HIJAB STYLING IS IT FASHION OR MODESTY? ITS’ PORTRAYAL IN THREE POPULAR HIJAB BRANDS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: At the present time, Hijab is no longer be merely a symbol of religion commitment but a fashion statement. Hijab styling has been influenced not only by traditions, culture and religion but trends of modern fashion. Thus, the paper attempts to find out the extend of Hijab wearing with modesty requirement of Islam in three popular local Hijab brands in Malaysia. The research employed content analysis of Instagram posts and analysed image representations of Hijab wearing used by the three brands. The unit of analysis inclusive the presence of a human model. The samples chosen were analysed based on the definition of Islamic clothing which include (1) headcovers that is covering of chest; (2) apparel that are loose-fitting and non-transparent which covers the whole body except for the hand and face; and (3) not exposing their accessory to be adorned by others. Based on the findings, it is found that the portrayals of models of the three local Hijab brands in their Instagram posts reflect the three important implications. Firstly, being corporate organizations, the brands focus on the mission of profit making by selling Hijabs that are striking and appealing enough to lure Muslimah into buying their Hijab. Secondly, the brands are also religion conscious whereby most of the postings analysed reflect the notion of modesty. Thirdly, the postings also exhibit a strong sense of keeping up with fashion trends in designing Hijab as that leads to having different ways in styling of Hijab. With that being said, the concept of modesty would potentially evolve as fashion changes in every season and resulted modesty to be turned into a fashion statement instead.

Keywords: Hijab, Instagram, Local, Brands, Modesty

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Introduction

Hijab is derived from the root h-j-b; its verbal form hajaba translates as ‘to veil, to seclude, to screen, to conceal, to form a separation, to mask’. Hijab translates as ‘cover, wrap, curtain, veil, screen, partition’ (El Guindi 1999, p. 157). Woldesemait (2012, p. 18) states that “Hijab styles are shared across Muslim women all over the world. The sharing of Hijab styles from all around has created new styles of the Hijab that have interconnected women in the Muslim world. Muslim women are using modern Western fashion and other styles from the Muslim world to meet the requirements of their traditions and religion. In addition, they are taking the requirements and traditions then fashionizing them, making them more modern and stylish. The modern fashion Hijab says that although the women wearing it will respect the traditions, cultures, and religion, they will also be part of modern fashion and style.”

In Islam, the human body is regarded as a cause of shame that must be hidden and covered, a view that relates back to Adam and Eve (Khuri 2001). Modesty and chastity are coveted and sacred aspects of one's personality and character. However, a woman's entire body is imbued with sexuality: bodily movements and the style, shape and colour of female clothing have the potency to instigate male sexual arousal (Tseëlon 1995). Advocates of the Hijab highlight the distinctive masculine proclivity for untamed sexual desire and interpret the Hijab as a divinely ordained solution to the seeming disparities in male and female sexual appetites. References to the Qur'an are integral to examining the Hijab as 'divinely ordained', yet, although the Qur'an instructs both sexes to dress modestly, there is a particular emphasis on female modesty (Siraj, 2011). Therefore, adhering to Islamic Hijab styling as per ordained by the Quran will embark lesser objectification towards women.

The recent spotlight in Muslim fashion has transformed Hijab as a fashion statement which was never meant to be. It somehow diverts the true meaning of wearing Hijab. Fashion is an expression of oneself and with the hype Hijab more Muslim women tend to experiment blending modesty and personal style into their appearances. Despite the obvious contradiction with the spirit of Hijab, a growing number of Muslim women are blending the two. The practice of headscarf is an essence of Islamic value. It is an act of obedience that has been clearly defined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. This recent interest in Muslim fashion also signals the changing dynamics of traditional and modern culture of the Islamic Hijab. Modification in Hijab fashion can be accepted in this era as one of fashion styles. Although the stylish Hijab cover everything but it does not meet the overall requirement of the Hijab. There are guidelines for women to follow in wearing Hijab which is covering the chest with apparent that is loose and covering your body and nor revealing the shape of your body. In addition, fashionable attire and accessory that can attract the attention of men should be avoided as it is also against the basic idea of modest clothing in Islam. With this, the significant and actual perspective of Hijab should be reinforced so that no mislead of Islamic values (Boulanouar, 2006, p. 140; Woldesemait, 2012, p. 19; Zulkifli and Fatin, 2013, p. 50; Rizvi, 2014 & Rita, 2017, p. 342).

Problem Statement

Malaysian women are affected by the controversy of Hijab wearing and tend to look towards beauty and fashion of Hijab (Hassim, 2014). It is because media and celebrity portray a certain style of hijab that may not comply with the fundamental concept of Muslim clothing, but society may deem it as the right way hence conforming fashionable hijab as a modest veiling to wearers (Sofia & Latiff, 2013). For instance, Be Lofa” by Neelofa was heavily criticized after the
launching of her new tudung and turban in Zouk. The act impacted negatively on societal acceptance toward fashionable hijab because it tarnishes hijab wearers by appearing in nightclubs, moreover, demeaning hijab as religious responsibility of wearer to uphold modesty in terms of appearance and attitude instead hijab been launched in a place that tarnish a reputation of a devout Muslimah (Syahirah, 2018). The Muslim community consists of the fastest-growing consumer markets globally especially in the fashion sector (Rita, 2017). There are large and flourishing markets for Western-inspired clothing that is sheer to the point of being obscene and cuts being disregard as “Hijab fashion” in the current society. The ever-increasing interaction among Eastern and Western cultures are fanned even harder into a state of fluctuation due to the recent interest in Muslim fashion (Zulkifli and Fatin, 2013). In the Islamic culture, the headscarf is presented as an exemplification but was constantly denounced due to the prevalence of consumer culture in the state-of-art secular society (Gurbuz & Gurbuz-Kucuksari, 2009). Hence, this research is trying to understand the brands’ direction in styling Hijab based on fashion or religious perspective. It is whether they are persuaded by the modern approach that portrays the fashionable style of wearing Hijab or following the importance and the compulsory state in Islam.

Research Objective
To find out the extend of Hijab wearing with modesty requirement of Islam in three popular local Hijab brands.

Literature Review
Women agree that as time goes by, the style of apparel as well as covering changes and also differs based on background and cultures. The fashion of apparel changes according to the changing world, as fashion designs continue to make its way into the industry, various and new types of designs would be developed. Some clothing designs these days do not even fully cover a person’s torso. Fashion designers are designing clothes that are of minimal covering, only enough to cover the private areas where as a part of the tummy is shown (Bohwon & Bundhoo, 2016). Some argue that the more contemporary and upcoming trials of Hijab has become famous trends which started impacting the Muslim community and others believe that Muslim can choose to veil fashionable as long as it is ideologically and morally guarded (Gould, 2014).

According to DeSilver and Masci (2017) of Pew Research Center, as of 2010 Islam is the second largest religious tradition after Christianity and by the year 2050 the world population would be made up of 2.76 billion or 29.7% of Muslims. With such large numbers of Muslims around the globe, it does make sense for multinational brands to take the opportunity to expand into the growing segment of the market. For example, local and global designers are designing modesty, one of it is Mimpikita, a Malaysian brand founded by three sisters which made debut at London Fashion Week in 2015 featuring fashion in chic and modest clothing (Salva, 2017). Uniqlo has a steady line of Muslim wears, ranging from head scarves and tunics. These collections are made with the collaboration with British fashion designer Hana Tajima (Sharkey, 2016). Nike, the world-famous sports brand has also embarked on the Islamic clothing as well, designing sportswear for female Muslim athletes (“Nike launches Hijab for female Muslim athletes”, 2017). Even luxury brand like Dolce & Gabbana has started to produce Hijabs and abayas especially for the customers in Middle East. Not forgetting, other luxury brands and high street fashion houses like DKNY, Oscar de la Renta, Tommy Hilfiger, Mango and Monique Lhuillier has also made collections targeted at Muslim wearers (Yotka, 2016).
However, there are some fashion designers who think that the Hijab has both its religious responsibility and can be applied with fashion. Farheen Naqi, a fashion blogger, and the owner of Little Black Hijab, an online Hijab store mentioned that Hijab plays the minority in modesty (Chakrabarti, 2016). Not only that, Dina Torkia, a well-known vlogger gave her view on the fashion styles of Hijab, mentioned there are only small scale of fashionable Muslim women that can be portrayed as role model. As a result, traditional Hijab wearers look bleak that implicate negatively upon trendy Hijab wearers (Barr, 2018). For instance, local singer, Yuna mentioned that, “Hijab has been intimate to me and my beliefs and I agree to the idea of being modest and I always find a way to blend it into my attire while I stay in the music industry” (Lang, 2016). Furthermore, according to Puteri Hassannah Karunia, who is a popular fashion blogger in Indonesia claimed that veil bolster Islamic modesty, “It doesn’t matter how long ones wear our Hijab, as long as she do not show her skin, hair, breasts, butt and all of our body means that is the correct Hijab for her” (Akiko 2015).

Brand influencer is an individual who use social media platform to gain followers, these followers will likely be influenced by influencer to make certain action in purchasing product. Furthermore, many brands found out that using influencer to represent the brand is highly effective (Lim, Aifa, Cheah, Azman & Wong, 2017). According to Young, Shakiba, Kwok, Montazeri (2014) study, on the influence of social networking technologies on female religious veil-wearing behavior resulted that respondents will engage in fashion Hijab, after influenced by micro-celebrity. Further supported by Zulkifli and Fatin (2013) research where most of the Hijab wearers were influenced by brand influencer in purchasing Hijab. As seen, nowadays, small and upcoming Hijab’s brand used brand influencer to attract Muslims to purchase their Hijab (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018).

Hijab has attracted many women to venture into entrepreneurship. According to Mayberry (2015), the global market for what is known as modest fashion was valued at 230 billion dollars in 2014 while it’s expected to soar to 327 billion dollars by 2020. The blooming of Hijab in fashion industry made Hijab into a money-making business. Salma and Wawan (2016) research proven that women entrepreneurs in the Hijab fashion is motivated by passion towards fashion. In addition, women entrepreneurs wanted to conduct their business in a happily and comfortable atmosphere. Furthermore, Kim, Sivapalan, Bahiyah and Gusniar (2015) stated that the blooming of online commerce give rise to women entrepreneurs in Hijab fashion industry. These women venture into Hijab business in a small-scale manner by utilising their basic IT skill or being tech savvy. The women online entrepreneurs demonstrate their ability to design and update websites and social media accounts, marketing the products in social media as and maintaining customer loyalty. Like story behind the birth of dUCk Scarves, blogger turned entrepreneur, Vivy Yusof decided to don the headscarf after giving birth to her first child. She couldn’t find any suitable scarves that suit her needs available on the market and therefore decided to start her own. With each launch, her scarves are always favoured by Hijab wearers (Mayberry, 2015).

Research Methodology
Content analysis was employed in this research. The content analysis examined three successful local Hijab brands in Malaysia from April to June 2018. For each of the brands, the official corporate page and the founder’s page were analyzed. The brands chosen based on a ranking of the Malaysia’s top 10 fashion scarf brands by TallyPress.com (TallyPress, 2015). All the brands have embarked on international market with their collection to countries such as United States,
Britain, Australia, France, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, South Korea and Japan. In addition, the brands’ Instagram has over hundreds of thousands of followers. The reason for the 3 months to be chosen it was due to the reason of high posting rates as brands kicked start their Hari Raya Puasa collections and promotions. Within the span of 3 months, the data collected were based on the analysis of 743 postings.

The research analyzed image representations of Hijab wearing used by these three brands in Instagram posts. Instagram is a leading image-based services in social media platform due to the emergence of smart phone photography that ease the sharing of images with others. (Ibrahim, 2015). Moreover, images are more engaging instead of just a plain text of information makes interacting on Instagram much greater compare to another social media platform (Abbott, Donaghey, Hare., & Hopkins, 2013). With this, the brands latest collection can be easily viewed via the posting of images to Instagram as a form of visual marketing. This allows the customers to not only view but know the product via stunning visual information provided by the seller. The strength of this research technique is that it enables to capture the data via the brand corporate Instagram which been made public. The Instagram function whereby post will always be on the social media service enable researcher to retrieve the needed data if the company does not delete the post from their Instagram. However, researcher faced difficulty in sipping through the massive number of posts in order to capture the data required by the stipulated time frame.

All unit of analysis have the presence of a human model. All samples were analyzed based on the definition of Islamic clothing which include (1) headcovers that is covering of chest; (2) apparel that are loose-fitting and non-transparent which covers the whole body except for the hand and face; and (3) not exposing their accessory to be adorned by others. The 3 main themes are further divided into sub-themes that are also in accordance with the concepts of modesty. Firstly, headscarves must cover the wearers’ hair, wearers’ forehead to chin must be covered and lastly, headscarves must also cover wearers’ bosoms. Secondly, apparels should be non-figure hugging, i.e., the garment must not be tight that make the women’s body shapes or curves visible; non-transparent, i.e., the materials are not supposed to be see-through that make the wearer undergarments visible; and the clothing must cover the body except for the face and wrist of the wearer. Thirdly, there shouldn’t be any head accessory, nor dangling earrings and anklet.

Findings, Analyses and Discussions
This research has generated three main themes in analyzing the Instagram posts of the three brands. The basis of the themes is from the definition of Islamic clothing which include (1) headcovers that is covering of chest; (2) apparel that are loose-fitting and non-transparent which covers the whole body except for the hand and face; and (3) not exposing their accessory to be adorned by others. The definition is following the three Quranic references that discuss the ruling of Hijab which is compulsory to all Muslim female and the appropriate Hijab styling.

Women clothing in Islam focuses on modesty of three items namely, headscarves, apparel and accessory.

The themes for this research are described as follows. First is headscarf. Headscarf is a piece of cloth that been used to wrap around the head in order to covers the head of a wearer. In Surah An-Nur (24) ayah 31, the Quran uses the Arabic word khimar to refer to women’s headscarves says that “And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to
wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers that you might succeed.” Based on the findings, two of the sub themes under headscarf fulfilled the concept of modesty. 99.8% (742) of postings cover the wearer’s hair while 86.4% (642) of the postings cover the wearer’s forehead to chin. However, the third sub theme which is headscarf covers the wearer’s bosoms; 73.9% (549) of the postings reveal that wearer’s headscarf does not cover her bosoms.

Second is clothing. Clothing is a piece of fabric that been use as an apparel to cover the outer part of body that shield the women’s aurah. In the Quranic reference, the outer garment or in Arabic known as jilbab must be must be loose-fitting and non-transparent clothing that covers the whole body, maybe with the exception of the hands and face as mention in Surah Al-Ahzab (33) ayah 59, “O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.” Two sub themes under apparel have strong fulfillment towards the concept of modesty. According to the analysis, 72.3% (537) of the postings reveal wearer’s clothing isn’t figure hugging while 93% (691) of the postings reflect that wearer’s clothing is also non-transparent. While the last sub theme has slightly more than half of the postings, 55.3% (411) shows the wearer’s body is covered except for face and wrist while only 9% (67) that do not. However, 35.7% (265) of the postings do not reveal the wearer’s face or wrist.

Third is accessory. Accessories are jewelry put on by wearers as an additional styling to their appearance. The head accessories are head chain or head band that wearer put on around the crown of her head for embellishment. The dangling earrings are donned by wearer that opt for a loosely tied head cover in order to accessories their look with hoop or chunky earring. The anklet is permissible to be worn by Hijab wearers when it is not visible to others particularly the non-mahram as the ankle is part of a woman’s aurah. More so, anklet with tinkering bells that makes lots of sounds is not permissible in Islam as it be able to attract the attentions of the non-mahram. In Islam, women are not to vaunt their accessory as stated in the Quran using the Arabic word zinah to refer to their “finery,” Surah Al-Ahzab (33) Ayah 33 says that “stay at home, and do not flaunt your finery as they used to in the pagan past; keep up the prayer, give the prescribed alms, and obey God and His Messenger. God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet’s] House, and to purify you thoroughly.” The findings of the third theme; two of the sub themes display high percentage of modesty level. Both no head accessory and no dangling earrings achieved 99.5% (739) and 96.4% (716) respectively. On the other hand, the findings of the third sub theme show inconclusive results as most of the postings; which is 97% (720) of the postings do not show wearer’s feet.

Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that portrayals of models of the three local Hijab brands reflect three important implications. Firstly, being corporate organizations, the brands focus on the mission of profit making by selling Hijabs that are striking and appealing enough to lure Muslimah into buying their Hijab. Secondly, the brands are also religion conscious whereby most of the postings analyzed reflect the notion of modesty. Thirdly, the postings also exhibit a strong sense of keeping up with fashion trends in designing Hijab as that
leads to having different ways in styling of Hijab. Although the analysis of this research shows the traditional concept of modesty is still mostly upheld. However, the third implication as mentioned above cannot be ignored as fashion is ever changing. With that being said, the concept of modesty would potentially evolve as fashion changes in every season. A study by Zulkifli and Fatin (2013) found that Hijab fashion has become an outlet for fashion designers to showcase their creativity in designing Hijab that not only follow the modesty requirement but able to insinuate that Muslimah are also fashion forward. As supported by Fadila and Munazza, (2017), Muslim women taking into consideration religious obligation in styling their Hijab but the modification made is to stay close to current trend is acceptable among the Malaysian. As a result, the participants agreed that the obligation of wearing Hijab is important rather than its styling. Perhaps being a stylish Hijab wearer could reduce the misconception of Islam and in the long run, able to reduce the prejudice and discrimination towards the religion. As Slinginger (2014) notes, Catholic women have veiled for centuries and never been frowned upon however, when Muslim women don the Hijab; they could be labelled as terrorists.

**Conclusion**

Hijab has always been associated with religious practices. In Islam Hijab is donned by Muslim women in covering their aurah. Due to the continuous blooming of fashion industry, it has turned Hijab into a multimillion-dollar industry. One of the impacts has been seen in the contemporary styling of Hijab. With that being said, modesty has been turned into a fashion statement and also resulting in more non-Muslim women embrace the donning of Hijab. That could also be one of the reasons as to why Hijab designers have also kept away modesty components from styling their fashionable Hijab. Creating Hijabs that have more universe appeal not only attracts Muslimahs but also to those that want to try out new fashion styles.

**References**


