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Discursive Commodification of Pesantren Adab Symbols in TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Television representations of pesantren do not merely depict social reality. They also shape the context through which audiences interpret symbols of adab, tradition, and religious authority. This study examines the representation of santri-kiai relations in TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored segment aired on 13 October 2025.

Novelty: The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the discursive commodification of pesantren adab symbols by external television media. It introduces the concept of the materialisation chain and uses integrated verbal-visual analysis while distinguishing discursive commercialisation from factual commercial practice in pesantren.

Methods: This study used a critical qualitative approach with Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model. Primary data consisted of verbal transcripts, captions, visual sequences, gestures, and verbal-visual relations in a 51-second segment. Contextual data were drawn from broadcasting regulations, a decision of the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, institutional responses, and scholarly literature.

Results: The findings show that the macrostructure frames santri-kiai relations through materiality. The superstructure moves from envelopes and bodily gestures to suspicion about wealth, luxury goods, and kiai families. The microstructure employs syntactic contrast, sensational diction, generalisation through netizen opinion, and invitations to agree.

Conclusion: The study concludes that the commercial meaning produced by the segment is an effect of audiovisual discourse construction, not factual evidence that pesantren or kiai engage in commercialisation. Cultural sensitivity should therefore be understood as part of communicative accuracy and broadcasting responsibility.

KEYWORDS: critical discourse analysis; media commodification; materialisation chain; pesantren; television representation

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) hold an important historical, social, and cultural position in Islamic education in Indonesia. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2019 places pesantren within three main functions: education, da'wah, and community empowerment. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs as of October 2025 recorded 42,391 pesantren with 6,267,741 santri. This scale shows that pesantren are not marginal communities. Media portrayals of pesantren can influence public knowledge about one of the largest religious education ecosystems in Indonesia (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025; Republik Indonesia, 2019).

Santri-kiai relations are a central element of pesantren culture. This relationship goes beyond an administrative relation between students and teachers. The kiai acts as a teacher, moral guide, spiritual leader, and guardian of the continuity of scholarly transmission, or sanad. Santri learn religious knowledge while also undergoing the formation of adab. Practices such as kissing the hand, lowering the body, speaking politely, and prioritising the teacher derive their meaning from this educational system. Respect for the kiai is fundamentally directed toward knowledge and pedagogical authority, although concrete practices remain open to ethical evaluation when they involve coercion or abuse of power (Asy'ari, 2017; Dhofier, 1982; van Bruinessen, 1995).

Studies on Indonesian Islamic education also affirm that pesantren cannot be understood merely as school institutions. Pesantren operate through negotiations among tradition, modernity, scholarly authority, and the social role of the community. This framework is important so that santri-kiai relations are not reduced to administrative relations or material transactions (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Pohl, 2006).

Cultural meaning does not move intact when it enters television. Media select scenes, cut duration, arrange sequences, add narration, and combine images with sound. Hall (1997) explains representation as the production of meaning through language and sign systems. Therefore, the pesantren that appears on screen is a reality that has already been selected and articulated. The factual accuracy of a visual object does not necessarily guarantee the accuracy of meaning if the context connecting the object is narrowed or replaced.

In media discourse studies, media texts are arenas of meaning production. They are connected to social context, institutional practices, and the position of represented groups. Representations of religious groups therefore need to be read as discursive constructions that can strengthen or shift public understanding of particular cultural identities (Carvalho, 2008; Fuersich, 2010).

The process of representation takes place within industrial structures. Television needs stories that are quickly understood, attractive, and able to retain audience attention. Such pressure can encourage compression, dramatisation, personalisation, and the highlighting of conflict (McManus, 1994). In the political economy of communication, Mosco (2009) defines commodification as the transformation of use value into exchange value. In media content, this process occurs when information, experiences, and symbols are processed into communication products. This study does not equate exchange value with advertising revenue that can be calculated from a single segment. The concept of commodification is used to read the transformation of adab symbols that possess cultural use value into audiovisual material that possesses attention value in a television product.

Studies on nonfiction entertainment show that fact-based programmes can stand between journalistic credibility and commercial interests. Dramatisation and simplification often become ways to maintain the readability and appeal of content. Analyses of factual television also emphasise the importance of reading verbal-visual relations multimodally because images can reinforce claims that remain verbally indicative or speculative (Fuersich, 2003; Sedlaczek, 2017).

The intersection between religion and media can transform forms of authority and the circulation of symbols. Hjarvard (2008, 2016) describes the mediatisation of religion as a process in which religious practices, symbols, and institutions become increasingly dependent on the logic of the media. In the Indonesian context, digital media can expand the reach of traditional authority, strengthen organisational identity, and encourage the adjustment of messages to platform aesthetics and demands (Munawara et al., 2020; Rohmatulloh et al., 2022; Ronaldi et al., 2023). Raya (2025) shows that digital spaces open new opportunities for religious authority and message commodification. These findings are important, but most of them discuss religious actors who use media to deliver messages. This study examines a different direction, namely external media that package religious practices as objects of storytelling.

Debates on the mediatisation of religion show that media do not merely transmit religious messages. Media can reshape authority, modes of delivery, visual formats, and the logic of public reception. Studies on online religious authority and digital da'wah in Indonesia strengthen the understanding that religious symbols often move according to media logic, both when religious actors use media and when external media package religious symbols as objects of storytelling (Campbell, 2010; Fakhruroji, 2015; Hew, 2018; Loevheim, 2011; Nisa, 2018).

The problem of representation becomes sensitive when the representing party does not provide adequate space for community context. This can be seen in TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored programme aired on 13 October 2025. One segment juxtaposed the practice of kissing the hand and a low bodily position with envelope-giving, alleged kiai wealth, luxury vehicles, expensive sarongs, kiai families, and the concept of blessing, or berkah. This juxtaposition triggered criticism because adab relations were understood through narratives of materiality and inequality.

The Indonesian Broadcasting Commission imposed a temporary suspension through Letter Number 31/K/KPI/31.2/10/2025. KPI assessed that the programme violated P3SPS provisions governing respect

for religious values, norms of decency, and the prohibition against degrading certain individuals or groups (Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia, 2012a, 2012b, 2025). RMI PBNU demanded an apology and programme evaluation, while the Indonesian Ulema Council highlighted the representation that cornered pesantren and kiai (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2025; NU Online, 2025). These reactions show that the meaning of the broadcast did not stop on screen. The discourse moved into regulatory spaces, religious organisations, online news, and digital conversations.

This segment is important because it brings together two fields of meaning. Kissing the hand, a low bodily position, kiai, and berkah belong to the field of adab and scholarly authority. Envelopes, money, luxury vehicles, expensive brands, and family wealth belong to the field of materiality. Each sign does not automatically produce commercial meaning. Meaning emerges from the relations among signs, the sequence of information, word choice, and the evaluation provided by the narrator. The analysis therefore needs to move beyond content listing toward an examination of discursive mechanisms.

The study by Sunarto and Zulfa (2025) shows that the broadcast used provocative framing and raised problems of broadcasting ethics. That study provides an important basis for examining the selection and highlighting of reality. However, framing analysis mainly explains which aspects of reality are selected, emphasised, and made salient. It does not fully explain how selected verbal and visual signs are organised into a socio-cognitive structure of meaning. A more detailed explanation is still needed of how gestures of respect, envelope giving, luxury, kiai families, and berkah are arranged into a single evaluative flow. Nisa (2024) analyses [the commodification of da'wah through YouTube](#), but the object [is the adjustment of da'wah content to platform logic](#). [The](#) research gap lies in the mechanism of commodifying adab symbols by external television media, particularly through verbal-visual relations.

The distinction between this study and previous research lies in its analytical level. This study does not only ask what frame is used. It asks how macrostructure, superstructure, microstructure, inferred knowledge schemas, and discourse access transform pesantren adab symbols into a narrative of materiality. Therefore, this study proposes the concept of the materialisation chain as a tentative analytical proposition. The materialisation chain refers to a discursive sequence that connects nonmaterial gestures of respect with material objects through editing, modality, verbal evaluation, and visual juxtaposition.

[Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model](#) was selected because it connects textual structure, models of social knowledge, and the context of power. Textual analysis covers macrostructure, superstructure, semantics, syntax, stylistics, rhetoric, and visual-verbal relations. Social cognition is used to reconstruct knowledge schemas manifested by the broadcast, not to claim the individual thoughts of producers. Social context is used to examine media access to the production of meaning, the position of the represented community, and the role of regulators (van Dijk, 1988, 1993, 2008, 2015). Mosco's (2009) concept of commodification then helps explain how the results of discourse construction acquire attention value within the media industry.

Thus, the use [of critical discourse analysis in this article is](#) not only intended [to](#) unpack word choice. It also examines how audiovisual texts produce social definitions of pesantren through relations among themes, story schemas, diction, visuals, and discourse access (Carvalho, 2008; Sedlacek, 2017; van Dijk, 1993).

Based on this problem, [this study](#) poses [the following question: how do the](#) textual structure, social cognition model, and social context of Xpose Uncensored construct the commodification of pesantren adab symbols in the representation of santri-kiai relations? This study aims to explain the discursive mechanisms that transfer adab symbols into a framework of materiality. The contribution of the study lies in three aspects. First, it identifies the materialisation chain that links gestures, envelopes, wealth, family, and berkah. Second, it integrates verbal and visual analysis within van Dijk's model. Third, it distinguishes commercialisation as a meaning produced by the broadcast from commercialisation as an empirical fact in pesantren.

Research Type

This study used a qualitative approach with a critical paradigm and a media text study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study examines the process of meaning formation in audiovisual texts rather than measuring the effect of the broadcast on audiences. The critical paradigm directs the analysis toward the relationship among language, visuals, social knowledge, access to discourse, and the industrial structure of media (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Dijk, 1993).

Research Corpus and Unit of Analysis

The research corpus was TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored programme, episode of 13 October 2025 (TRANS7, 2025). The unit of observation was purposively selected from the time segment 00.23-01.14, or 51 seconds. The segment met three criteria: it displayed gestures associated with pesantren adab, mentioned envelope-giving and kiai wealth, and connected the two through evaluative narration. The term santri in this article refers to subjects represented by the broadcast as parties in a follower or santri relationship with the kiai. This study does not claim the personal identity of every individual shown if such identity is not explicitly mentioned in the broadcast.

The 51-second segment was selected not to represent the entire programme statistically, but because it functions as a critical discourse event. The segment contains the core semiotic elements examined in this study: bodily gestures associated with adab, envelope-giving, references to wealth, luxury objects, kiai family members, and the concept of *berkah*. These elements appear in a short but dense audiovisual sequence. The segment is therefore analytically significant for tracing how cultural symbols are connected to material meanings.

Research Location and Context

This research was not based on a physical field site. It focused on audiovisual media texts and public documents related to TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored broadcast. The research context included the television broadcasting space, broadcasting regulations, responses from religious organisations, and public conversations that emerged after the broadcast circulated.

Instrumentation or Tools

Primary data consisted of the narrator's utterances, captions, shot sequences, visual objects, bodily gestures, and visual-verbal relations. The verbal units of analysis were clauses or sentences that had thematic and evaluative functions. The visual units were shot changes or the appearance of objects that shifted the direction of meaning. Visual-verbal relations were analysed when images reinforced, narrowed, or shifted the meaning of utterances. Secondary data included the Pesantren Law, P3SPS, KPI sanction decisions, responses from religious institutions, and literature on pesantren, representation, the mediatization of religion, the political economy of communication, and critical discourse analysis. Documents were used as sources that recorded communicative actions and social context (Bowen, 2009).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through broadcast documentation, repeated observation, transcription, segmentation, visual note-taking, and document study. The researcher divided the segment based on changes in verbal propositions and shifts in visual function. Each unit was recorded in a matrix containing time, verbal data, visual signs, initial function, van Dijk category, and interpretation. The descriptive stage was separated from the interpretive stage so that conclusions could be traced back to the data.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, the researcher arranged the transcript and visual sequence chronologically. Second, the researcher identified the global theme and story schema. Third, the researcher analysed semantics, syntax, stylistics, rhetoric, and visual-verbal relations. Fourth, the

researcher reconstructed the models of knowledge offered by the text, such as inequality, transaction, suspicion, and distributive morality. Fifth, the researcher connected the findings with pesantren culture, the structure of the television industry, broadcasting regulation, and institutional responses. Mosco's (2009) concepts of content commodification, spatialisation, and structuration were used at the interpretation stage, not as categories imposed from the beginning.

The materialisation chain was used as a sensitising analytical concept after the initial mapping of textual and visual units. It helped trace how nonmaterial signs, such as respect and bodily etiquette, were connected to material signs, such as envelopes, wealth, luxury goods, and family benefits. This concept was not used to infer economic motive or producer intention. It was used to examine how commercial meaning is produced through audiovisual arrangement.

Table 1. Analytical Framework Linking van Dijk's Discourse Dimensions and Mosco's Commodification Process

Analytical layer	van Dijk's CDA function	Mosco's commodification link	Operational focus
Textual structure	Identifies macrostructure, superstructure, microstructure, and verbal-visual relations.	Shows how cultural signs are shaped into media content.	Gesture, envelope, luxury, family, and berkah.
Social cognition	Reconstructs knowledge schemas inferred from discourse.	Explains how meanings become readable as transaction, suspicion, and inequality.	Inequality, transaction, suspicion, distributive morality.
Social context	Examines discourse access, power, regulation, and contestation.	Explains circulation, attention value, and institutional response.	KPI sanction, RMI PBNU response, MUI response, public circulation.
Commodification process	Connects discourse construction with media logic.	Defines symbolic transformation into attention-oriented content.	Discursive commodification of adab symbols.

Source: Developed by the author based on van Dijk (1988, 1993, 2008, 2015) and Mosco (2009).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the analysis was maintained through repeated observation, source triangulation, an audit trail, examination of cases that did not fully support the dominant pattern, and researcher reflexivity. The mention of berkah at the end of the segment was treated as a balancing case that had to be analysed rather than ignored. Triangulation was conducted by comparing the broadcast, regulatory documents, institutional responses, and scholarly literature. The audit trail was maintained through transcription matrices and analytical memos. These steps refer to the principles of credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Approval

This study analysed broadcast material and public documents and did not directly involve human participants. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. The researcher nevertheless maintained accuracy in representing the data, limited claims to the text and public context, and did not infer the subjective intentions of the programme makers without supporting data.

This study did not conduct interviews with producers, editors, santri, kiai, or viewers. Therefore, social cognition is understood as a model of knowledge that can be reconstructed from the text, not as a claim about the subjective intentions of the programme makers. The study also did not access rating data, advertising revenue, or internal editorial meeting processes. This limitation is important so that the concept of commodification does not become an accusation of an economic motive unsupported by data.

RESULTS

Architecture of the Segment and Two Fields of Meaning

The segment is composed of five narrative sequences. The first sequence constructs a contrast between a kiai described as wealthy and a congregation that gives envelopes. The second sequence presents adult subjects in a low bodily position while kissing the hand. The third sequence links the gesture to envelope-giving through the word ternyata (apparently/it turns out). The fourth sequence extends suspicion to the

sources of wealth, expensive vehicles, branded sarongs, and kiai families. The fifth sequence mentions *berkah* as the reason for giving, but only after the material narrative has dominated the flow.

The data reveal two fields of meaning. The field of *adab* is marked by hand-kissing, a lowered body, the kiai, and *berkah*. The field of materiality is marked by envelopes, money, vehicles worth billions, expensive sarongs, and families said to share in the benefits. The shift in meaning is formed through the accumulation and sequence of signs. Table 2 summarises this relationship.

Table 2. Verbal-Visual Sequence in the Xpose Uncensored Segment

Time	Main verbal data	Dominant visual data	Discursive function
00.23-00.34	A very wealthy kiai, yet the congregation gives envelopes ... still moves low to kiss the hand.	Kiai figure, envelope, low body.	Builds contrast.
00.35-00.38	It turns out that the one moving low is the one giving the envelope.	Gesture and envelope in proximity.	Links <i>adab</i> to material sign.
00.39-00.57	Netizens are also suspicious ... some kiai are very wealthy. Cars ... priced in the billions. Sarongs ... the most expensive brands.	Vehicles and clothing.	Extends suspicion to luxury.
00.58-01.05	The family also gets a share of the money ... if they are wealthy, the congregation should be given money.	Family and money symbols.	Expands criticism to family.
01.06-01.14	By giving envelopes to the kiai ... it is hoped that one may obtain <i>berkah</i> .	Envelope and respect gesture.	Adds religious reason late.

Source: Processed by the author from Xpose Uncensored TRANS7 broadcast, 13 October 2025.

Macrostructure: Materialisation of Santri-Kiai Relations

At the macrostructural level, the global theme of the segment is the problematisation of santri-kiai relations through materiality. The broadcast does not stop at describing the practice of hand-kissing or envelope-giving. The kiai is positioned as the party who is very wealthy, the congregation as the giver, and the subject represented as a santri or follower as the party who lowers the body.

The sentence 'a very wealthy kiai, yet the congregation gives envelopes' becomes the centre of the theme. The conjunction *but* confronts the possession of wealth with the act of receiving gifts. The broadcast then follows this opposition with expensive vehicles, branded sarongs, and kiai families. As a result, the envelope appears as an initial clue for reading wealth rather than as an ambiguous object.

This macrostructure shifts the centre of the relationship from education and scholarly authority toward material exchange. Respect for the teacher is not explained through *sanad*, the formation of *adab*, or the educational structure of *pesantren*. The absence of such context allows the material context provided by the narration to become the main interpretive frame.

Superstructure: Disclosure Plot and Escalation of Suspicion

At the level of superstructure, the segment follows a disclosure schema. The flow begins with a surprising premise, continues with visual evidence in the form of a low bodily position, and then declares the gesture-envelope relation through the word *ternyata*. The narrative then moves toward suspicions about the causes of wealth, shows luxury goods, extends criticism to the family, and closes with the reason of *berkah*.

The word *ternyata* marks a shift from observation to a claim of discovery. Rhetorically, the word gives the impression that the broadcast reveals a previously hidden fact. The phrase *bisa jadi* (it could be) grammatically signals possibility, but it appears close to visual symbols of luxury. Weak modality at the level of words therefore gains stronger force through audiovisual sequencing.

The placement of *berkah* at the end produces asymmetry. The religious meaning is mentioned, but it is not given equal time, source, or explanation. In the observed sequence, *berkah* appears after the material frame has already been established.

Microstructure and Verbal-Visual Relations

In the semantic aspect, the broadcast builds local coherence among hand-kissing, envelopes, wealth, and luxury. This coherence is not stated through causal evidence. It is produced through sequential proximity. The visual of the lowered body appears close to utterances about envelopes. Envelopes are then followed by discussion of wealth. Wealth is followed by vehicles, sarongs, and family.

In the syntactic aspect, the conjunction *but* constructs opposition, whereas *temyata* constructs disclosure. The sentence 'if he is wealthy, the congregation should be the one receiving money' uses a simple normative structure. The wealthy subject is placed as the party obliged to give.

In the stylistic aspect, the words *ngesot* (moving low or dragging oneself), *mencengangkan* (shocking), and *kecipratan duit* (getting a share of money) use a popular conversational register. The word *ngesot* does not merely describe movement. It carries associations of bodily lowliness, powerlessness, and abnormality. *Kecipratan duit* places the family in the image of enjoying a flow of money without explaining the source, mechanism, or evidence.

In the rhetorical aspect, the phrase 'netizens are also suspicious' functions as a generalisation of source. The identity, number, and basis of the netizens' suspicion are not explained. The expression 'right?' then turns viewers from recipients of information into parties invited to agree with the judgment.

Visuals reinforce verbal operations. The low bodily position gives an image of hierarchy. The envelope gives materiality a concrete form. Expensive vehicles and clothing provide recognisable symbols of luxury. The image of family expands the target of evaluation from the individual to the kinship network.

Table 3. Discourse Operations across van Dijk's Analytical Dimensions

Dimension	Dominant data	Discourse operation	Meaning produced
Macrostructure	Wealthy kiai, giving congregation, low gesture, luxury.	Material centring.	Relation read through inequality.
Superstructure	Envelope -> gesture -> suspicion -> luxury -> family -> <i>berkah</i> .	Disclosure and escalation.	Religious meaning appears late.
Semantics	Hand-kissing, envelopes, wealth in one sequence.	Sequential coherence.	Adab linked to transaction.
Syntax	<i>But</i> , <i>temyata</i> , <i>should</i> .	Opposition, disclosure, norm.	Receiving envelopes appears irregular.
Stylistic-rhetorical	<i>Ngesot</i> , shocking, netizens, <i>right?</i> .	Sensation and invitation.	Audience is guided to agree.
Visual	Low body, envelope, vehicles, clothing, family.	Concrete reinforcement.	Suspicion gains factual feel.

Source: Processed by the author from Xpose Uncensored TRANS7 broadcast, 13 October 2025.

DISCUSSION

Social Cognition: Inferred Schemas of Inequality, Transaction, and Popular Morality

In van Dijk's model, social cognition connects textual structures with the knowledge that enables texts to be produced and understood. In this article, social cognition is treated as a discourse-inferred structure. It does not refer to verified mental models of producers, editors, or programme makers because the study did not conduct production interviews. The schemas below are reconstructed from the broadcast's textual and audiovisual organisation.

The first schema reads *santri-kiai* relations as inequality. The gesture of lowering the body is not explained as educational etiquette but is presented as odd behaviour. The diction *ngesot* reinforces the transfer of the gesture from the category of respect to the category of subordination.

The second schema defines the envelope primarily as money flowing to the *kiai*. The broadcast does not explain variations in the meaning of giving, such as alms, gifts, activity support, gratitude, or *khidmah*. The absence of alternatives makes one possibility appear as if it were the only definition. The third schema links the envelope with wealth accumulation. The phrase *bisa jadi* maintains linguistic uncertainty, but the arrangement of images directs viewers toward a preselected answer.

The fourth schema uses netizens as guarantors of reasonableness. Digital opinions whose sources are not traced are transformed into shared social knowledge. The fifth schema uses distributive morality, namely

that wealthy people should give to weaker parties. This norm has an ethical basis. However, its application to every form of giving to a teacher requires context.

The sixth schema shows ambivalence toward *berkah*. The broadcast acknowledges that the giving is done with the expectation of obtaining *berkah*, but it does not explain *berkah* as a relational concept in the tradition of Islamic education. As a result, *berkah* can be read as an irrational rationalisation for the transfer of money. This pattern shows decontextualisation, in which a sign is separated from its original cultural horizon and inserted into the moral horizon of popular media.

Decontextualisation does not necessarily mean that the images or objects displayed are false. The problem lies in the relationships constructed among those objects. Media have the power to determine which context is considered relevant. When the context of *adab* is minimised and the material context is enlarged, viewers receive a discourse model that views respect as transaction and authority as economic benefit.

Social Context: Discourse Access, Regulation, and Contested Definition

Santri-kiai relations develop within a cultural structure that connects education, morality, spirituality, and scholarly authority. Hand-kissing gains meaning from the long-term relationship among teacher, knowledge, and self-formation. The form of the gesture cannot be interpreted only from the visible bodily position. However, recognising cultural context does not mean that every practice is immune to criticism. Criticism requires data on coercion, exploitation, or abuse, not associations built merely through editing.

Television works under time constraints and the demand for rapid readability. Oppositions such as wealthy versus giving, low versus powerful, and *berkah* versus money are easy to convey within a short duration. This logic produces a clear story but reduces complexity. Hjarvard (2008, 2016) explains that media are not merely channels. Media carry formats, genres, and logics that can reshape religious symbols. In this case, *adab* symbols are translated into a format of disclosure, suspicion, and popular evaluation.

Such television logic is consistent with the tendency toward commodification in religious programmes on screen. Symbols, advice, figures, and religious rituals can be processed into audiovisual packages that are easy to consume and capable of producing public attention (Fachrudin, 2017; Fuersich, 2003).

From the perspective of power, television media have broad access to determine initial definitions in the public sphere. Pesantren communities do not occupy an equal position in the segment analysed because they are not present as providers of context. After the broadcast circulated, RMI PBNU, MUI, and pesantren groups used institutional channels and digital media to build counter-representations. Within van Dijk's (1993) framework, access to public discourse is a source of power. The polemic shows that represented groups can reject media definitions, but such rejection emerges only after the initial definition has already circulated.

The regulatory context shows that broadcasting freedom is accompanied by the obligation to respect religious values and social groups. KPI's sanction indicates that the issue was not merely audience dislike. It also concerned professional standards and the social responsibility of broadcasting. The decision does not automatically prove all interpretations in this study. However, the regulator's decision strengthens the relevance of analysing how narratives and visuals degrade or corner a community.

The polemic also shows spatialisation in the political economy of communication. The broadcast excerpt moved beyond its airtime, circulated on social media, became an object of news coverage, triggered protests, and resulted in regulatory action. The expansion of circulation increased its attention value. The 51-second segment gained a new life as content reproduced by various actors. Thus, commodification did not end when the programme was aired. Attention value grew through cross-platform circulation and interpretive conflict.

Commodification of Adab Symbols as Discursive Construction

From Mosco's (2009) perspective, content commodification occurs when experiences and symbols are processed into communication products. In this case, what is commodified is not pesantren directly as institutions, but public readability of pesantren symbols. The gesture of hand-kissing has cultural use value as a practice of respect. The broadcast articulates it as a dramatic element that acquires attention value when linked to envelopes, luxury, and family.

This study uses commodification in a discursive sense. It does not claim economic commodification, audience commodification, or labour commodification because the study did not access revenue data, audience metrics, or internal production records. The analytical claim is limited to how cultural symbols are transformed into attention-oriented media meanings through audiovisual discourse. Table 4 clarifies this boundary.

Table 4. Operational Boundary of Commodification in This Study

Type of commodification	Main meaning	Data required	Position of this study
Discursive commodification	Cultural symbols become attention-oriented meanings.	Text, visuals, sequence, narration, public context.	Main focus.
Economic commodification	Content produces measurable revenue.	Ratings, advertising revenue, sponsorship data.	Not claimed.
Audience commodification	Audience attention is sold to advertisers.	Audience metrics and market data.	Not measured.
Labour commodification	Media labour is organised for production value.	Production records and newsroom interviews.	Not examined.

Source: Developed by the author based on Mosco (2009).

The discursive commodification process takes place through four operations. First, selection chooses easily recognisable objects: the lowered body, envelopes, vehicles, sarongs, and family. Second, articulation connects objects through sequence and conjunctions. Third, evaluation applies labels such as shocking, suspicious, and should. Fourth, simplification reduces other possible meanings. These four operations produce a story that is concise, emotional, and easily circulated.

The commodification found in this study is discursive because the study only had access to texts and public contexts. There are no data to state that producers intentionally sought profit from insulting pesantren. Nor are there data proving a relationship between the segment and advertising revenue. The accountable claim is that the broadcast transformed cultural symbols into units of conflict and attention. Attention value is an important condition in the media economy, but it is not a single proof of individual commercial motive.

This finding extends the study by Sunarto and Zulfa (2025). While framing analysis explains the highlighting of negative aspects, this analysis reveals the semiotic chain that enables such highlighting to work. Hand-kissing does not become a sign of transaction on its own. The meaning of transaction emerges after the gesture is juxtaposed with envelopes, the envelopes are linked to wealth, wealth is visualised through luxury goods, and family is included as a beneficiary. Berkah then has to confront a chain of meaning that has already been constructed.

The findings also distinguish two directions in the relationship between religion and media. In studies of da'wah media, religious actors package messages to expand reach, build authority, or adapt to platforms (Munawara et al., 2020; Nisa, 2024; Raya, 2025; Rohmatulloh et al., 2022). In this case, the media industry packages the religious practices of others. The different position of representational control determines the risk. When communities do not have access to the production process, their symbols are more easily moved into contexts they do not determine.

Studies of digital da'wah show that when religious actors control message production, media can function as spaces for expanding authority and visual creativity. Conversely, when external media package religious practices without adequate contextual space, religious symbols become more vulnerable to being transferred into frames of sensation, popular morality, or attention commodification (Hew, 2018; Nisa, 2018).

Table 5. Key Findings of the Discursive Commodification Process

Main finding	Textual/audiovisual evidence	Analytical implication
Adab is materialised	Hand-kissing and low body are juxtaposed with envelopes.	Respect may be read as transaction.
Contrast becomes central	A very wealthy kiai, yet the congregation gives envelopes.	Relation appears morally irregular.
Suspicion is constructed	This could be why some kiai are very wealthy.	Envelope is linked to wealth without proof.
Public opinion is generalised	Netizens are also suspicious.	Unidentified voices legitimise the narrative.
Criticism extends to family	The family also gets a share of the money.	Material discourse moves to kinship.
Religious meaning is weakened	Berkah appears briefly at the end.	Cultural context has weaker weight.
Commodification is discursive	Narration, visuals, diction, and sequence accumulate.	Commercial reading is produced, not proven as fact.

Source: Processed by the author from Xpose Uncensored TRANS7 broadcast, 13 October 2025.

Theoretical Contribution, Practical Implications, and Limitations

Theoretically, this study shows that the commodification of religious symbols can be analysed without reducing it to direct economic transactions. Commodification works at the level of representation when cultural symbols are transformed into story units that possess conflict appeal and attention value. The integration of van Dijk and Mosco provides a clear division of labour. Van Dijk explains textual devices, inferred knowledge schemas, and discourse access. Mosco explains the relationship among content production, circulation, and industrial structure.

This addition to the literature strengthens the article's position that the commodification of adab symbols needs to be read as a discursive event. It is located at the intersection of critical discourse analysis, media representation, the mediatisation of religion, pesantren culture, and the political economy of television. Thus, the findings of this study not only explain the TRANS7 case. They also provide an analytical model for reading media representations of other religious traditions.

This study proposes the concept of the materialisation chain as an analytical finding. The materialisation chain is a discursive sequence that connects nonmaterial gestures with material objects through editing, modality, and evaluation. In this segment, the chain moves from the body to the envelope, from the envelope to wealth, from wealth to luxury goods, and from luxury goods to family. This concept can be tested in media representations of other traditions, rituals, or forms of cultural authority.

Practically, the findings have implications for television producers, regulators, journalists, media literacy initiatives, and religious communities. For television producers, cultural context should be treated as part of accuracy, not merely as an ethical supplement. For regulators, the findings show the need to assess not only explicit verbal violations but also the cumulative meaning produced by sequencing, visuals, captions, and narration. For journalists and media workers, the study underlines the importance of distinguishing data, suspicion, public opinion, and cultural explanation when reporting religious practices. For media literacy initiatives, the findings can be used to train audiences to read audiovisual sequencing critically. For religious communities, the findings indicate the need to provide accessible contextual explanations of religious symbols so that public interpretation is not dominated by external media framing.

This study has four limitations. First, the analysis focuses on one segment and therefore does not represent the entire TRANS7 programme. Second, the study did not access internal production processes and cannot determine editorial motives. Third, the study did not measure audience reception. Fourth, the analysis was conducted on recordings available to the researcher, so the accuracy of technical details remains dependent on archive quality. Future studies may compare several programmes, interview media workers and pesantren communities, conduct reception analysis, or test the materialisation chain in other cases.

CONCLUSION

TRANS7's Xpose Uncensored broadcast constructs the commodification of pesantren adab symbols through the accumulation of verbal and visual signs. The macrostructure centres santri-kiai relations on materiality. The superstructure moves the story from envelopes and bodily gestures toward suspicion of wealth, luxury goods, and kiai families. The microstructure uses syntactic contrast, sensational diction,

generalisation of netizen opinion, and invitations to agree. Visual-verbal relations give suspicion a factual impression even though causal relations are not proven.

At the level of social cognition, the broadcast prioritises schemas of inequality, transaction, suspicion, and distributive morality. These schemas are inferred from discourse, not verified as producer cognition. The envelope is more strongly defined as a sign of money flow than as alms, gift, support, khidmah, or respect. Berkah is mentioned, but it does not receive a comparable explanatory space. At the level of social context, the shift in meaning arises from the clash between the pesantren cultural logic based on adab and scholarly authority and the television logic that demands compression, conflict, and attention.

The commercialisation identified in this study is a discursive construction. This study does not prove that pesantren or kiai factually engage in commercialisation. It also does not prove the individual profit motive of the programme makers. The study demonstrates that media can transform symbols of respect into story material associated with money and luxury through selection, articulation, evaluation, and simplification. Therefore, cultural sensitivity must be understood as part of communicative accuracy and broadcasting responsibility.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author designed the study, collected and analysed the data, and wrote the entire manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research and manuscript.

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