

Syariah Also Influences Millions Of Lux Users.

It's unfortunate that Luna Maya and Ariel have become YouTube celebrities, overnight. This column is not the forum for fanning meaningless gossip. But the on-going saga does shine a spotlight on brands, their consumers and the social context within which they exist.

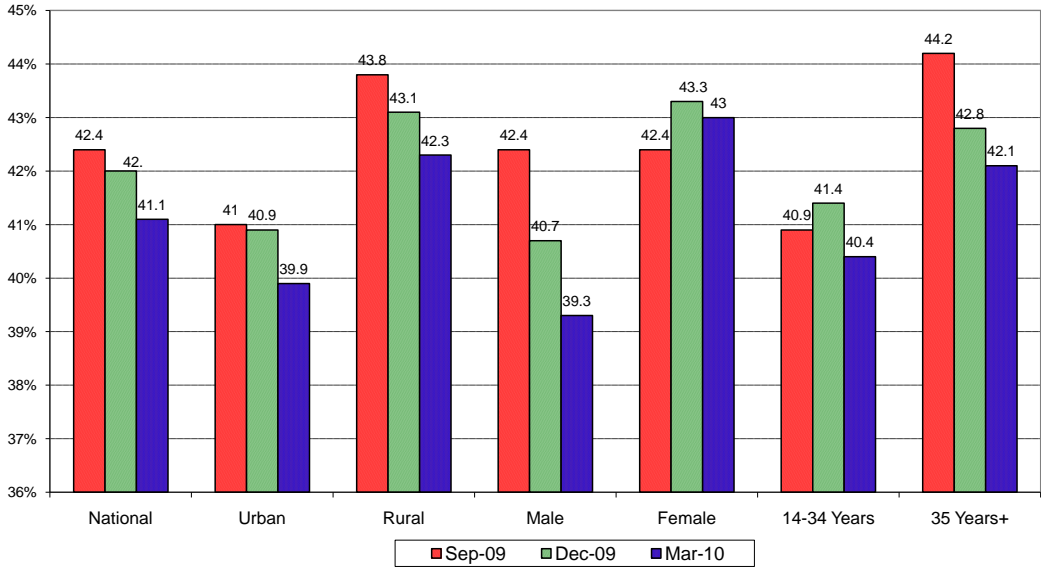
To a society-watcher, the evolution of post-Suharto Indonesia is a fascinating story in the making. To a civil libertarian, that process of evolution is revealing steps both forward and backwards. To a marketing professional, there are lessons to be learnt from the smut smearing media space not only in Indonesia but around the world. As all of the above, I thought the incident had at least one important lesson that I should underline. In so doing, I will step on the toes of two institutions with whom I was associated for many years in many countries. I still have the greatest respect and affection for the company Unilever, and their advertising agency, JWT. The brand under scrutiny is of course Lux Beauty soap, with which I've worked in Indonesia and the region in years gone by.

Lux is a mass-market brand, not upmarket like Dove is. Everybody involved with the Luna Maya commercial seemed unaware of the social context within which Lux operates. Today, 41 per cent of Indonesians 14 years of age believe "Islamic syariah law should be implemented in my *daerah*", or area. That view is slightly higher among women, with 43 per cent in agreement. 96 per cent of 'main grocery buyers' in households around the country are women. For the majority of Indonesians today, the good news is that the people who want syariah imposed are in the minority. In a short span of time, the continuing decline from majority to minority status is nothing short of joyous news for today's new majority. But 41 per cent is still a very large number of people in a country the size of Indonesia. It's one thing to be "edgy", even "racy", if you really know your target audience. To offend a large section of society, knowingly or unknowingly, is another matter altogether.

Nowadays, Lux is the third most popular brand in the country. With 14 per cent market share, its universe of regular users reflects Indonesian society. Of the women and men for whom Lux is the 'Brand Used Most Often', 41 per cent also believe that "syariah should be implemented in my *daerah*". Their views on other aspects of Syariah monitored by Roy Morgan Single Source are similar to their fellow citizens. 40 per cent of urban Indonesia and 42 per cent of rural Indonesia in agreement on this key religious view, together bring the national average to 41. Within urban confines alone an interesting split exists: 43 per cent of city residents and 37 per of town folk share that belief.

Across the country, across all faiths, a steady 90 per cent of the population believes "religion is an important part of everyday life". When probed on a few manifestations of syariah in particular, the numbers change visibly. Today, 45 per cent believe that "it should be compulsory for women in Indonesia to wear the jilbab". That number has remained steady, more or less, since these measurements were introduced in September 2007. But the view that "thieves should be punished by having their hand cut off" has declined from 44 to 34 per cent during the same period. So has the response to "those committing adultery should be whipped to death in public", dipping from 37 to 35 per cent, September 2009 to March 2010. Still very large numbers, indeed.

Islamic Syariah Should Be Implemented In My Region



I believe Indonesia is more conservative today than it was 20 years ago. I have no way of proving this, but as a co-conspirator for what was easily the country’s most racy commercial of the time, I remember how Lux Shower Gel took off like a rocket soon after it was launched two decades ago. Sections of the clergy, politics and academia threw major tantrums. The TV station was threatened with closure, but life returned to normal as soon as the offending knees were edited out of a commercial that featured a young lady dancing in the shower. The brouhaha in the media had given the brand all the attention it wanted, among its intended audience.

The Luna Maya Lux commercial appeared at a time when Indonesia is in fact becoming more and more conservative. The proof lies in Roy Morgan Values Segments, a societal map tracking the country continuously. Of its 10 segments, “Real Conservatism” is growing steadily. Today, 17 per cent of Indonesians hail from this group, up from 13 per cent just three years ago. I should remind readers that moderate conservatism should be not be confused with fundamentalist extremism, they are not one and the same thing. One’s going up, the other’s coming down.

Against this panorama of societal change, the choice of Luna Maya for Lux is bewildering. Just about everybody knew who she was and how she lived her life. But who knew about the rest of Indonesia? Personally, I believe her life is her own business and nobody else’s. But the evidence shows that millions of loyal Lux users would disagree with me. Many would want her stoned to death. These opinions are not just mine, they are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country’s largest syndicated survey with over 25,000 respondents annually. The findings are projected to reflect over 85% of the population 14 years and older.

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