamic Broadcasting in Malaysia

This figure further maps the three dimensions of Mosco's (2009) political economy framework onto distinct processes that structure the dual role of Islamic television. Commodification is linked to production, where da'wah content is transformed into media products designed to attract both viewers and advertisers. Structuration is tied to consumption, as audiences receive content shaped by government regulation, institutional guidelines, and political influence. Spatialization governs distribution, with Islamic programming expanding into digital platforms and adopting narrowcasting strategies for specific audience segments, signifying a shift from mass broadcasting to targeted broadcasting.

Overall, the model demonstrates that the dimensions of commodification, structuration, and spatialization not only define the technical and operational logics of Islamic television but also mediate the balance between the ideals of da'wah and the imperatives of commercialization. This tension positions Islamic broadcasting in Malaysia within an ongoing negotiation between its normative institutional mission and its market-driven industrial obligations (Rozalafri, 2020; Mosco, 2009; McChesney & Schiller, 2003).

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that the three dimensions of the political economy of media commodification, structuration, and spatialization, exert a profound influence on the dual role of Islamic television in Malaysia. From an institutional perspective, Islamic television disseminates da'wah, provides religious education, and fosters an authentic Islamic identity. From an industrial perspective, however, it is shaped by the imperatives of ratings, advertising revenue, and competitiveness within broadcasting and digital ecosystems. This persistent duality underscores that Islamic television cannot rely solely on da'wah idealism; rather, it must strategically navigate market realities without compromising the integrity of its religious mission (Rozalafri, 2020; Mosco, 2009).

In addition, the findings resonate with global media policy frameworks that emphasize diversity, inclusivity, and cultural sustainability. For instance, UNESCO's *Media Development Indicators* advocate for a balance between market competitiveness and the preservation of cultural and religious identity, which directly parallels the challenges faced by Islamic television in Malaysia (UNESCO, 2019). Similarly, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has repeatedly underscored the importance of strengthening media cooperation among Muslim-majority countries to promote authentic narratives of Islam in the global sphere (OIC, 2017). Aligning Malaysia's Islamic broadcasting with these international frameworks not only enhances domestic policy relevance but also positions the nation as a key player in shaping the global discourse on Islamic media.

The implications of this study can be considered from three expanded perspectives. First, from a policy perspective, the findings call for broadcasting regulations that are not only inclusive and balanced domestically but also aligned with global standards for Islamic media. Agencies such as MCMC should integrate shariah-compliance frameworks with international media governance principles, creating space for innovation while enabling Malaysian Islamic TV to participate more competitively on the global stage (Mansor & Hassan, 2021).

Second, from an industry perspective, Islamic television must broaden its strategies beyond the local market by positioning itself as a regional and global content provider. Developing innovative edutainment formats, strengthening the branding of Islamic personalities with cultural authenticity, and leveraging digital platforms for international distribution can enhance Malaysia's role as a hub for Islamic broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific. Narrowcasting strategies could also be scaled globally to serve diverse Muslim diasporas while maintaining cultural and theological integrity (Reuters Institute, 2024).

Third, from an academic perspective, this study contributes to the literature on the political economy of Islamic media by situating Malaysia's case within broader debates on globalization. Future research should extend to comparative cross-country studies, exploring how different Muslim-majority nations such as Indonesia, Turkey, or the Gulf states navigate the institutional-industrial tensions of Islamic broadcasting. This would support the development of a more globally sustainable model of Islamic television, incorporating algorithmic governance, international policy frameworks, and transnational audience dynamics (Alit, Sakri, & Azmi, 2025).

In conclusion, Islamic television broadcasting in Malaysia stands at a critical juncture between da'wah idealism and commercial realities. By expanding its vision across national boundaries and aligning with global media policies, Islamic television has the potential to evolve as both a powerful agent of da'wah and a competitive global industry. This strategic repositioning will ensure its continued relevance, not only within Malaysia but also across the international media landscape of the 21st century (McChesney & Schiller, 2003; Rozalafri, 2020).

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