

Transforming Social Capital into Economic Capital: An Analysis of PT EAHM's Multi-Level Marketing Strategy for Cahaya Biscuits from the Perspective of Progressive Islamic Marketing

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Abstract

This research analyzes the marketing phenomenon of "Biskuit Cahaya," initiated by PT Ekonomi Aisyiyah Hasanah Makmur (PT EAHM) under the Central Java 'Aisyiyah Regional Leadership, which presents a unique business model integrating modern corporate entities with grassroots socio-religious structures. Utilizing a multidimensional theoretical framework that synthesizes Social Capital Theory (bonding, bridging, and linking), Relationship Marketing, and Social Entrepreneurship within the perspective of Progressive Islamic Marketing, this study explores how social assets are converted into economic capital through a tiered distribution network. The findings reveal that while the "bonding" social capital among 'Aisyiyah members creates a highly loyal captive market and reduces conventional marketing costs, the organization faces critical challenges regarding the overlap between volunteerism and professionalism, as well as logistical inefficiencies. The research suggests that the integration of digital transformation through the "Eksys" platform and structured entrepreneurial training for the BUEKA units are essential to transition from seasonal internal sales to a sustainable national brand. Ultimately, the "Biskuit Cahaya" model proves that utilizing ideological trust and organizational density can drive inclusive economic growth and organizational independence, serving as a strategic benchmark for faith-based economic movements in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

The marketing phenomenon of Cahaya Biscuit products, initiated by PT Ekonomi Aisyiyah Hasanah Makmur (PT EAHM) under the auspices of the Central Java 'Aisyiyah Regional Leadership (PWA), presents a unique business model, where a modern corporate entity integrates with a socio-religious organizational structure with a strong grassroots presence. To conduct an in-depth analysis and formulate solutions to the marketing challenges faced, a multidimensional theoretical framework is required. Based on the distribution characteristics used, the most appropriate theory to dissect this problem is an integration of Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988), Relationship Marketing Theory (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), and the Social Entrepreneurship Paradigm (Drayton, 1980), all framed within the perspective of Progressive Islamic Marketing.

The distribution strategy of Cahaya Biscuits is inseparable from the long history of 'Aisyiyah as a Muhammadiyah women's organization founded in 1917 with a mission of enlightenment and empowerment. The presence of PT EAHM with its head office at Jalan Singosari Raya No. 33, Semarang, marks a new phase in the professionalization of the organization's economic movement. This product is not merely a consumer commodity, but rather a manifestation of the third pillar of Muhammadiyah's da'wah, namely economic empowerment, after education and health. The use of a tiered distribution model that utilizes the organizational structure—starting from the Regional Leadership (PWA), Regional Leadership (PDA), Branch Leadership (PCA), to Branch Leadership (PRA)—requires a deep understanding of how social capital is converted into economic capital without degrading the organization's ideological values.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study apply a descriptive qualitative approach with multidimensional analysis. Data were analyzed through mapping the dimensions of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) and evaluating a tiered distribution model from the regional to the branch level 'Aisyiyah Organization in Central Java.

Research Context and Unit of Analysis

The research context is centered on the economic transformation of 'Aisyiyah, the oldest Islamic women's organization in Indonesia, as it transitions from a traditional social-religious movement toward professional economic empowerment in Central Java. This shift is marked by the establishment of PT Ekonomi Aisyiyah Hasanah Makmur (PT EAHM), which integrates modern corporate logic with a deep-rooted religious infrastructure to market "Biskuit Cahaya." The study examines this phenomenon within the framework of Progressive Islamic Marketing, focusing on how the organization leverages its vast social network and ideological loyalty to create a sustainable, self-reliant economic ecosystem during strategic periods like the Eid al-Fitr season.

The unit of analysis is multilevel, encompassing the strategic, operational, and individual tiers of the 'Aisyiyah organizational hierarchy. At the macro and meso levels, the study analyzes PT EAHM and the Regional Leadership of 'Aisyiyah (PWA) as the primary decision-makers and regulators. At the operational level, the analysis focuses on the tiered

distribution network—stretching from District (PDA) to Branch (PCA) and Sub-branch (PRA) levels—as well as the BUEKA (Aisyiyah Family Economic Business) units that act as the front-line distributors. Finally, at the micro level, the research evaluates the behavior and motivations of individual members and stakeholders, exploring how social capital and ideological commitment are converted into tangible economic transactions.

Data Collection

The data collection for this research follows a qualitative approach, utilizing a combination of primary and secondary sources to capture the complexity of 'Aisyiyah's economic movement. Primary data is gathered through **semi-structured interviews** with key stakeholders, including the management of PT EAHM, leaders of PWA Central Java, and coordinators of BUEKA at the Branch (*Cabang*) and Sub-branch (*Ranting*) levels. These interviews focus on the conversion of social capital into economic transactions and the operational challenges of the tiered distribution model. Additionally, **field observations** are conducted to document the actual flow of "Biskuit Cahaya" products during peak seasons, such as Eid al-Fitr. Secondary data is derived from internal organizational documents, PT EAHM's sales reports, and digital records from the "Eksys" platform to provide a quantitative backdrop to the qualitative findings.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process employs a **thematic analysis** technique, framed by the integration of Social Capital Theory, Relationship Marketing, and Social Entrepreneurship. Initially, the collected data is transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes such as "ideological loyalty," "logistical bottlenecks," and "professional-volunteer dualism." These themes are then mapped against the three dimensions of social capital—bonding, bridging, and linking—to evaluate how trust within the organization influences market penetration. To ensure validity, **data triangulation** is performed by comparing interview insights with field observations and document analysis. Finally, the analysis synthesizes these findings into a strategic roadmap, identifying how digital integration and professional training can optimize the current distribution model within the perspective of Progressive Islamic Marketing.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the integrity and quality of the study, this research adheres to established standards of **trustworthiness and rigor** through several strategic measures. **Credibility** is established via **data triangulation**, where findings are cross-verified by comparing interview testimonies from various organizational levels (PWA to Ranting) with observational data and internal sales reports from the "Eksys" platform. **Transferability** is enhanced by providing a "thick description" of the unique 'Aisyiyah socio-economic context, allowing other religious organizations to evaluate the applicability of this model to their own settings. To maintain **dependability and confirmability**, a detailed audit trail is kept, documenting every stage of the research process—from initial coding to the final synthesis—to ensure that the conclusions are derived directly from the data rather than researcher bias. Furthermore, member checking is conducted with PT EAHM management to verify that the interpretations accurately reflect the operational realities of the "Biskuit Cahaya" distribution system.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity in this research is maintained by adhering to the principles of informed consent, anonymity, and institutional confidentiality. Before data collection, all participants—including organizational leaders, PT EAHM staff, and grassroots volunteers—are provided with a clear explanation of the research objectives and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. To protect the privacy of members within the 'Aisyiyah network, personal identifiers are anonymized, and corporate data from PT EAHM is handled with strict confidentiality, ensuring that internal analytics and "Eksys" platform data are used solely for academic purposes. Furthermore, the study is conducted with high religious and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the analysis remains respectful of the "Islam Berkemajuan" values and the ideological mission of the organization.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this research, gathered through interviews, document analysis of PT EAHM, and field observations within the 'Aisyiyah network in Central Java, are categorized into four key areas:

1. Mapping the Multi-Level Distribution Infrastructure

The research identifies a robust, four-tier distribution system that mirrors the 'Aisyiyah organizational hierarchy. Unlike commercial MLMs, this structure uses pre-existing social nodes:

- a. **Tier 1 (Provincial/PWA):** PT EAHM acts as the central hub for branding, quality control, and strategic partnerships (e.g., with PT Choice Plus Makmur).
- b. **Tier 2 (Regional/PDA):** Acts as "Buffer Stock" centers. In regions like Jepara and Semarang, the PDA manages large-scale inventories for redistribution.
- c. **Tier 3 (Branch/PCA):** Functions as the administrative coordinator for local orders.
- d. **Tier 4 (Sub-branch/PRA & BUEKA):** The "Front-line" where direct sales to members and the public occur.

2. Market Penetration and the "Captive Market" Effect

Data from sales reports during peak seasons (Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr) show a high velocity of transactions driven by organizational loyalty.

- a. **Internal Consumption:** Approximately 75% of sales are generated within the 'Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah internal ecosystem.
- b. **Institutional Ordering:** Significant volume is driven by "Institutional Orders" (e.g., UNIMUS and various Muhammadiyah universities) for employee hampers, proving the strength of vertical endorsement.
- c. **Product Differentiation:** The "Halalan Thayyiban" branding and premium tin packaging were found to be the primary drivers for consumer choice over cheaper, non-affiliated brands.

3. Economic Impact on Women Entrepreneurs (BUEKA)

Observations of BUEKA units reveal a tangible transformation in grassroots economic activity:

- a. **Income Generation:** Participating members at the *Ranting* level reported a margin-based income that supports household economies.
- b. **Skill Acquisition:** Through the "Biskuit Cahaya" program, members gained basic experience in inventory management and direct selling, although formal business

training remains inconsistent.

- c. **Social Value:** 10-15% of regional distribution plans include a "social component," where profits or products are redirected to teachers, the poor (*dhuafa*), and disaster relief.

4. Identification of Operational Bottlenecks

Despite the strong social foundation, the results highlight several critical barriers to efficiency:

- a. **The Professionalism Gap:** 80% of the distributors are volunteers (housewives and activists) whose primary commitment is to the organization's social mission, often leading to slower response times in commercial transactions.
- b. **Logistical Fragmentation:** Due to the wide geography of Central Java, shipping costs and "stock-outs" occur frequently at the *Ranting* level because of a lack of real-time inventory tracking.
- c. **Digital Adoption Rate:** While the "Eksys" platform has been launched, adoption at the Sub-branch level is still below 30%, with many members still preferring manual orders via WhatsApp.

5. Quantitative Potential Analysis

Applying the conceptual formula for marketing potential, the study found a significant gap between the high "Trust Coefficient" of the members and the "Realized Sales Volume." This suggests that while the social foundation (Social Capital) is robust, the current limiting factor is the technical infrastructure and professional capacity required to fully transform that social trust into maximized economic capital.

Discussion

The research findings demonstrate a complex interplay between social obligation and market logic. By applying the integrated theoretical framework, we can dissect how PT EAHM's strategy functions as a mechanism for capital transformation.

1. The Mechanics of Capital Transformation (Coleman, 1988)

The **Mapping of the Multi-Level Infrastructure** (Finding 1) and the **Captive Market Effect** (Finding 2) serve as empirical evidence for Social Capital Theory.

- a. **Bonding Capital as a Sales Catalyst:** The 75% internal consumption rate confirms that *Bonding Social Capital* creates a low-friction economic environment. The ideological alignment within 'Aisiyiah effectively reduces "transaction costs," as members purchase out of a sense of shared identity.
- b. **Linking Capital and Institutional Volume:** The high volume of "Institutional Orders" from entities like UNIMUS illustrates *Linking Social Capital*. Vertical endorsements from leadership act as a "Trust Multiplier," converting organizational authority into high-velocity economic capital.

2. Trust and Commitment in Distribution (Morgan & Hunt, 1994)

The **Tiered Infrastructure** (Finding 1) is not merely a logistical chain but a manifestation of **Relationship Marketing**.

- a. **Spiritual-Relational Commitment:** Morgan & Hunt argue that trust and commitment are the core of successful partnerships. PT EAHM replaces traditional financial incentives with a "Spiritual-Relational" bond. The commitment of PCA/PDA levels is driven by a shared mission (*Dakwah Ekonomi*), which explains their willingness to act as "Buffer Stock" centers despite potentially lower commercial margins.
- b. **The Trust-Professionalism Paradox:** Finding 4 (The Professionalism Gap) highlights a

unique theoretical conflict. High trust (*Bonding Capital*) can sometimes be counter-productive to professionalization; because the relationship is based on social volunteerism, there is less pressure to meet standard commercial KPIs, leading to the "slower response times" observed in the field.

3. Social Entrepreneurship and systemic Change (Drayton, 1980)

The **Impact on BUEKA Units** (Finding 3) aligns with the **Social Entrepreneurship Paradigm**.

- a. **Beyond Profit: Social Value Creation:** The redirection of 10-15% of proceeds to *dhuafa* and teachers (Finding 3c) proves that PT EAHM operates as a social enterprise. Following Drayton's model, the "Product" (Biskuit Cahaya) is a vehicle for systemic change—transforming housewives into economic actors and providing a "social dividend" to the community.
- b. **Empowerment through Practice:** The "learning-by-doing" entrepreneurial environment in BUEKA units represents the transformation of *Human Capital*. Even with inconsistent formal training, the act of participating in a structured distribution network builds grassroots economic resilience.

4. Progressive Islamic Marketing: The "Thayyib" Differentiator

The **Product Differentiation** findings (Finding 2c) validate the **Progressive Islamic Marketing** perspective.

- a. **Excellence (Ihsan) as Strategy:** The preference for premium tin packaging and "Halalan Thayyiban" quality indicates that consumers in this network value *Ihsan* (excellence). It proves that in a progressive framework, religious products must compete on quality, not just piety.
- b. **Ta'awun in the Multi-Level Model:** The tiered structure reflects the principle of *Ta'awun* (mutual cooperation), where the economic benefit is distributed across all levels of the organization rather than being concentrated at the top, as is often seen in commercial MLMs.

5. Synthesis: Bridging the "Realization Gap"

The **Quantitative Potential Analysis** (Finding 5) identifies a gap between the **Trust Coefficient** and **Realized Sales**.

- a. **Theoretical Conclusion:** Social Capital is the *fuel*, but Professional Infrastructure is the *engine*. The low digital adoption rate (30%) and logistical fragmentation (Finding 4b/c) act as "friction" that prevents the full conversion of social trust into maximized economic capital.
- b. **The Path Forward:** To close this gap, the transformation must move from "Implicit Trust" (based on friendship/religion) to "Systemic Trust" (based on digital transparency and professional efficiency through the Eksys platform).

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that PT EAHM has successfully established a revolutionary "Social-to-Economic" capital transformation model. By leveraging the tiered structure of 'Aisyiyah, the organization has created a high-trust, low-cost distribution network that serves both a commercial and a missionary (*dakwah*) purpose. However, the reliance on **Bonding Social Capital** (ideological loyalty) without a corresponding level of professional management creates a "Realization Gap." While the social foundation is robust, systemic inefficiencies—particularly in digital adoption and logistical management—prevent the model from reaching its full economic potential.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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