

Can Islam be Cool? Emerging Islamic Consumer Culture¹

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Abstract

In the paper the author challenges the stereotypical image of Islamic culture as being repressive and hostile to consumerism. Using variety of examples, the author describes the multifold process of consumer culture formation in the Islamic world. Modern Islamic consumer culture is not homogenous. On the one hand, it is shaped by pressures of aggressively marketed global popular culture of Western provenance and reactions (often escalating into resistance) to that influence by the recipients, but on the other, it is deeply embedded in the traditional values of the local communities.

Islam is associated with religious orthodoxy and considered as a juxtaposition of modernity with all its founding elements. One of them is consumer culture, which, due to its materialistic character, focus on individualism and relationship with often not too much sophisticated and morally unambiguous mass culture, seems to contradict any religious rules. Apparently this view was well founded, especially in terms of revivalist notions in Islam and activities of fundamentalist groups, which declared a war on popular culture in its most superficial form. However, starting

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from the early 21st century a new trend is to be observed – attempts to adapt Western culture to Islam, resulting in a new local, Islamic variation of global culture.

Making use of achievement of alien civilisations – including the Western one – by keeping the foundations of own culture has always been an unique feature of the Arabo-Islamic civilization. This time a framework for a synthesis is provided by consumer culture, especially since it allows one to construct his own identity through consuming products. Such products belong to consumer culture, but at the same time maintain their religious character. Often they are linked to mass culture, while their main target group are young people. Drawing from the idea of multiculturalism they enable young religious Muslims to participate in global mass culture and maintain their religious identity. Often they play additional roles – many of them are committed socially or politically, i.e. they comprise a spiritual added value (*spirituelle Mehrwert*) reflected in feelings, values and experiences (Bolz 2002: 106).

Since a couple of years Islamic equivalents of Western products of consumer culture are becoming more and more popular. Dozen or so years ago it would be hard to imagine to use Rap music – often filled with vulgar language – to transmit religious ideas, or a fashion doll wearing *abaya* and *hijab*. Especially interesting seem to be products of Islamic pop-culture targeting especially young people – Muslims, especially those of migrant origin² – who try to reconcile their heritage and religion with social realities of countries, which they inhabit. Most of them are offspring of migrants, born and raised in the West, aware of their rights and duties as citizens, and as Muslims. They also dissociate themselves from ethnic influences in religious practice of their parents, and perceive Islam as an universal religion, purified from cultural context. An additional factor speeding up the development of Islamic consumer culture is the increase of anti-Muslim sentiments in many Western states resulting from terrorist attacks carried out by Muslims (starting with 9/11) and challenges of integration of Muslim communities in selected European states. Under such circumstances affirmation of Islam became a vital necessity.

Popular culture of youth became quite an interesting and promising sphere for Muslim activists. It provides a possibility for expression of one's individuality by choosing its products and elements, such as music, clothing, words. It is also wide enough to allow people from different cultures, classes and social groups – including ethnic and religious ones – to take part. What is more, it does not provoke negative

² Products of Islamic consumer culture have not meet the interest of autochthonous Muslims of Europe, e.g. the Tartars. They are rather treated as an exotic novelty, see: Górak-Sosnowska and Łyszczarz (2009).

reactions from Muslims of Europe (Pew Research Center 2006: 1). And this might be a starting point to join it on one's own rules. Moreover, by referring to the rules of Islam, Islamic youth consumer culture actually reinforces revitalization of Islam in new, unique forms.

In order to qualify a product as Islamic it has to have a religious character (e.g. *hijab*, *halal* food), or some other features which determine its religious identity (e.g. credit without interest, application for mobile phone reminding about prayer times). Its consumer character is determined by its popular use and possibility of individualization. Islamic consumer products can be divided into two parts:

- Products which were created as an Islamic counterbalance for Western popular culture (even though they actually belong to pop-culture; e.g. comic book 'The 99', action and strategy videogames, sodas, etc.),
- Products which allow religious Muslims to participate in social life (e.g. *burkini* – swimming suit for religious Muslims, accounts in Islamic banks).

Both categories can be seen as reaction to modernity, but in the first case the Islamic product is an alternative for the already existing Western product, while in the second case – a tool enabling participation in the public sphere. Patrick Haenni (2009: 315) calls them – respectively – Islamized products and Islamic products, indicating that Islamized products aim at creating a new identity and do not have to adhere to the rules of Islamic law. The borderline between both categories is flexible and depends to a great extent on interpretation. Most of Islamic popular literature came into existence in order to provide young Muslims with other than Western cultural patterns, but one can also indicate publications, which provide guidance on how to live in a Western society as a Muslim. Islamic banking provides services to religious clients, who otherwise would keep their money at home, but one shall bear in mind that Islamic economics was created as a counterbalance to Western capitalism.

The relation between religiosity and consumption of Islamic products is not a linear one. Very religious and conservative persons will reject Western, modern form of Islamic products, despite their religious character. That means that a *Fulla* fashion doll can be rejected, even though she wears a head cover, due to the fact that it is a doll, i.e. an item which tries to copy God's act of creation. Islamic pop music – despite its message – can also be qualified as *haram*, that is forbidden, because very traditional Muslims do not tolerate neither singing, nor music instruments, except for an unique genre, *nasheed*, in its traditional form (i.e. melodic recitation performed *a capella*). Another problem is interpretation of religiosity of each product. Some of them have an explicit religious character, such as Islamic female fashion targeting

Muslims who cover their hair and wear loose gear, i.e. religious women. In other product the religious component appears only indirectly within a wider social or political message (e.g. in Islamic sodas or eco-Islam).

The paper aims to present the relatively new phenomenon of Islamic consumer culture. Firstly, it explains the shift from anti-consumer ethics to Islamic consumer culture. In the second part it places Islamic consumer culture in a broader framework of consumer studies.

From Anti-Consumer Ethics...

In the beginning the transmission of Western cultural patterns accompanied by changed in lifestyles were strongly opposed by traditional Islamic communities. While Islam promotes entrepreneurship and does not support ascetics, it is also against excessive lavishness and luxury (e.g. using golden pottery, wearing jewellery by men). It is due to the Islamic concept of ownership, according to which everything in the world belongs to the God, while humans are his confidants and get the goods for a rent. This influences the way of using these goods – humans shall manage them in a rational manner, so that the whole Islamic community can profit. Consumption above real needs, which aims to fulfill egoistic desires is definitely against Islamic doctrine.

Another reason of aversion to consumer culture is its Western origin. For many Arabic intellectuals consumer culture equals with westernization (or Americanisation; Abaza 2006: 46) and indicates Western supremacy. It is not far from there to perceive westernization as a modern form of colonialism; only the form of the influence has changed – from a direct one to a more subtle one (LeVine 2002: 1). What is more, the offer of Western culture, especially popular culture, seems to be attractive for Muslim audience. By analyzing the reasons of development of fundamentalist movements in the Middle East, Emmanuel Sivan (2005: 30–31) pointed on the significance of popularization of pop-culture, which became competitive for religion.

These two elements – incompatibility of Islam and consumer culture, as well as negative attitude to Westernization – were decisive in setting the discourse on consumer culture as such. While analyzing relations between postmodernity and Islam, Bryan Turner (1997: 92) claims that Islam responded to the challenges of postmodernity with traditional fundamentalism and anti-consumer attitude, based on classical Islam. Dan Webb (2005: 104) provides similar narrative, by perceiving

Islam and an antithesis for consumerism. It is true, that other world religions also do not favor (or even condemn) consumerism, but in the case of Islam the antagonism is grounded in negative attitude of Muslims to the West.

Such rethorics is to be found in statements and writings of Islamic fundamentalists, but rather these older ones, from the era of splendor of the Muslim Brotherhood. By rejecting capitalism due to its materialistic character and link to colonialism, they provide numerous arguments on why Islam opposes consumer culture. One of such colorful statement comes from Mustafa as-Siba'i (d. 1964), one of the main spiritual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in his work 'Socialism of Islam':

When we take in our hand the leadership of this so long expected civilization, we will not run away to cosmos and we will not deny God's existence. We won't turn our intercontinental rockets and missiles a tool to threaten the nations of the world, so that we can pull them into the spheres of our influence. We won't turn the radio into a mean of deceiving people, and cinema into a mean of demoralization.

We won't turn women into a tool of fulfilling our desires. We won't use and pillage the world nations to achieve civilizational progress, we won't destroy their veneration and wealth (quoted after Danecki n.d.).

Until the 70's some fundamentalist Islamic groups created closed communities which followed the traditional way of life, were cut off from modernity and technology (Abaza 2006: 46). This way they tried to struggle against consumerism. Also traditional circles tried to defend themselves against influx of Western goods and excessive consumption. In Turkey the slogan against consumerism was *bir lokma bir hurka* – 'one sweet, one sweater'. This meant that limiting excessive consumption leads to wealth (Akçaoğlu 2009: 53).

However, gradually the attitude of Muslim traditionalists and fundamentalists to modernity started to become pragmatic. Ideas of ayatollah Ruhollah Chomeini were popularized during his emigration from Iran by the means of audio tapes. Lebanese Hezbollah runs since 1991 a TV station Al-Manar, and Taliban – despite their radical conservatism and puritanism – use modern weapons. That means that despite the negative attitude towards modernity in its normative dimension, Islamic groups use their means – especially knowledge and technology.

Such an instrumental borrowing of the form without the accompanying cultural dimension is called by Bassam Tibi (2001: 35) a dream about half modernity. According to this German scholar using Western tools has to translate into opening to the 'second part' of modernity – Western norms and values. Staying in the dream is unrealistic in long term and has to lead to assimilation anyway.

...to Islamic Consumer Culture

The claim of Tibi has been verified positively verified only partly. Since a couple of years Islam has been adapting to modernity. A religious Muslim female can be fashionable dressed, a girl – play with a fashion doll in *hijab*, an a devout Muslim listen to religious Hip-Hop or search for religious information in the Internet. Modernity is not treated only instrumentally as a tool of popularization of Islam. Adaptation processes enable young religious Muslims to participate in the social life more fully. It is because they can use the same tools of modern popular and consumer culture, adjusted to religious norms.

It does not mean that the role of religion is decreasing and Muslim communities are becoming secularized. Simultaneously religion is entering spheres of social life which have so far been dominated by the profane. Islamic consumer culture does not mean, as it used to, striving to establish an Islamic state with an omnipresent ideology of religion; it is rather an element of daily practice (Roy 2004: 99). References to Islam are much more subtle in their form, even if their message is unambiguous. It does not mean a new state project, not a system of orders; it is an individualistic project, based on conscious striving to a better understanding of religion. Therefore it is not on the defensive, retreating under the pressure of modernity; it is rather seeking new forms of expression, so that it can attract new adherents (and keep current followers) in the modern, global world. This process can be presented by paraphrasing a quotation of Bryan Turner (1997: 15): ‘the threat to Islam is not the legacy of Jesus, but that of Madonna’. Turner refers to the virtues of popular culture, which might be perceived as more attractive and push Muslims away from their religion. However, one of Madonna’s songs is ‘Like a prayer’ – and so it is much closer to religion.

Islamic consumer culture came into existence than to reaffirmation of religion and an increase of its significance in social life. The key to understand the contemporary renaissance of religiosity, illustrated by consumption, is a new religious middle class, which is being established in Islamic countries. Those who belong to this category fulfill most of the criteria of a middle class – they are relatively well off, they own enterprises or work as white or blue collars, have higher education and high cultural competencies. Their religiosity is determined by their origin – while some of them belong to so called *haute bourgeoisie*, most of them originate from lower social strata, often rural areas (Nasr 2010: 22–23). Their social advancement is due to their education and entrepreneurship.

The rise of a new religious middle class does not necessarily translate into support of Islamists. Muslim societies of Middle East don't approve radical Islamist groups, what is indicated by constantly decreasing support for militant Islam and terrorism. At the same time they support bigger influence of religion on politics (Pew Research Center 2005: 277–28). Relationship between religion and politics in the region are definitely complex. In Arab republics and Turkey the countries are ruled by secular governments. In countries of Gulf Cooperation Council religion constitutes one of the pillars of identity of their autochthonous inhabitants. In both cases religion seems to be a significant reference point, especially since its often Islam, rather than nationality, which builds the core of social identity. That is why there are often references to religion in popular songs, daily conversations, and advertising. Religious motives freely mix with secular ones – next to posters with exotic islands there are posters presenting genealogy of prophet Muhammad, while next to stickers 'Toyota#1' there are those with *shahada* or *basmala* (Starrett 1995: 56).

The case of the Islamic Republic of Iran due to a top-down Islamisation of social life. The country set a strategy of controlled liberalization, trying to manage politics according to social moods. This can be observed on one of the segments of popular culture – movies and music. In 90's cassettes with video and audio recordings were quite popular in Iran, even though illegal. In the beginning the state tried to limit their accessibility by administrative means. So video shops were taken their licenses, and their goods were confiscated. However, from mid-90's the 'devil' started to be tamed – the licenses were given back in 1993, and their assortment widened, but at the same time controlled. Liberalisation of video market was seen as a necessity due to another threat – proliferation of global TV programmes through satellite receivers (Shahabi 2008: 118). While satellite receivers were forbidden, the state also adopted a strategy of controlled liberalization. It allowed the receivers (that is watching foreign channels), but at the same time it broadened the offer of state TV (Alikhah 2008: 94–110). State policy of Islamisation translates into the state of the art of consumer culture, in which there are not many religious references. Islamic consumer culture reaches also states apparently far from global centres – fashionable devotional items, Islamic toys or religious themes in mobile phones are becoming more and more popular e.g. in Syria, allowing their owners to underline their individuality and adherence to Islamic tradition (Kokoshka 2008).

Religion and consumption are mutually entering their spheres, which used to be separated, leading to commercialization of Islam. In the case of the upper and middle class it is linked to processes of individuation and other changes in lifestyle, proving

that one can be rich and pious, and modern too. For lower social classes Islamic consumer culture offers a way to participate in modern consumer culture through what is important to them – religion.

One of the examples could be commercialization of Ramadan. For upper class exquisite *Ifitars* in luxury hotels are offered, often accompanied by artistic performance (e.g. dancing dervish). Spending Ramadan evenings in hotels and restaurants is a new practice for Egyptian middle class, showing its individualization and erosion of family values (Abaza 2006: 170). Traditionally Ramadan evenings used to be spent at homes. Families and neighbours used to meet together on dinners. It was the done thing to run an open house and share the dinner with poor and those in need. A significant ritual was also self-preparation of means. Moving Ramadan to a hotel changes the character of this religious festival.

Commercialization of Ramadan means also a broader offer of holiday products, including those for the lowest social strata. In Egyptian shops one can buy Ramadan lanterns in all possible shapes and sizes, which acquired a status similar to this of a Christmas tree in Western states (Amin 2004: 173); dates – the basic meal on *Ifitars* – are sold in different shapes and have unique names (such as the titles of popular Arab songs; Hammond 2007: 112). In 2007 during Ramadan 40 million SMSs were sent for 2,1 million USD, and in Saudi Arabia – 18 million (Bunt 2009: 65). Also in the case of lower social strata there seems to be erosion of traditional values. The threat however, are not SMS instead of personal visits, but worsening economic standing of many families. So they cannot appropriately host their guests on Ramadan visits, what translates into less visiting (Abaza 2006: 170).

But it is the religious middle and upper middle class who mostly benefit from the emerging Islamic consumer culture. Its legitimacy provide Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council. They have both – economic success with high level of living and conservatism with religiosity. The citizens of Dubai can enjoy consumerism in its Western form and feel the authenticity of their religion. It is not only the hotels which care for their guests, but also mosques – clean, air-conditioned and equipped with the best facilities possible, making ablution much easier (Nasr 2010: 31). In some countries Islamic coffee shops are established. In Istanbul these are e.g. Kaknüs Café and Medrese Café (*café*, and not *kahvehane*, what would indicate traditional coffee shops). Apart from coffee they offer their clients a possibility of participation in debates, lectures, concerts and Quran readings. They do not have a policy of gender segregation, what could be expected due to their Islamic character. Their owners trust their clients that they will behave properly. This way the coffee shops fulfill an additional function by offering young people a chance to get to know each other in

a proper setting (Ammann 2004: 57–58). Such places are targeting clients from middle and upper-middle class by offering them three attributed: piety, individualism and wealth (Haenni 2009: 322).

Towards Ethical Consumption

In Muslim majority countries of the Middle East Islamic consumer culture is a part of existing patterns of consumption, as it is linked to changes in lifestyles, spread of production and diversification. Products of Islamic consumer culture are innovative and provide an answer to these changes. Air-conditioned mosque is used by Muslims accustomed to a high standard of live, while Ramadan dinners – an offer for wealthy Middle Easterners, making their economic and social status visible to the wider public. Lower social strata have a wider range of devotional stickers and posters to choose from.

Another role fulfill products which stress the religious identity of their owners. Luxurious beauty salon for women wearing *hijab* in Saudi Arabia, in which all women – despite their belief – have to have their hair covered, has another meaning than the one in Egypt, where wearing a veil is optional. In the first case the clients of such salon enjoy high material status, in the second case it is also religiosity. It does not mean however that all religious and wealthy Egyptian females will choose such beauty salon. Only those who want to stress the religious aspect of their identity will choose it. Products of Islamic consumer culture have then a different meaning if religious Muslims constitute a minority. That is why creating an innovative Islamic consumer culture is easier to analyze in the Western context, in countries inhabited by a significant Muslim minority. This is because of two factors:

- Popularization of consumer culture in Western societies, thank to which also Muslims can join, or at least have a chance to get to know it,
- Relatively large number of Muslims inhabiting selected districts or cities of Western Europe or United States, what turns them into a significant segment of consumers, who have to be targeted in a proper manner.

Products of Islamic consumer culture appeared on Western markets only a couple of years ago, and most of them can be perceived through the lens of *Cool Islam*. It aims to spread Islam among young Muslims living in the West. The main message behind is that Islam does not mean conservatism, and so one can be Muslim and be cool (Boubekeur 2005: 12).

Establishment of Islamic consumer culture is seen as Americanization of Orient, but through the backdoor. Many Islamic product resemble their Western prototypes – so they use a good brand. Moreover, they do not oppose Western culture as such, even though they are against some of its elements. In case of committed products, such as beverages, it is American foreign policy. In case of other products religiously committed, like popular literature, or *fast food*, the differences refer to the value system. These products are in a way dualistic – Western in their form, but Islamic in their content. Their creation proves not only individualization of Muslims, but also their innovativeness. A new, unique consumer culture is being created by global and local producers – the first through diversification of their products and adjusting them to peculiar needs of their Muslim clients, the second – by copying the form of a global product and trying to fill it with a local content (Pink 2009: viii). Existence of Islamic consumer culture enables Muslims to:

- affirmation of Islam – presenting it as a modern religion,
- spreading it – through goods bought – among the believers, especially young Muslims, who might be reluctant to accept the message in a traditional form,
- participation in global culture by keeping their religious norms (so called Islamic fun).

These three points of reference provide a framework for interpretation of Islamic consumer culture.

Amel Boubekeur (2005: 12) perceives this phenomenon in a wider context of changes occurring in Muslim communities in the West. Especially after 9/11 attempts to redefine political aspirations of Muslims through new urban identity, based on individualism and ethics, and different from ethnicity and tradition. One of its determinants are Islamic products. One could therefore wonder, in how much is this new Islamic identity a result of self-motivated activities of Muslims, and in how much – an answer to external challenges.

Islamic products belong to so called new consumption, different from the ‘old’ one especially by its quality and way of fulfilling one’s needs. This new consumption is linked to several processes³, which might also be referred to in the case of Islamic products:

- **ecologisation** and production of ethically committed goods: many of Islamic consumer culture products belong to a wider range of ethically committed products, because they are linked to the social thought of Islam. Islamic music, literature or videogames do not contain violence or sex. However, they are committed because

³ Processes and their characteristics after: Bywalec (2007: 137–156).

they try to send to their users a message on how they should live in order to be good Muslims. Ethically commitment are also Islamic sodas, which – apart from religious component – focus also on political issues. Ethically and ecologically engaged is also eco-Islam and a big part of *halal* food market.

– **dematerialisation**, i.e. preference over symbolical value of a product rather than its technical or material qualities: the main value of the products is the reference to religion. Consumers are eager to pay higher price (*halal* food) or enjoy lower quality (beverages, videogames) in exchange for their religious character. The symbolic value is the key determinant of products belonging to Islamic consumer culture.

– **privatization**, understood as individualization of consumption, linked to individualization of lifestyles and consumer behavior: Islamic products offer young people an alternative to the cultural mainstream and a possibility of expressing their religious and cultural identity through products they buy. Privatization is one of the key processes which created Islamic consumer culture.

– **homogenisation and heterogenisation** of consumption: Islamic products as copies of their Western prototypes belong to global consumer culture, but through their religious component they are also different.

– **prosumption**, that is a mixture of production and consumption: in case of many Islamic products it is caused by niche character of the markets. That means that many products are created in order to fulfill the needs of their producers. This was the care of the first Islamic Cola, as well as a guidance for young Muslim teenagers in the US, or Muslim mangas. To some extent it is also the case of Islamic Hip Hop, local producers of Islamic clothing and owners of *halal* food-stores. They decided to establish their businesses in order to fill in a gap in the market and fulfill the needs of Muslim community (including their own and their family members). – **virtualisation**, indicating the role of Internet: in case of Islamic products Internet is a platform to exchange information, getting to know others and acquiring information about Islam. It is also a significant channel of distribution and promotion of products.

One can say that Islamic consumer culture grew on the changes in consumption, which occur in Western societies. At the same time consumer culture starts to penetrate societies in Muslim majority countries, however mostly upper classes for the time being.

Postmodernity switched the focus from utilitarian to symbolic values. Every product has certain value for their consumers, which they can acquire by the process of consumption. Key values which can be ascribed to the products of Islamic

consumer culture indicate their character and profile. Each of eight consumer values, known in consumer behavior theory, exists in the case of Islamic products, but with different intensity⁴.

- **spirituality** – that is experiencing a magical transformation or scarcity during consumption (e.g. in case of devoted collectors). The vast majority of religious products fulfills this criterion. It refers especially to products which has a visible religious message (e.g. some Hip-Hop genres), or a stigma (e.g. *hijab*). In the first case the consumer or performer experiences the spiritual rapture through *dhawā* – proselytism. In the second case it arises from a transformation of the stigma into a scare and authentic attribute.
- **ethics** – referring to moral or political motivation for buying. Also in this case most Islamic products fit. It is because almost every product engages his buyer in some way. In case of beverages the engagement has a political character, Green Muslims participate in the global green movement, and clients of Islamic banks choose them for religious reasons.
- **fun** – that is enjoyment during consumption. Many products of Islamic consumer culture are also fun, as they belong to pop-culture. It is however rather ‘controlled fun’ of Asef Bayat (2007), which seems to be a safety valve for religious Muslim youth, offering them fun compatible with religious rules.
- **status** – when a consumer strives to achieve success and tries to create his image through his consumption. The status is an important value or many Islamic products, but in most cases it refers rather to in-group. Religious symbols are not always clear for the environment, which is not familiar with Islam. It refers e.g. to styles of wearing *hijab*, which for a non-Muslim are just a matter of style and taste, while for Muslims it indicates the level of religiosity, and knowledge in *hijab* fashion.
- **self-esteem** – in cases when important is satisfaction from having a product. In case of Islamic products it is related to their modern form. This is a proof that Islam can be modern and legitimizes the relationship between religion and participating in pop-culture.
- **esthetics** – searching for beauty in consumption. It usually refers to designer products. Most producers of Islamic products do not enjoy visibility on the market. They only imitate the designer products (e.g. *Muslim up* beverage resembles *7 up* by name; a T-shirt of Styleislam with label *Juma* (Arab. *juma’a*) is stylized to resemble

⁴ Categories and their description after: Solomon (2006: 116–117).

logo of Puma⁵⁵), or adaptation of form. Some of the products look Oriental (e.g. mobile phones) or use calligraphic elements (e.g. T-Shirts), what also is a factor in their esthetics.

- **efficiency** – in case of products which make life of their owners more easy. Efficiency is not a value in case of Islamic products. It might be only partly found in these products which enable Muslims to participate in public sphere (e.g. Islamic banking).
- **perfection** – when most important is the quality of the product. Also this is only marginal in case of Islamic products, especially since Islamic products are usually of lower quality than their original prototypes. However, the perfection can be understood in a religious context. A product becomes perfect if it fulfills all religious rules.

In other words products of Islamic consumer culture are grounded in spirituality and ethics. These are the key distinctive elements and determine their competitive advantage. Efficiency and perfection – understood in clear-cut terms – are not so significant.

The above mentioned dominant values define the functions of Islamic products. Some of them have only utilitarian character, meant to make the public sphere more accessible for Muslims (e.g. through Islamic banking). Other are an example of neo-conservatism, offering conservative content in a modern form (e.g. some Hip-Hop, most of Internet services with *fatwas*). Other product are used to express political or social discontent (e.g. beverages, *taqwacore* – Muslim punk rock). Functions of Islamic products can also be linked to those specified in theory of consumer behavior. These are (Solomon et al. 2006: 139):

- **expressing values** – helps the consumer to express values which are significant for him. An individual buys a product for what it says about him/her. Often these functions are linked to the lifestyle. In case of Islamic products this function seems to be most important, because these products were created in order to enable Muslims expression of their religious, social and political values. Due to their religious affiliation these products are linked to a particular lifestyle. It refers predominantly to those products, which allow to express religiosity. Reading an Islamic comic book or playing an Islamic videogame influences the lifestyle to a lesser extent than wearing *hijab*, listening *nasheed*, or having a mobile phone with *tafsir* (commentary to Quran). In the first case religious elements are of secondary significance, while in the second – they build the core.

⁵ Puma sued StyleIslam in August 2010 for violation of its trademark (Lemme 2010).

– **protecting ego** – from external threats and internal anxiety. In case of Islamic products protecting ego means equipping in religious attributes, thank to which the individual is perceived as a Muslim. When it comes to external threats, they refer predominantly to the temptations of modernity. Due to the need of maintaining cohesion of one's identity, a person perceived as Muslim will probably behave according to this social role. Moreover Islam can be a cure for internet anxieties, acting as a guidance in real life situations⁶.

– **equipping in knowledge** – which are acquired due to one's strive for order or search for meaning. Islamic products usually do not equip their owners in knowledge, except for those which are produced for *dawa* (e.g. Hip-Hop, nasheed). One can assume that one is aware of why (s)he chose a particular product, and what kind of religious values the product reflects.

All these categories confirm the spiritual character of Islamic products. Most important are functions related to expressing values, because they make the products most distinctive, or even legitimize their existence. Also important is the function of protecting ego, which makes it possible to value Islamic products positive.

Due to their social and political engagement Islamic products can be called ethical. But the moral rules which they recall – such as social responsibility, peace, seeking the truth – are universal enough to be included in aims of other social movements. For instance Islamic *halal* products combine healthy (safe), ethnic, ecological and ethic foodstuff (Evans, n.d.), while beverages and some T-Shirts subscribe to the slogans of anti-global and anti-war movements. It gives Muslim producers a potentially bigger market for selling their products, and religious Muslims – a way to be included in global social movements. It is important in case of integration, especially for religious Muslims, because it offers a possibility of using religious motivation to work for local community, according to the concept of pious citizenship. Moreover, Islam can be affirmed as a modern religion, addressing contemporary problems of humanity.

One should however bear in mind that these initiatives have a marginal character – they only sketch a possibility, from which only few are benefitting. Some Muslims will stay skeptical to Islamic consumer culture, treating it as *haram*. Some are too much assimilated or secular to feel a need to buy such product; they rather prefer Western prototypes. And there are also Muslims who will not opt for Islamic products due to the negative stand of Islam in public opinion. It is worth mentioning here that some products are ascribed far bigger impact than in the reality. This was

⁶ Especially in the case of some converts, as Islam might be not only a belief, but also a system regulating one's life (van Nieuwkerk 2006: 6).

the case of beverages, which are politically flavored. Even though they are hardly accessible in most Islamic countries some articles were referring to 'Cola wars' or 'Cola crusades' (Falk 2003: 2).

Islamic products provide an interesting example of adaptation of Islam to realities of Western societies by giving religious Muslims a chance to participate in global culture. That is why they should not be perceived as an example of Islamic separatism. They are inspired by Western culture, only adopted to needs of Muslims. Islamic consumer culture is not a monolith, just as Islam. Everyone can use it according to his/her needs, treating it as an Oriental novelty, or a way of expressing his opinions and beliefs. It is worth stressing, that Islamic consumer culture is one of a great variety of local (ethnic, religious, national) answers to global culture. The fact that it is more known and visible is because of the meaning ascribed to its core – Islam.

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