Hijabistas : An Analysis of the Mediation of Malay-Muslims and Modesty

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ABSTRACT

"Hijab", or the act of veiling among Muslim women, has been noted as an increasingly common practice in recent years in Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey, Indonesia or Malaysia. Scholars argue that its more modern, hybriditized identity is emergent in progressive, multicultural societies, particularly in these Muslim-majority countries (Saleh, 2010). In Malaysian media, the hijab and its association with a modest lifestyle is usually portrayed by Muslim women who are predominantly Malay. Years of socio-political developments in the nation state made Islamic cosmopolitanism an inevitable experience for Malay-Muslim women who are predisposed to the globalization of Islam and the ongoing negotiations by the Malay elite that seek to escape conservative Malay female stereotypes amidst Malaysia's developing and multi-ethnic landscape. The current representations of the hijab offer a favourable status quo for Malay-Muslim women through marketing strategies that emphasize fashion trends and class mobility, thus disregarding the purpose of modesty in Islam altogether. This study administered a preliminary survey to explore attitudes and behaviours of female Malay-Muslim respondents towards the modern hijab in Malaysian media. In addition, interviews with media practitioners examined the construct of the modern hijab and its role in creating desire among the Malay-Muslim audience. The study found that the present phenomena is integrated with transnational flows of global media that commodified modesty to benefit marketers. The hijab is seen to have proliferated in today's media enhancing the desire for Malay-Muslim media audiences to participate in the modern hijab movement and increase wider acceptance of the hijab.

INTRODUCTION

The act of veiling is a symbol of Islamic faith that covers the hair of Muslim women and discourages exposure of various body parts determined as *aurat* (areas that are sacred and forbidden to the gaze of the opposite sex). In the Quranic verse of *Surah An-Nur*, veiling was discussed as a way to protect women from sexual misdemeanor and slander.

> "…O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): this is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is of forgiving, most merciful. (33: 59)" (Hoodfar, 1993)

Hadith[1] from *al-Azhab* as well as *Bukhari and Muslim* further interpreted female modesty as a way to distinguish humans from an animal state, proposing the concept of "shame" where good character and suppression of sexuality through respectful garments avoid shortcomings of morality and determine the place of women in Islam (Muslim American Society, 2013; Syed & Pio, 2010). In Malaysia, veiling is more commonly known as the hijab or *tudung* in the local language and is often associated as an ethnic identifier for the Malays of the country who are predetermined as Muslims under the Federal Constitution compared to non-Malay citizens, who are free to chose their religions (Yang & Md. Sidin 2011). Even with the prescription of modesty available in the Holy Quran and local practice of *sharia* (Islamic law), wearing the hijab remains an option and not an obligation for Malay women. In revisiting the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP)[2] from 1970 to 1990, scholars observed inconsistencies with the social transformations of Malay women who initially abandoned their religious lifestyles in rural areas to move into the city and adapt Western ways that were considered modern and liberating (Norani, 2008; Aihwa, 1990). In a paradox, the present majority of Malay women cover their hair more, compared to three decades ago, since modesty became homogenized with contemporary fashion and grew as a social expectation of Malay women as pointed out by Mouser (2007) in Hochel (2013). The conflict experienced in balancing a multicultural society and maintaining supremacy of the Malay race negotiated the representation of postmodern Malay-Muslims in Malaysia (Kessler, 2008), of which Martinez (2001) explored how the very essence of being "Malay" included being Muslim and upholding as well as practicing Islamic principles (Martinez, 2001). Further to this, an Islamic resurgence in the Middle East[3] had spread among Malay-Muslims and Muslims in neighbouring Southeast Asian countries; particularly among undergraduates from

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1   Hadith, as explained by Burton (1994), is a collection of sayings of Prophet Muhammad that are memorised and passed down by Muslims who are religious scholars, which are also frequently referenced by laypeople who practice the Islamic faith.

2   The NEP put in place economic structures to facilitate social mobility for the Malay community, including study, job and business opportunities. The NEP was formulated response to violent ethnic riots on 13th May 1969 which erupted in part due to dissatisfaction over economic disparity between ethnic Malays and Chinese.

3   Cole and Hoffman-Ladd draw attention to the liberation of the veil by western-influenced leaders Reza Pahlavi of Iran and Qasim Amin of Egypt during the Middle East War of 1967 and the Iranian revolution in 1979 respectively, raising concerns from global Muslims including Malaysia. Counter ideologies from scholars such as Mawdudi from India, Al-Faruqi from the United States and Al-Attas from Malaysia made a strong impression among educated youth among Malaysian university communities through the fortification of Islamic knowledge. (Khalid & O'Connor, 2011).

tertiary institutions who commercialized Islamic fashion such as long scarves and abayas for women as a representation of Islamic devotion[4] in the late 1980s. Similarly "Arabicized"[5] Islamic practices permeated conventional media where religious television programmes such as "*Muqaddam*" familiarized audiences with Islamic teachings, whilst the broadcast of the call to prayers became a daily routine for media audiences (Khoo, 2006).

Nevertheless, the proliferation of Islamic allegiance inadvertently disassociated Malay-Muslim women from their more educated and progressive counterparts. For instance, in Shuhaimi Baba's film, "Selubung", the hijab is portrayed as an extreme Arabic symbol of male dominance, depicting men as more intelligent than women, and portraying women as the weaker sex under their veils (Ong, 1990; Khoo, 2006:127). Khattab (2012) further observed that print and television advertisements painted middle-class Malay women in hijab with a sense of inferiority by presenting a misleading idea that being modest is the key to becoming the most ideal wife or mother, overlooking the clothing's seemingly patriarchal relationship with Muslim men.

As part of the restoration of order following the May 13 racial riots in 1969 the establishment of Malay divine rights in the New Economic Policy offered a new "bumigeous" perspective of Malays, who are defined as educated urbanites that benefit from the nation's progressiveness (Lauclau & Mouffe, 1985; Khoo, 2006:127), and as such are protagonists to the archetypes of modest and Islamic Malays earlier discussed. Many journalists such as Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman became known for openly participating in and creating discourse on the globalization of "new" middle-class Malay-Muslims in print media (through columns such as "Ceritalah" and "Dina Zaman Speaks" respectively), on the topics of secularism and the role of women in Islam.

Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad introduced the privatization of media companies in the late 1990s in order to gain tighter government control of the press, and in doing so encouraged the emergence of commercial media that focused on the needs of Malay-Muslim audiences (Norani, 2008; Wang, 1998; Zaharom & Wang, 2004). Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi succeeded Mahathir in 2003 and enforced the governance of "Islam Hadhari" that emphasized the Islamic flow of information (Abdul & Saiful, 2001; Chong, 2006). Badawi further addressed the importance of this Islamic ideology where "the Malays, UMNO and Islam in this country cannot be separated" (Martin, 2014). The legacy of these Malay-centric political stances is the strong emphasis of Islam as the official religion of the country, whilst the globalization of Islam itself encouraged Malay-Muslim women to project liberal and progressive personas similar to other women in developing communities in South East Asia. For Malay-Muslim women, modernity is the result of increased wealth, higher standards of education and movement of national urbanization where religion and identity became a form of "depeasantization" that provided them the mobility of class (Aihwa,1990).

This paper investigates the construct of the hijab through the perspective of Malaysian media consumers. In doing so, factors that influence acceptance of the hijab among Malay-

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4   Meanwhile, Norani (2008) established that although the Constitution needed to serve the interests of diverse cultural backgrounds, PAS leaders surfaced with sharia-centric and educated young Islamists of ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) to balance Islam as a focal point among the people (2008).
5   In a column by social activist Marina Mahathir in The Malay Mail Online, she discussed how Arab culture had colonized Malay-Muslims and influenced their culture particularly in dressing, becoming estranged from their own Malay traditions (http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/marina-mahathir-malaysia-undergoing-arab-colonialism#sthash.BX3NKGAB.dpuf)

Muslim women and the role of media as a source of knowledge of female modesty were explored. Further to this, the study also analyzed the significance of hijab culture to the Malay-Muslim society and identified messages, trends and patterns that conform or contradict the goals of veiling. The study examined the following: 1) factors that motivate the practice of hijab among Malay-Muslim women; 2) negotiation of the hijab as a cultural identity by Malay-Muslim women in their usage of the media; 3) implications of media representations of the hijab on the identity of Malay-Muslim women and society at large.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Several authors described the modern hijab as a form of multiculturalism where media audiences participate in intercultural experiments that unify Muslim and Asian elements; and in this "Islamic cosmopolitanism" women are able to connect with urban trends irrespective of their perceived or actual modesty (Beta & Hum, 2011; Potts, 2009; Stivens, 2006). While Malaysia projects itself as a successfully modern, ideal and tolerant Islamic state compared to other Muslim-majority countries through advertising of tourism campaigns in the media (Dluzewska, 2008), the hijab that was previously viewed as a constraint to the advancement of Muslim women has since been redefined through the convergence of global forces and media framing, whilst reforming the representation of Malay-Muslim women in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the hijab continued to be negotiated among Malay-Muslim women in their media consumption where this range of audiences are predisposed to ideas and visuals that are made available to them (Saodah & Shafizan, 2008). In the wake of a new, prosperous economic era that looked to the West for cues of progression, post-colonial Malaysia became enamoured with Western ideals, of which "unveiling" as argued by scholars became the ticket to freedom and emancipation, and the ultimate step towards modernity (Ahmed, 2011; Bullock, 2002; Hochel,2013). Not long after the impact of socio-economic transformation of the NEP, the road towards the acculturation of Islam became more defined to Malays, and reverting or returning to Islamic ways became common practice among highly-educated and urban women in the 1980s (Khoo, 2006; Norani, 2008; Aihwa, 1990). In balancing both old and new schools of thought, the display of piety became infused with ideas of modernity in its expression, resulting in fallacies of female liberation in creative and avant garde visuals and media text that resonated in the audiences' minds.

The subtext of Malay womens' magazines have long become the denotation for the Malay middle-class and the introduction of Malay urban culture (Stivens, 1998). Stivens further argued that womens' magazines have become fervent references to idealist illustrations of modern Muslim wives who are the determinants of Malay modernity as managers of the household. Among media audiences, Media Planning Guide Malaysia established that 49.3% of media users aged 20-44 years old prefer magazines as their favourite pastime while 17% trust magazine advertisements (Perception Media 2012). Apart from existing female lifestyle magazines on the shelves, Muslim female magazine *Nur* has had a low-key presence since it was introduced in 2002 by Kumpulan Media Karangkraf; offering spiritual wellbeing with Islamic guidance on lifestyle, career and fashion. It had received a moderate response from readers and continues its distribution at 46,000 (Perception Media, 2014). In keeping up with the changing trends, the same publisher established another Muslim-centric magazine, *Hijabista* that caters for urban Malay women and is derived from the fusion of words "hijab" and "fashionista" (Sinar Harian 2012; Kumpulan Media Karangkraf 2013). While the name

itself already denotes glamour, its catchy tagline "stailo dan sopan" (stylish & modest) insinuated that modernity and modesty can be unified. To reflect upon its commercial success, *Hijabista* is also presented through a television format in a weekly half-hour programme on urban Malay channel, *Astro Ria* and sponsored by *Sunsilk*, a prominent haircare brand (Haswari, 2013).

At present, *Hijabista* stands as an iconic Malay magazine that appeals to Malay-Muslim females, although the contemporary representations of veiling in its publication does not necessarily meet Quranic standards of modesty. The rise of communication technology resulted in the nation progressing through an extended discourse of the hijab in cyberspace where visuals and online resources become even more abundant for conversational currency. *Hijabista*'s foray into social media to keep connected to potential readers currently resulted in 537,639 likes on Facebook, 9554 followers on Twitter, and 515,000 followers on Instagram[6]. The mobile accessibility of the Internet played a key role in resonating the modern hijab as a form of self-expression in the minds of urban Malay women.

In an interview by Sinar Harian (2012) with *Hijabista*'s former editor, Nursuziana Zulkifli, it was revealed that the magazine intended for young women to embrace the hijab revolution currently developing in the fashion industry and for them to ultimately become empowered from the knowledge about the hijab they obtained (through the magazine). There were several debates about *Hijabista* magazine on the Internet, the most popular being an anonymous post by "*A Worried Muslimah*" (which asserted the magazine has no respect for modesty) published on popular entertainment blog, Beautifulnara.com.

> "Portraying hijab women and `doll-ing' them up like models in Vogue but then only to cover her hair is an absolute disgrace and mockery to us the believing women. What more the women and cover girls who allow themselves to be exploited as an object and fool themselves into thinking they are on their 'Deen' and pleasing Allah by just covering their hair." (Abang Nara, 2013)

The post received 2200 likes by Facebook users and was shared 97 times on Twitter. A paradox of ideas emerged as a result of the increase of hijab exposure and its criticisms in the public sphere – enhancing the opacity of hijab wearers rather than protecting the modesty of urban Malay women. The image presented in *Hijabista*, similar magazines and other media outlets may not be entirely accurate for those seeking religious affirmation to embrace their true faith. Commenters felt the wavering practice of modesty among Muslim women overlooked the clear distinction of how female modesty is prescribed in religious teachings of the Quran. In a Hadith explained by al-Balali (2006, p.38), women who may constitute "Hell dwellers" included women who wear clothes but either exposed parts of the body that could incite sexual urges from a man (such as her legs, thighs bosoms) or used transparent or tight clothing that left little to the imagination – these women are considered "naked". The same goes for women that wear their hair crowned under the hijab to make it higher in a way that is likened to the humps of camels (ibid). Concern over the hijab in mass media lies mainly in sending the wrong messages to fellow Muslim women who may not have sufficient knowledge about dressing modestly, particularly in multi-ethnic, robust communities such as Malaysia's that possess diverse media content which requires layers of interpretation. Elements of marketing such as emblazonment of products that portray the hijab in line with elite, urbanite lifestyles brings up the question of whether if ever hijab fashion was at all "Islamic".

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6   Information as at 4 August 2015

Gökariksel and Secor (2009, p.7) argued that the commodification of the hijab possesses "…religious, cultural and political references, and fashion, an unmoored system of self-referential change associated with capitalism, modernity and a particular kind of consumer subject." Trends of hijab in Indonesia, one of the largest Muslim countries in the world, are inspired by religious teachers and produced by local designers that use Islamic fashion magazines such as *Noor*, *Paras* and *Alia* to aggressively promote stylish ways to cover a woman's modesty and ironically contradicts the idea of concealing a woman's beauty or lowering a man's gaze (Amrullah, 2008; Beta & Hum, 2011). Meanwhile, Kilicbay and Binark's (2002) study in Turkey found visual codes from branding strategies of various fashion products which are generally linked to English names and western practice of dressing; while high-end fashion models in hijab associated with technology and gadgets such as mobile phones particularly in magazines suggest that the hijab is a socially uplifting and desirable experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Flew (2007) determined that culture promotes greater social inclusion and redress economic inequality and social disadvantage; of which in the case of the hijab examined in this paper– it becomes a tool for social change and economic growth to the community of urban, Malay-Muslim women. This present study suggests that permeation of the hijab in Malaysian media is attributed to Malay-Muslim female audiences' media exposure and participation. As suggested by the Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (U&G) perspective, audiences are in control of their media choices and use them to fulfill their needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Katz (1959) maintained that the media firstly supplies the user with information that serves subjective interests and later shapes attitudes and beliefs of individual users. In the seventy years of refining the U&G theory, scholars have long discussed obtaining gratification through an individual's media usage which involve; i) *cognitive needs*, including acquiring information, knowledge and understanding; ii) *affective needs*, including emotion, pleasure, feelings; iii) *personal integrative needs*, including credibility, stability, status; vi) *social integrative needs*, including interacting with family and friends; and, v) *tension release needs*, including escape and diversion (Blumler, 1979; Katz et al., 1974; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

Affinity for the modern hijab movement emerges from self-gratification that is obtained through media audience's own information-seeking behavior. Various media platforms that commodify the hijab as a transformative culture is illustrated in the conceptual framework below:
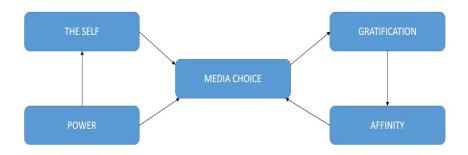

Figure 1: Framework on Media Effects of Female Modesty on Malay-Muslim Women

Media messages form the social construct of the hijab where the actors of the hijab fashion industry formulate Islamic capitalism by redefining values of Islam through the commodification of modesty in a more modern representation. By participating and embracing this construct, the media audience aspires to achieve a boost in social class thus increasing one's self-worth. An analysis on the perception of the hijab in Malaysian media is imperative to examine its role in creating awareness of modesty to Malay-Muslim women. The results of this study is expected to benefit media practitioners as well as to create awareness of issues and changes concerning modernity in female modesty in Malaysia in the socio-economic and political landscape.

METHODOLOGY

First, to examine factors that motivate the practice of hijab among Malay-Muslim women, respondents were contacted purposefully based on their demographics as female Malay Muslims from the age of 18-40 years old and dwell within the urban areas of the Klang Valley which comprise of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur that are most concentrated with dense population and exposure to various media platforms. The study sought respondents who have received higher education and are also active media users to gauge their perspectives on the hijab phenomenon in Malaysia. A survey was done via the Internet to reach this unique population or community. The online questionnaire method has been argued by scholars as advantageous due to its web form which provides flexibility of time and user adaptability. The modern generation of media audiences are largely tech-savvy and appreciate the convenience of online questionnaires which allows fluidity of more personal thoughts and opinions in their response (Wright, 2005; Lumsden & Morgan, 2005). A series of open-ended, close-ended and Likert scale questions were prepared to enquire on the perception of audiences on the hijab. The survey was prepared on Google Drive in the format of an online form for the convenience of respondents and was open for public access. However, the link to the form was distributed through the researcher's social media acquaintances and contacts. As such, snowball sampling was applied to obtain more respondents through available contacts and the link to the survey was made available for sharing to be extended to respondents that fit the criteria. A deadline was established within two weeks and a total of 112 respondents responded to the survey, where a majority of them ranged from age 26-33 years old (54%), followed by younger respondents aged 18-25 (30%) and more mature audiences at age 34-40 years old (14%). Most of the respondents had a minimum of a bachelor degree (55%) that fit the criterion of the study, with 68% of respondents enjoying middle-class to upper-class incomes of more than RM3000 per month. While 54% of respondents wear the hijab, 14% of them are relatively new to its practice between one to four years.

Next, in-depth interviews were organized with media practitioners that are directly involved with the practice of hijab in Malaysian media and the production of modesty-related content in the media. The first interviewee was social activist Wardina Safiyyah who is also known as a television actor, presenter and social media advocate on female modesty in Malaysia. The second interviewee identified is Jamaliah Jais, chief editor for *Nur*, a Malay-Muslim female magazine that was established a decade prior to high-fashion driven magazine titles such as *Hijabista, Hijab Fesyen* and *Dara.com*. The interviews were conducted with standardized, open-ended questions that correspond to themes determined by the study. Interviews obtained from the two participants were transcribed and included in a simple coding process. The quotes selected from participants' transcripts were organized and

clustered based on repetitive patterns and the themes emergent during the coding process.

Finally, the analysis focused on conceptualization of the hijab based on the study objectives which was interpreted from tabulations of respondent survey answers and interview participants' personal views.

FINDINGS
Factors that motivate the practice of hijab among Malay-Muslim women
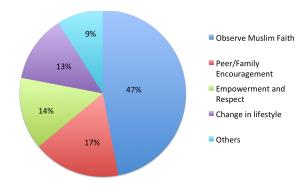

Figure 2: Respondents' motivations on wearing the hijab

With reference to Figure 2, a majority of respondents (47%) felt that the hijab is worn as a way to observe the Muslim faith, followed by 17% who are influenced by peers and family. Seeking empowerment and respect (14%), whilst also wanting a change of lifestyle (13%) also played important part in wanting to dress modestly within the multicultural society of Malaysia. All of these elements are internal factors that relate to the respondents' need to belong and also feel a sense of achievement in their lives, drawing from the respondents' socialization and their self-development. Freudian theories have established "the female institution" where a woman's sexual economy or reproduction within the society is heavily invested in social expectations and yardsticks that measure their success based on others, as well as female aggressiveness that emerge in her need for a sense of recognition (Irigaray, 1985).
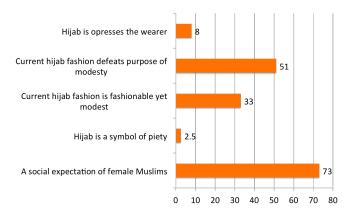

Figure 3: Personal opinions of respondents about the hijab

Figure 3 illustrated the perception of Malay-Muslim women on their exposure to the hijab in media which is also a contributing factor to their decision to wear the hijab or otherwise. 73% of respondents assume that the hijab is a social expectation in Malaysia, while 51% concurred that hijab fashion currently defeats the purpose of modesty. The emergence of hijab as a purveyor of Islamic imminence is inconsistent with the changing times but remained a symbol of the Malays in the constitution as a political stance (Norani, 2008).

Similarly, in the interviews conducted for this paper, participants who are media practitioners and wear the hijab felt that modesty is now being recognized as a positive female identity for Malay-Muslims.

Respondent 1:

"People are no longer going to judge me based on how short my skirt is or my beauty. People now are going to respect me for who I am and what I have to put out."

"But you don't put a bad light on women who wear the hijab because for me, I choose to wear it and I like to wear it and I don't judge those who don't wear it. That's not my duty to do so and neither should it be yours to judge the women who choose to wear the hijab."

Respondent 2:

"I think, first and foremost, it's actually quite an eye-opener because we can know and learn the many ways to style a hijab, not just for trying styles but to hijab materials as well."

" ...we have readers who have just decided to wear the hijab, they will find the print media more effective and helpful because they are able to get detailed information and also interact with us if they have any concerns or questions. Plus with printed materials, the readers are able to use them as reference as and when they need it. Unlike broadcasting media, we sometimes forget what we watched after the show is over."

It is important to note that only 2.5% of the respondents felt that the hijab represents religion whilst 33% felt that it is a fashion trend. In U&G, the hijab in media satisfied *cognitive needs* of which it supplies the necessary knowledge needed to understand the phenomenon itself. It is seen in effect how the respondents and interview participants perceive the hijab as an automated signifier of a female Muslim irregardless of their frequency of worship and opinion of the religion. Further to the theory, the relationship of audiences or respondents with the constantly-developing hijab culture will eventually acculturate the practice as a form of social norm with the codification of meaning that media users transcribe from constant reproduction of hijab imageries in various forms of media.

Negotiation of hijab in the media

The study found that that respondents also are most notably users of the Internet compared to other media (77%) as described in Figure 4, followed by broadcast media. Referring to the demographics of the respondents, fleeting content from the web and broadcast media are more convenient for access, and is continuously updated for timely information gathering. However, findings further revealed that despite preferring the Internet for a more seamless mode of communication, print media showed the most inclination for hijab imageries, hence appealing most to the respondents' memory (refer to Figure 5). This can be attributed to the abundance of visuals and representation of Malay-Muslim women dressed in the hijab that can be related to discourse of current issues, as well as representation of culture and endorsement of consumer products as a marketing strategy.
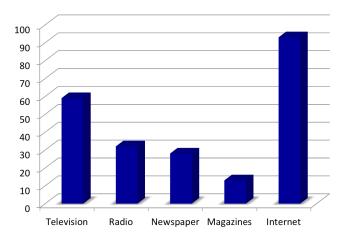
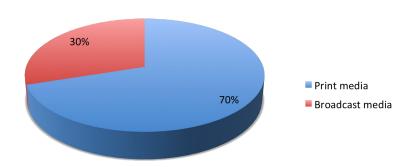**Figure 4: Respondents' preferred communication channel**

Figure 5: Respondents' recall of hijab references on print media

However, the interviewees felt that impressions made in media can be farfetched and unrealistic although the media was important to ingrain the elements of hijab among users as both an identity and point of reference for hijab enthusiasts.

Respondent 1:

"The reason is if you go back to media as your source of reference, it wouldn't focus so much on your inner self because their main objective is profit and gain so they will put trends and fads first before your search of a true Muslimah. They will produce something that will sell. And now Islamic products like hijab sells."

" Also, do you know that now the criteria to achieve high TV ratings, they need to feature Islamic qualities because there is a demand for that. This is what I mean by the media can be deviated from portraying the true Islamic teachings."

Respondent 2:

"When people started gaining interest in hijab after they realized there are many ways to style the hijab, which safe to say was popularized by Hana Tajima, then more and more are buying magazines for Muslim women so they can learn the styles."

" Media do play a huge role in influencing our image because when we see others looking beautiful, we want to look that way as well. But sometimes what works for those in the media, may not look as good on us."

Dominick (2007) contended the media is a primary source of information that divulges wide topics especially in public affairs and determines the audiences' breadth of knowledge in a specific phenomenon of which they become selective in their pursuit of personal gratifications. The U&G model observed that media provided a platform for *affective needs*, which included emotion, pleasure, feelings and *personal integrative needs* that included credibility, stability and status with portrayal of the hijab through elaborate photographs and visuals. Even though in its inception it intended to convey messages of Islamic faith, veiling in media is seen as a status quo to fit into current trends and youth culture. Nagata (2011) asserted that Malaysian fashion magazines are fast-enabling images and advertisements for stylish veils and coordinated outfits that are referred to in household terms such as "dakwah fashion", of which media audiences find such content inevitable yet felt assurance that the idea of hijab-wearing is most appropriate and most importantly provided validation on their decision to veil. The idea of religiosity has now become secondary to the hijab identity in its negotiation to be recognized as a more elite and approachable Malay-Muslim subculture.

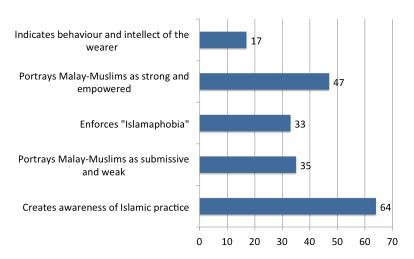## *Implications for the identity of Malay-Muslim women and society at large*

Figure 6: Respondents' perception of the hijab images portrayed in media

A section of the survey sought to establish the influence of hijab in the media onto the construct of Malay-Muslim women within the Malaysian society. According to Figure 6, 64% of the respondents felt that the hijab created more awareness towards Islamic practice within the Malay-Muslim culture. Meanwhile, 47% of respondents felt that the current representations of the hijab illustrates an enforced power stance of Malay-Muslims within the community. Nevertheless, contradicting views still remain where several respondents point out that the act of veiling still projects Malay-Muslim women as weak and submissive and injects the fear of Islam through oppressive representations in the media. A small minority of the respondents, however; felt that a person's intellect is evaluated by wearing the hijab. The U&G had discussed *social integrative needs* of media users that saw their interaction with family

and peers, of which leads to providing gratification of *tension release needs*, that involves a form of escape and diversion for the media user.
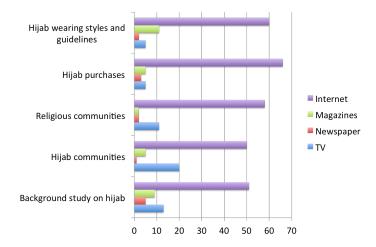

Figure 7: Hijab-related needs that motivate media usage among respondents

Based on the majority of respondents' who recognized the media as an advocate of all things Islamic through the hijab, the Internet became a favoured information-seeking tool for the respondents to learn more about the hijab compared to other media, particularly on purchasing hijab-related items such as dresses, followed by hijab wearing styles which are easily available especially on Youtube and Facebook. In Figure 7, a large number of respondents also turned to the Internet to partake in discussions related to religion within the Malay-Muslim community which further warrants their inclusion within the Islamic groups that support the hijab.

Respondent 1:
"That is why I feel my Facebook is an important tool and useful because this is the channel which I share information and events to other sisters. I also post events that are happening and coming up. So you can check it out for more information and seek what you're looking for. Our circle, which is the largest group, will meet once a month. And then if a member choose to be in a support group nearer to where they reside, then we will direct you the one nearest and most relevant to you for your convenience."

"So knowledge is key. You need to expose yourself to lectures from scholars; you need to want to learn and also sharing it by encouraging your friends. Knowing why you do something is important because it gives you direction and motivation..."

Respondent 2:
"It does help to interest our readers to learn more on the stories these celebrities have to tell because these are famous celebrities so people are naturally curious. But it also gives inspiration to our readers to also don the hijab."

"Other than that, they can attend many Islamic talks or usrah or any classes that teach the right ways of being a Muslim woman. These classes and blogs do explain in depth about the right conduct of being a Muslim woman."

The U&G model prescribed by Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1973) further indicated that

mass communication in itself networks the media user with "others" within a communal experience, where an active audience that recognizes the significance of the media content utilize information pertinent to their goals and achievements particularly in the development of physical and spiritual well-being. Hence, elements of socialization is imminent in constructing and deconstructing the hijab as a way of life in the minds of the audiences.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Consumer culture builds constructs that allow people to craft a specific personality they want to project, of which a consumer is subject to buying and collecting items that satisfy this desire (Wilson, 2012). Based on the results of this study, the study observed capitalist marketing strategies that build on the hybridity of contradicting identities. The systemic Muslim norms of female modesty are recursively integrated with western, cosmopolitan fashion and reproduced as a fetching phenomenon through lavish, modern visuals in media.

The communal experience provided by visual and textual information provide a sense of female empowerment where women can express their personalities through dress and pursue liberated lifestyles; but the hijab becomes key indication to the beholder that Islam is indeed a foundation to their faith hence sets several limits and moderates their socialization. This idea creates embedded memory within the minds of the audiences and can be related to a study by Wilson (2012, p.7) that coin this mediating approach of media as "surrogacy" where the human social practice lies in their consumption and consensus, creating cultural artefacts whilst likening the act of religious-centric marketing to sports and music where it obtains "fans" or followers who can relate to the hijab construct.

The Internet has become the preferred feedback channel for individuals' to react to it as it allows two-way communication compared to traditional media. The knowledge applied through many tutorials and fashion spreads provided in the visuals that dominate the magazine not only serves as a source of alternative information, it is also information that can be used as a form of social utility (Katz et al., 1973). Whether media consumers recognise or dispute the representation of the female Muslim which to some degree may seem more attention-seeking than religious, an individual could expand her social interactions with the conversational currency that is gained from the informative, unique and avant garde approach that promotes the new "Muslimah" – not only with friends, colleagues and members of the family, who are of the same and even different gender, indicating a link to showcasing Malaysia as a developed, intellectual nation with understanding of urban cultures. As discussed by scholars, the export of culture through media technologies and forms is to reorganize the commercialization of a local media culture for profit, subject to modification and domestication of imported culture (Ang, 1996; Noor, 2000). The current hijab phenomenon in Malaysia is a result of construction and deconstruction of the Malay-Muslim identity that adapts global and local socio-political and economical stances as there is a need to conform to pressures of a modern, developing society.

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