ISLAMIC VALUES IN *MUSLIMFLEXER* MEMES:

PIERCE'S SEMIOTIC THEORY

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A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this graduating paper is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this graduating paper. Other researcher's opinion on finding included in this research is quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

Yogyakarta, April 7th 2022

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MOTTO

"Signs are to eyes what words are to ears"

-Kin Glickman-

"Ignoring the signs is a good way to end up at the wrong destination"

-Unknown-

"When the road ahead looks bleak, see the signs. They will be there. They will be

guiding you down the right path."

DEDICATION

This graduating paper is dedicated to my beloved parents.

As well as for people who often ask *"when you graduate,*

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married",

Lastly, for myself.

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Moreover, I know that this graduating paper is not perfect. Hopefully, the readers can provide suggestions and advice for my graduating paper.

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Yogyakarta, March 1, 2022

The Researcher

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of memes on various social media in this cyber era is increasing rapidly. Currently, memes are not only used as a medium of entertainment but are also used as a medium to distribute ideas, opinions, and even religious knowledge. *Muslimflexer* meme is one of the memes that contains this kind of religious teaching. This meme allegedly has Islamic values in it. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out what Islamic values are contained in the signs on the meme. The research method used by the researcher is qualitative research with data collection techniques based on observation. As for the data analysis, the researcher used the referential equivalent method. To understand memes, the researcher takes Shifman Limor's point of view. Memes are divided into video memes and photo memes, containing juxtaposition, frozen motion, focus on ordinary people, flawed masculinity, humour, simplicity, repetition, and whimsical content that refers to iconic signs. Thus, in determining the signs in the memes in this research, the researchers applied the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce as a theoretical framework. In addition, the Qur'an and Hadith are also used to support the findings of this study. After being traced, it was found that the signs in this meme contain Islamic values as follows; say "Bismillah" before eating, faith in Allah, command to lower the gaze, the virtue of praying in the mosque and fearing only Allah (*Khasyyah*).

Keywords: *Meme, Islamic Values, Islam, Da'wah, Signs*

ISLAMIC VALUES IN *MUSLIMFLEXER* MEMES: PIERCE'S SEMIOTIC THEORY

Oleh: Maulida Lailia Giffani

ABSTRAK

Munculnya meme diberbagai media sosial di era siber ini semakin meningkat pesat. Saat ini, meme tidak hanya dijadikan sebagai media hiburan semata, namun juga digunakan sebagai media untuk menyalurkan ide, pendapat, bahkan ilmu agama. Meme *Muslimflexer* adalah salah satu meme yang berisi ajaran agama semacam ini. Meme ini disinyalir memiliki nilai-nilai keislaman di dalamnya. Oleh karena itu, tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui nilai-nilai keislaman apa saja yang terkandung dalam tanda-tanda pada meme tersebut. Adapun metode penelitian yang digunakan peneliti adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berdasarkan observasi. Sedangkan untuk analisis datanya, peneliti menggunakan metode padan referensial. Untuk memahami meme, peneliti mengambil sudut pandang Shifman Limor. Meme dibagi menjadi memetic video dan memetic foto yang didalamnya terdapat penjajaran, gerak beku, fokus pada orang biasa, maskulinitas cacat, humor, kesederhanaan, pengulangan, dan konten aneh yang mengacu pada tanda-tanda ikonik. Sehingga dalam menentukan tanda-tanda dalam meme pada penelitian ini, peneliti menerapkan teori semiotika dari Charles Sanders Pierce sebagai kerangka teori. Selain itu, Al-Qur'an dan Hadits juga digunakan untuk mendukung temuan penelitian ini. Setelah ditelusuri, ditemukan bahwa tanda-tanda dalam meme ini mengandung nilai-nilai Islam sebagai berikut; membaca "Bismillah" sebelum makan, percaya adanya Allah, perintah untuk menjaga pandangan, keutamaan sholat di masjid, dan takut hanya kepada Allah (*Khasyyah*).

Kata kunci: *Meme, Nilai-Nilai Keislaman, Islam, Dakwah, Tanda*

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 **Background of Study**

Today, life without the internet is simply unimaginable. By dint of the internet, people can connect with others worldwide. Especially since the Covid-19 outbreak, many activities have been done online, from working from home with internet media to teaching and learning processes that are also carried out online. As long as many activities have been conducted online since the pandemic, there is an increase in internet users in 2021. Derived from the Ministry of Communication and Information on its website https://aptika.kominfo.go.id/, internet users in Indonesia in 2021 have increased by 11 per cent from the previous year, from 175.4 million to 202.6 million users.

Meanwhile, internet users worldwide reached 4.66 billion, 59.5 per cent of the global population. The increase in internet users is also followed by the use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and others. The content presented in social media is also diverse, ranging from news content, education content, advertisements to entertainment content that is most in demand by most social media users. Entertainment content itself also takes various forms, one of which is memes.

A meme is an idea, behaviour, or style spread through imitation and usually contains a symbolic meaning representing a particular phenomenon. According to Dawkins (1976, p. 192), a meme is a new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission or a unit of imitation. Through this imitation

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process, there are similarities in the content's characteristics and the form of the collection of memes. In addition to the imitation process, the similarity in the characteristics of the content and form is also caused by the dissemination and modification by other social media users. Below is an example of a meme on the internet:
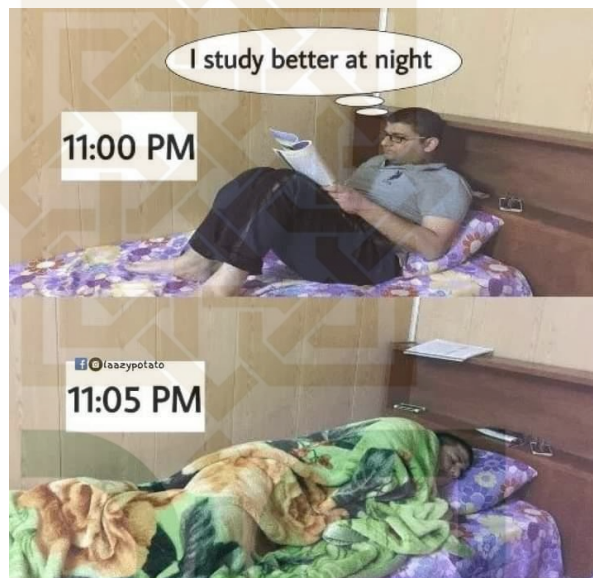
Figure. 1 *Example of Meme*
(Source: https://surl.li/brjnc)

Memes are usually adapted from memorable events and then parodied in the form of jokes, satires, and even sarcasm. Making memes is not only on trivial matters but sometimes takes a heavy topic. For example, the 4chan site in 2003 was very instrumental in popularizing memes, from those based on anime to politics. Not only politics, but now memes have also penetrated the belief system: memes with religious themes.

Muslimflexer is a meme account on Instagram with 75 thousand followers and uploaded more than a thousand meme content that uses Islam as its theme. The

researcher views this meme are unique and distinctive from any other meme. *Muslimflexer* memes show many signs that indicate Islamic values. Islamic values can be seen from the signs in memes through images (visual) and sentences (verbal). Based on the signs, *Muslimflexer* memes shows Islamic teachings aimed at da'wah but packed with humour. Below is an example of the *Muslimflexer* meme:
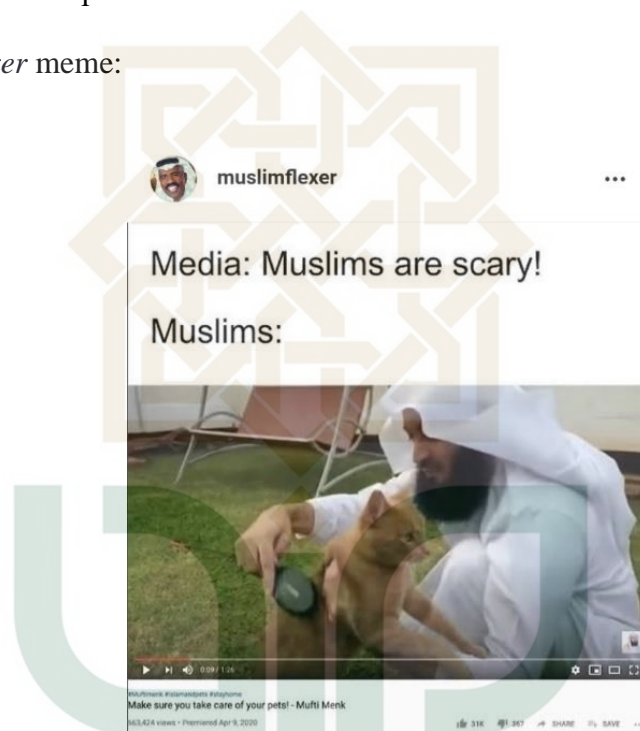
Figure. 2 *Example of Muslimflexer Meme*
(Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/CM3Efb7Jfnx/)

Based on the example from the *Muslimflexer* meme above, there is an image with a caption consisting of visual and verbal signs, which will be researched using the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce.

According to the semiotic figure, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), human life is characterized by the mixing of signs and their use in every representative activity (Danesi, 2010, p. 33). Signs created by humans have

different representations due to their cultural background. Therefore, a particular area has different signs from other areas according to the background of their own culture.

Following Pierce, a sign is something that stands for something to someone in some form or capacity (Umberto Eco, 2009, p. 21). Based on Pierce's thought, it was explained that a sign could represent something else. The signs can be the form of experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings. In addition, there are two types of signs: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal signals include words and other language structures (expressions, sentences, and so on); nonverbal signs include drawings and gestures (Marcel Danesi, 2004, p. 7).

Like Saussure, Pierce also has a modal of sign called triadic (three-part) model consisting of a representamen, an interpretant, and an object (Daniel Chandler, 2002, p. 29). Representamen or sign is a thing that represents another thing that is not necessarily material, though usually interpreted as such. Then, the object is a reference of representamen or something beyond the sign (a referent), which spontaneously relates representamen to the experience of human cognition. Interpretant or sign user is a concept of thoughts from someone who uses the sign and derives it to a particular meaning. The interpretant, according to Eco in Steven (2011, p. 194), can be another sign in another semiotic system (e.g., a drawing corresponding to a word), a definition in the same semiotic system (e.g.'salt' signifies 'sodium chlorine'), an emotive association (e.g., 'dog' signifies 'love'), or a translation into another language.

Pierce, meanwhile, splits it into three sections based on the ground. The first is qualisign (firstness), which refers to a quality that works as a sign, followed by sinsign (secondness), which refers to a specific thing or event that functions as a sign, and finally legisign (thirdness), which refers to the general kind that functions as a sign. The second trichotomy is regarded from the point of view of representamen and object, which can be an icon or qualitative relation, an index or actual relation, or an abstract relation. The relationship between the interpretant and the sign, which can be rheme or general interpretation, dicent or specialized interpretation, and argument, is the final from Pierce's trichotomy model (logical interpretation).

In the table below, the researcher shows examples of analysis.

Table 1. *Triadic Analysis Result Sample*

Representamen	Object	Interpretant
Figure 1 - The sentence "I better study at night - Sleeping man picture	Depiction of people who like to procrastinate study time.	Delaying study time will make people even lazier.
Figure 2 - The phrase "Muslims are scary!" - Picture of a man combing cat hair	An accurate depiction of Muslims	Muslims are not scary, and they are soft-hearted.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher wants to analyze what Islamic values are found from the signs contained in *Muslimflexer* memes. The

researcher interested and challenged to use *Muslimflexer* memes as the research object because of the uniqueness and difference with other memes. Moreover, so far from the researcher's knowledge, the researcher has not found any research that uses memes with Islamic themes before, so later this research can be used as a reference for further researchers that are interested in analyzing Islamic-themed memes. This research will focus on analyzing signs in *Muslimflexer* memes by looking at the relationship to the representamen, object, and interpretant using Pierce's semiotic theory.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanation on the background, the researcher formulates research questions:

1. What is the interpretation of *Muslimflexer* memes based on the signs?

2. What are the Islamic values contained in *Muslimflexer* memes?

1.3 Objectives of Study

From the research questions above, the objectives of the researcher conducting this research are:

1. Find out the meaning of the signs contained in *Muslimflexer* memes and the interpretation of these memes.

2. Finding Islamic values contained in *Muslimflexer* memes.

1.4 Significance of Study

This research is a contribution to the advancement of science, particularly in the fields of linguistics and semiotics. This research will assist researchers and

readers gain a better understanding of the signs, their meanings, and their uses. This research can also be used as a source of information for a further researcher interested in researching memes because research on memes, especially those containing Islamic elements, is still rare. The researcher believes that research on religious signs in memes is needed to develop science. Therefore, for linguists and literary experts, this research is expected to enrich their interests in researching memes in more depth.

1.5 Literature Review

So far, the researcher has not found any research that has been done before which discusses *Muslimflexer* memes. However, the researcher found several types of research and journals that are similar to this research.

The first research is a thesis written by Vivian Savenia Sumeisey, entitled "Semiotic Analysis of The Simpsons Memes in Memes.com Instagram", published in 2019. This research aimed to figure out what symbol appears in The Simpsons memes and how it is understood. The research data for The Simpsons memes is gathered utilizing qualitative audio and visual materials from memes.com Instagram as the data source. Fourteen data sets are evaluated using visual semiotics in conjunction with Charles Sanders Peirce's theory. In this thesis, Vivian uses Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory while finding the meaning of the memes using nonverbal communication, framing techniques, and communicative act. This research helps the researcher know more clearly about nonverbal communication, framing techniques, and communicative acts. The similarity between this thesis and

this research is using a semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce to analyze the object, while the difference between them is in the object and the theme.

The second is a video journal of education and pedagogy compiled by Richard Kearney entitled "Meme Frameworks: A Semiotic Perspective on Internet Memes", published in 2019. This journal shows how memes have become part of political landscapes, especially in radicalization. A paradigmatic example of the infiltration of political discussion by cultural memes was Donald Trump Jr sharing memes depicting "the deplorables" by remixing the promo image for "the untouchables" featuring Donald Trump's campaign team face as well as a cartoon version of Donald Trump as the cartoon character "Pepe the Frog" which is a symbol of white supremacy. The journal also said that media need creators who create educative entertainment, such as memes work to communicate and educate in online spaces, not even spreading radicalism. For similarity between the journal and this research uses the same approach, that is semiotic, whereas the difference between them is in the object and the theme.

The third is a thesis written by Yasih Chykita Paputungan entitled "Penanaman Nilai Keislaman dalam Mencegah Perilaku Bullying di SMP IT Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta" published in 2019. This thesis uses a qualitative descriptive field research method whose objects are students at SMP IT Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta in 2018/2019 academic year. This research aims to describe the forms of bullying in students at SMP IT Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta, as well as instilling Islamic values in SMP IT Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta. The result of this research indicate that the forms of bullying found in SMP IT Masjid Syuhada

Yogyakarta are physical bullying, verbal bullying, and mental bullying. The causes of bullying at SMP IT Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta are family, school environment, peers, and personality. Then, in inculating Islamic values to prevent bullying at SMP IT Masjid Suhada Yogyakarta, namely through habituation, Ibrah and Amsal, as well as giving advice. The similarity between Yasih's thesis and this research is that they both raise the theme of Islamic values even though the theories and objects used are different. This thesis helps researcher understand Islamic values in depth.

The fourth is a thesis written by Mokhammad Khadiid Syaifullah, entitled "The Teachings of Salafi in *Life with The Ahmad Family* Comic: Pierce's Semiotic Analysis", published in 2020. His thesis used a semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce and the material from *Life with The Ahmad Family* Comic on Facebook as the resource of the data. The method that he used was qualitative research by way of reflection or playing a role in determining the data's interpretation. From his thesis, it was concluded that the Salafi teachings contained in the comic were the prohibition of drawing creatures, maintaining a beard, prohibiting of saying Christmas, and so on. Besides that, the similarity between the thesis and this research is using the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce to analyze the object, while the difference between both of them is in the object.

The last is a journal written by Anjad A. Mahasneh and Hana Bashayreh entitled "A Semiotic Translation of Memes: Trump's Visit to Saudi Arabia as a Case Study", published in 2021. This journal examines memes that have now become entertainment media spread across various social media platforms. Authors using a semiotic approach of Saussure and its resource data are six internet memes

about Donald Trump's 2017 visit to Saudi Arabia were chosen at random. The study of this journal shows that memes can be an expressive social and political message. In addition to entertainment, memes have an impact on the language, thoughts, and cultural notions of a country, as well as encouraging social media users to be more outspoken. The similarity between the journal and this research is the same object, 'memes' with different semiotic theories.

After investigating these researches and journals, the researcher concludes that research on *Muslimflexer* memes using the semiotic approach of Charles Sanders Pierce as a whole (all triadic) never been attempted before. This research differs from others because it researched Islamic memes, and its analysis applied all triadic elements. Therefore, the researcher suggests that this research is worth doing.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

This research focuses on analyzing signs contained in *Muslimflexer* memes using a semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce. The researcher uses a semiotic theory of Pierce to find out the trichotomy relationship between signs in *Muslimflexer* memes. The trichotomy relationship is the relationship between object, representamen, and interpretant. According to Budiman (2005, p. 49), an object is an idea that is sometimes called the background of the representamen. It can be a mental representation (in mind) and something real. Then, representamen is a form accepted by a sign or functions as a sign itself. Something can be called representamen (sign) if it fulfils two conditions; first, it can be perceived with the five senses or with thoughts (feelings). Second, it represents something else. The

interpretant is meaning from the signs, not the interpreter. These three dimensions will always relate to each other, so this is called a triadic structure.

In addition to the three elements above, to carry out a more in-depth analysis, it is necessary to use all levels of signs from the first to the third trichotomy. The first trichotomy consists of qualisign, sinsign, and legisign—the second consists of an icon, symbol, and index. The last trichotomy consists of rheme, dicent, and argument.

After analyzing all levels of the signs contained in *Muslimflexer* memes, the researcher will look for what Islamic values are contained in them. Islamic values are essentially a collection of life principles and teachings on how humans should live their lives. These principles are interrelated to form a unified whole that cannot be separated. Islamic values are the development of Islamic religious teachings sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. Qur'an is the source revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad, while hadith are the deeds, words, and decrees that are based on the Prophet Muhammad (Hasan, 2006, p. 15).

1.7 Method of Research

1.7.1 Type of Research

The researcher employs qualitative research techniques in examining this object which is descriptive and uses analysis. In addition, qualitative research also emphasizes the process and the meaning contained in it. According to Creswell (2014, pg. 4), qualitative research investigates and comprehends the meaning that individuals or groups attach to a social or human issue. Emerging questions and

processes are part of the research process, as are data acquired in the participant's environment, data analysis that builds inductively from specifics to broad themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the data. The structure of the final written report is customizable. Those who engage in this type of research promote an approach to research that values an inductive approach, an emphasis on personal meaning, and the necessity of rendering a situation's complexity.

This research aims to analyze the meaning of memes, so it is suitable to use qualitative methods. In addition, the research also uses a semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Pierce to determine the representamen, object, and interpretant.

1.7.2 Data Sources

The data from this research was gathered from the *Muslimflexer* Instagram account with the link that is https://www.instagram.com/muslimflexer/ . The researcher limited the data based on the timing of *Muslimflexer* Instagram posts from Mei 2020 to March 2021 by taking five samples of memes from one hundred and ninety memes.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

According to Creswell (2014, p. 253), there are four primary methods of data collecting in qualitative research: observation, interview, documents, audio, and visual material. In this research, it is used observation, so the researcher takes field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at the research site. As for taking the sample, the researcher used a purposive sampling technique. Based on Sugiono, purposive sampling is a sampling technique with certain considerations (2016, pg. 85). The criteria used in this study are *Muslimflexer* memes which are

unique and contain Islamic values related to daily behavior. The reason for sampling only five memes is because after being observed, these contents are sufficient to represent the data obtained. In addition, the sampling time span is quite long in order to obtain quality data.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

The researcher employs an equivalent method to analyze the data. According to Sudaryanto (1993, p. 13), the equivalent method is concerned with the concepts of assessing language data with any determining tool that is not integrated into the language. The researcher in this research uses the reference as a determining tool, and the referent is Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. The equivalent method in this research is implemented by the basic technique of sorting the determining elements and advanced techniques in the form of linking techniques appeal. The element sorting technique uses a tool in the form of a sorting power that is the mentality possessed by the researcher (Sudaryanto, 1993, pg. 21). Furthermore, an advanced technique is carried out, namely, comparing the determining elements relevant to all the specified data elements, in addition to tools in the form of mental discrimination, seen from the point of view of the object of research itself, each element becomes the standard of appeal or a tool, in this case, is a sign.

1.8 Organization

There are four chapters in this paper. The first chapter is an introduction that wraps up multiple sub-chapters, including the background of study, research

questions, objectives of study, significance of study, literature review, theoretical approach, method of study, and paper organization. The theoretical framework, which covers the researcher's theories, is the second chapter. The findings and discussions are discussed in the third chapter. The researcher outlines the findings of the indications found in *Muslimflexer* memes, as well as what Islamic values that contain, in this chapter. The final chapter is the research's conclusion and suggestion. It summarizes all of the findings from the analysis.

CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This is the final section of the paper. This chapter is divided into two pieces. The conclusion is the first component of the research, and it seeks to address the research question. The second section is a suggestion, which includes some research-related advice.

4.1 Conclusion

The researcher highlights a number of Islamic values contained in the signs manifested in *Muslimflexer* memes based on the research findings and discussions. The first value is to say "Bismillah" before eating. The second value is faith in Allah, then the third value is the command to lower the gaze. The fourth value is the virtue of praying in the mosque, and the fifth is fear only Allah (*khasyyah*). These Islamic values are encapsulated in signs that appear in memes. As a result, the researcher might claim that Muslimflexer memes contain teachings about Islamic values. As stated in the background of the study, Islamic values through memes are intended to serve as a medium of da'wah in imparting Islamic teachings to citizens.

4.2 Suggestion

After accomplishing this research, the researcher suggests some advices for further researchers interested in researching memes. The first is that the next researcher can use more popular memes such as 9gag or other interesting memes in

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researching Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that further researchers can optimally use Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic theory. However, the researcher also suggests that further researchers use the semiotic theory of another figure, such as Ferdinand De Saussure or Roland Barthes.

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