

## The Socialization of *Hijab* Culture among Malaysian Media Consumers

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### ABSTRACT

Veiling or wearing the *hijab* is a practice of Islamic faith. As a Muslim country, the progressive socio-political and economic landscape in Malaysia prescribed predominantly Malay women as proponents of the *hijab* in various communication channels. In this study, the identity of Malay-Muslim women is explored through representations of the *hijab* in media that create desire among media consumers to embrace a more modern yet Islamic lifestyle. The emergence of these media messages has minimal relation to piety and is sending the wrong ideals to aspiring young women. The objectives of the study were to determine: 1) the perceptions of media consumers on the *hijab*, 2) factors that influence their acceptance of the *hijab*, and 3) the relationship between Malay-Muslim women and *hijab* through their media use. The study interviewed media practitioners and analysed discussions on selected articles from a Malay online entertainment portal. The study found that the *hijab* culture is fundamental as a media commodity and as an integral element to the identity of Malay-Muslims. The significance of this exploratory study is to generate an understanding on mass media as an agent of socialization and consequently establishing that the *hijab* phenomenon in Malaysia has shaped a societal structure through the convergence of Islam and Malay-Muslim culture.

**Keywords:** Cultural identity, content analysis, hijab, consumer culture, uses and gratifications

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Islam, Quranic verses and Hadith established female modesty as a promoter of good character and morals that hinder Muslim women from harm (Hoodfar, 1993; Muslim American Society, 2013; Syed & Pio, 2010). At present, numerous nation states have embraced veiling or *hijab* as the identifier of Muslim women despite recurrent criticisms on Islamic extremism and religious oppression. American Muslim women proudly define themselves to resist patriarchal norms and express stronger, more religious identities that rise above on-going media discourse and misconceptions of Islam post-9/11 (Droogsma, 2007). Amid the migrant population of United Kingdom, the *hijab* became a transformative tool of multiculturalism that inspired diversity of opinions. London emerged as the 'outpost' of world communities where the garment is embedded within a "trans-cultural city" that offers women alternative ways of being; thus Muslim women are oriented with the *hijab* through their communal experiences on media platforms (Tarlo, 2007). The headscarf ban in France under Jacques Chirac's administration in 2004 was a drawback for Muslim women and men who faced religious undermining. Inadvertently, this issue illuminated the *hijab* to the unfamiliar public. With 40 million viewers in Arab countries, Europe, Asia and North America, *Al-Jazeera* news network introduced the term "*hijab*" in its newscast during this period of controversy through extensive coverage of veiling issues in its network programming as well as frequent references to *hijab*-related products, while its female news reporters and anchors also veiled in solidarity of this ongoing issue (Cherribi, 2006).

Scholars have since actively sought to understand heightened Islamic modesty in media that consider veiling as a cultural and lived experience (Akou, 2010; Beta & Hum, 2011; Kılıçbay & Binark, 2002; Tarlo, 2007). In time, commodification of the *hijab* became prevalent through the capacity of media messages that created its symbolic value, particularly for profit (Gokarikel & Secor, 2009; Flew, 2007). Islamic cosmopolitanism had created social strata that glorify capitalism, modernity and consumerism. In Muslim-majority countries such as Turkey, studies have suggested that the *hijab* is regarded as a more desirable experience when displays of modesty in media is linked with Western fashion and technological gadgets to indicate progressiveness (Kilicbay & Binark

2002). Visibility of the *hijab* is also perpetuated by endorsement from prominent personalities that influenced the perceptions of media audiences. Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world is a hub of Islamic fashion that grew steadfast with support from religious speakers, celebrities and socialites; subsequently initiating the transnational flow of *hijab* trends that even permeated to Arabic states, where veiling had supposedly originated from. In short, aggressive reproduction of *hijab* imageries on print media continued to urbanize *hijab* with more contemporary styles and popular culture as a convergence of religion and modernity (Amrullah, 2008; Beta & Hum, 2011). This new Muslim “high society” sought reproduction of content that presented *hijab* as the epitome of a Muslim woman.

## 2.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aimed to explore the issues behind misrepresentations of the *hijab* in Malaysian media to determine reasons behind its commodification and to identify consequences of its pervasiveness upon the attitudes of young Malay-Muslims from their media use. In doing so, the study examined three specific questions:

RQ1: How do media consumers perceive the current representations of *hijab* in Malay media?

RQ2: What are the factors that influence the acceptance of *hijab* among Malay-Muslim women?

RQ3: What is the relationship between Malay-Muslim women and the *hijab* and how is this dependent on their media use?

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 *Hijab Commodification in Malaysian Media*

There is limited evidence on the integral role of the *hijab* as a signifier of *Malay-Muslimness*. However, there is evidence that suggest Islamic dressing was regarded as resistance towards post-colonialism by rural womenfolk who are commonly subjected to a close-knit, patriarchal Muslim community; whilst those who sought status mobility migrated to the city and obtained liberal lifestyles<sup>1</sup> (Ong, 1990). During the years that followed, the Islamisation of Malaysia became clearer with PAS’ (*Parti Islam Semalaysia*) state hold in that Kelantan that upheld strict sharia laws; while ruling party BN (*Barisan Nasional*) and UMNO (*United Malay National Organization*) negotiated Islamist politics to cater ground-level demands of both Malays and non-Malays (Kessler, 2008; Kulenović, 2006; Norani, 2008). Meanwhile, propaganda of worldwide Islamic resurgence was expressed among undergraduate students at Malaysian universities in the 1980s with the earliest versions of Arabic long dresses or *jubah* and loose veils called the *tudung*<sup>2</sup> (Rafidah & O’Connor, 2011).

The *hijab* became even more recognized among Malay-Muslim females as we fast-forward to the new millennium. Currently, representations of the *hijab* by Malay women in local media contradict the goals of modesty through influences of modern fashion that urge young women to be in control of their bodies, yet deeming it appropriate in the religious sense. It is apparent that consumerism has enticed young women to achieve “Islamic” beauty standards by adopting new concepts or practices derived from cultural artifacts<sup>3</sup> available in the vast landscape of the Malay product market (Umi, 2006; Saodah & Shafizan, 2008; Wilson, 2012). In a notable example, *Sunsilk*<sup>4</sup> shampoo by Unilever group targeted Malay-Muslim women with *hijab* in its *Clean and Fresh* advertising campaign. The campaign featured popular *hijab*-wearing singer Heliza Helmi, a Malaysian reality television star as ambassador of the product and later achieved a staggering growth of 9% sales in just 12 months after its launch (Media Specialists Association, 2014). This breakthrough formula led to its tie-up with *Hijabista* magazine. At this point onwards, the religious relationship of modesty with Malaysian audiences became estranged. As first-of-its-kind contemporary Islamic fashion magazine, *Hijabista* claimed to represent the urban Malay woman and is derived from the

<sup>1</sup> The New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1970s encouraged young Malays especially women to migrate to the city in search of job opportunities and in essence urbanizing them (Khoo, 2006; Ong, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Rafidah & O’ Connor (2011) contended that religious scholars such as Mawdudi from India, Al-Faruqi from the United States and Al- Attas from Malaysia were major influences to Islamic movements that permeated Malaysian university communities.

<sup>3</sup> Cultural “artifacts” are symbolisms that appear in media that frequently suggests construct of an established society (Flew,2007)

<sup>4</sup> After reaching saturation in the product growth, the *Sunsilk* shampoo campaign started with an insight to approach a new target audience, which are women with *hijab* that also have needs to feel confident with their hair. The uniqueness of the campaign where it is impossible to demonstrate product use on the hair of women that practice modesty inspired other ways to speak to these women through teaching them various ways of styling of the *hijab* in digital platforms as well as on print and broadcast (Advertising Marketing Malaysia, 2014).

fusion of words “*hijab*” and “*fashionista*” (*Sinar Harian*, 2012). Furthermore, *Hijabista*'s format of a weekly half-hour television programme on *Astro Ria* obtained full sponsorship from *Sunsilk* (Haswari, 2013). First, the show promoted a signature “*Sunsilk Twist*” *hijab* style that was made available through different platforms on the Internet. Following this, a short drama segment called “*Dunia Lola*” (*Lola's World*) was introduced in the show, featuring a fictitious young *hijab*-wearing Malay woman who is chasing her dreams to become an Islamic fashion designer. Finally, a contest similar to the American *Project Runway* called “*Hijabku Gayaku*” (*My Hijab, My Style*) was promoted on the show, but aired separately on its own and went viral through social media (Media Specialists Association, 2014). Similarly, *Hijabista* is popularly trending on Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest and has thus far achieved 64,870 “likes” on Facebook<sup>5</sup>, also promoting the *Sunsilk Clean and Fresh* initiatives.

The integration of consumers' emotional and social needs with the *hijab* became inevitable. Beta and Hum (2011) agreed that the modern *hijab* exploits in Malaysian and Indonesian media are forms of “cosmopolitan multiculturalism” that engaged media consumers in intercultural experiments and encouraged their individualism. While the *hijab* representations became increasingly available in the digital age, print media remains unparalleled in its journalistic credibility and photographic evidence to visually highlight the *hijab*'s newsworthiness. According to the Media Planning Guide Malaysia 2012, a survey established that 49.3% of media users aged 20-44 years old preferred magazines as their favourite pastime while 17% trust magazine advertisements (Perception Media, 2012). Aside from *Hijabista*, other Islamic womens' magazines sold at newsstands such as *Nur*, *Mingguan Wanita* and *Aniqah*, although are laden with religious guidance on lifestyle, career, are also putting emphasis on *hijab*-styling. Consequently the relationship between media users and the fast-growing *hijab* movement on local Malaysian media continued to generate content relative to its marketing agenda. This raised debates of whether true modesty standards are met in its exaggerated manifestation.

### 3.2 The Praxis of Malay-Muslimness

Scholars have argued that Malaysia's postcolonial Islamic state was shaped from modern education, availability of new communication technologies and centralization of state power that adopted its foundation from European civilizations and other developing Muslim-majority countries (Farooqui, 2006; Farish, 2000). Views on the significant social transformations resulting from New Economic Policy (NEP) from 1970 to 1990 described Malay-Muslim women as wanting to mirror behaviours of their Western counterparts and leaving their Islamic grassroots behind them as they embrace city life (Norani, 2008; Ong, 1990). In contrast, the *hijab* at present has become homogenous and a social expectation among Malay-Muslims as pointed out by Hochel (2013). The emergence of the *hijab* has decontextualized the role of Malays as an ethnicity and shaped the construct of visible “Malay-Muslims” as “good” and “strong” characters in order to sustain the dominance of the Malay race. There is limited literature on how the *hijab* had mediated the construct of Malay-Muslimness, however, evidence suggested that the very essence of being “Malay” included being Muslim and practicing Islamic principles (Martinez, 2001). The foundations of “Islam Hadhari” introduced by former Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi saw a national paradigm of Islamic flows in public administration and information. This amplified the outlook on religion by Malay-Muslims at large while at the same time sustaining multiculturalism with their unique differentiation amidst diverse ethnicities of the state (Abdul & Saiful, 2001; Chong, 2006). As a result, the frequency of Islamic *dakwah* was observed in channels mass communication and penetrated socialization of urban class Malay-Muslims (Nadiah, 2011).

While this is the case, rapid socioeconomic developments converged faith and fashion to position the *hijab* as a platform of progressive, feminist ideals. Modern Malay-Muslim women at present detach conservativeness in *hijab* and made it a “power suit” that allowed them to present themselves in ways women without *hijab* can (Nurzihan, 2014). As a result, the modern, more liberal *hijab* is portrayed as a desired product for mass consumption even though the traditional interpretation to *hijab*-wearing seen in the Quranic verse of *Surah An-Nur* discussed veiling as a protection for women against misdemeanour<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, *Hadith*<sup>7</sup> from *al-Azhab* as well as *Bukhari and Muslim* defined female modesty as a context of “shame”, where respectful garments determine

<sup>5</sup> Information as at 18 November 2013

<sup>6</sup> “...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)

<sup>7</sup> *Hadith*, as explained by Burton (1994) is a collection of words of wisdom by the Holy Prophet that are memorised and passed down by his followers that are mainly religious scholars, which are also highly referenced by those who practice the Islamic faith.

the morals of women in Islam (Muslim American Society, 2013; Syed & Pio, 2010). The outcome of its commercialization has the *hijab* more transparent thus nulling the aforementioned Islamic calls to action.

In consumer culture, commodities are market made and are part of a system of images, text, objects and practices which media audiences make sense of. According to Kozinets (2010), the reproduction of these meanings is dependent on the personal choices of the audiences in their private sphere. As such, their take on the *hijab* may be shared on various and dense network of global media platforms and negotiated in social situations and interpersonal relationships. Print and television advertisements are enforcing a misleading notion among Malay-Muslims that modesty is a validation for the ideal wife or mother which at the same time subjugating women to their domestic role in the patriarchal Malay household (Umi, 2012). Furthermore, numerous authors argued that magazines are seen as catalyst to consumerism and commodification who held that such publications present an ideal notion of the construct to womanhood through perfection of images where readers are encouraged to supplement their physical appearances with glamorous clothing and makeup (Boni, 2002; Kassam, 2011). Guised as empowerment for the female gender, the value of visuals in media is appreciated more by highly educated women that are proponents of Islamic egalitarian ideas. The objectifications of women's bodies in media pre-emptively determined audiences' social expectations of their self and govern their self-confidence (Saodah & Shafizan, 2008). This leads to an aspect of gender identity, where consumption of media guide women who are driven by communal goals and social expectations to commensurate their worth (Fischer & Arnold, 1994).

That being said, although the relationship between Islamic religiosity and consumer behaviour has not yet been thoroughly examined, studies have concluded that the religiosity construct is a key influence in media audiences' purchase decisions (Delener, 1994). Considering religion as an important value in a person's spiritual well-being, it can be said that the paradigm of faith plays a significant role in helping individuals cope with the expectations of veiling with guidance, solutions to problems of how to appear, behave and consequently become accepted within the society through commodities offered by the media. However, in representing the *hijab* as a Malay-Muslim denominator in the present political stance, media consumers are predisposed towards Malay-Muslim culture that intends to remain as the forefront of the nation state. Specifically, cultural meanings generated by Malay women and the *hijab* provide ideologies of Malay cohesiveness. In relation to the study of Douglas and Craig (1997), the correlation between religion; of which in this case are Islamic beliefs, and the strength of Malay ethnic identification mediates control of the ethnic group and incites consumption of *hijab*-related products and media commodities.

#### 4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the uses and gratifications theory (U&G), it can be argued that media consumers use the media to enhance personal experiences and seek gratifications fulfilled by their selected media choice as discussed by communication scholars (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973b). The involvement of audiences is a pivotal aspect of the U&G concept, stemming the communication model in its inception was a linear process that emphasized the media as an intermediary of meanings with audiences as the receiving end interpreting them (Schramm & Roberts, 1971). Through U&G, the receiver could dynamically interchange positions into the source and vice versa; of which knowledge can be reiterated through other communication channels, human motivations are satisfied with media sources of which is divided into six categories: 1) cognition; 2) diversion; 3) social utility; 4) affiliation; 5) expression; and 6) withdrawal (Dominick, 2007). Katz (1959) maintained that U&G studies the media that firstly supplies the user with cognition and information of which becomes a form of escapism based on their interests and nonetheless acts as an instrumental tool that changes attitudes and shapes beliefs of its users. Spanning almost seventy years of refining the theory, new media technologies on the internet are attracting more users to become more active in having their voices heard whilst simultaneously obtaining information for self-entertainment to manage their varied emotional states (Ruggiero, 2009).

The central theme of this study is the audience insight on the representation of the Malay-Muslim ethnic identity through the *hijab*. While many other studies have explored the cultural identification of Malay women and Malaysian media consumption separately, there has been inadequate focus on the aspect of cultural pluralism in the Muslim-Malay identity. The complexities of the modernized Muslim identity cannot be ignored despite its disadvantages to Muslim principles, as the emergence of the *hijab* is traditionally perceived as a uni-dimensional presence. To elaborate, a multi-way flow of information takes place through the experiences of a Malay-Muslim woman in using mass media to fulfil her developmental needs. The variety of media vehicles available for this purpose amplifies the need for information-seeking, and thus exposes her to media commodities that influence her attitudes and behavior as well as help her achieve life goals.



Figure 1 : Framework on the flow of *hijab* affiliation among Malay-Muslim women based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973)

The affiliation with *hijab* movements and conversations in media returns the Malay-Muslim woman to the commodities of the media, allowing her to partake and become immersed in the social phenomenon. Further to this, by embracing the redefined identity of Malay-Muslims in the *hijab*, the Malay-Muslim woman experiences social mobility through heightened status quo and consequently creating new needs when her communal goals are achieved.

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was deployed in this study to identify similar patterns and emerging trends in the materials examined. Subsequently, the coding frames from this method are derived from selected literatures and organized under McClelland's hierarchal structure of coding (McClelland et al., 2008; Schreier, 2012). These frames are then correlated with the uses and gratifications model, citing categories that are mentioned in the "Theoretical Framework" section of this study, namely "cognition", "diversion", "social utility", "affiliation", "expression" and "withdrawal". The categories of coding are predetermined to address the research questions posed for this study, using two different data stimulus that act as triangulation to increase validity in convergent findings and also known as organized "thematic coding" (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006). With that in mind, the data collection for this study was conducted in two stages.

The first stage of data collection comprised of in-depth interviews conducted with two media practitioners. The interview participants were selected through purposive sampling as they represent Malaysian media in their professions. The first interviewee was a social activist and avid *hijab* advocate, Wardina Safiyyah who is known for her work on television as an actor, presenter and social media advocate of female modesty in Malaysia. Meanwhile, the second interviewee was Jamaliah Jais, chief editor for *Nur*, a Malay-Muslim female magazine that has been established for almost a decade before the emergence of more contemporary *Hijabista* magazine. The interviews were conducted with standardized; open-ended questions based on the research questions and were later transcribed for coding purposes. For this study, the said interviewees will be referred to as "informants".

Additionally, based on the discussions by Beers (2014) and Kozinets (2010), it was argued that online participation and interaction of media audiences ascertain their perceptions towards specific issues. Hence, the second stage of data collection examined *Beautifulnara.com*, a popular Malay-language entertainment blog that posted the entry "*Luahan Hati Seorang Muslimah Buat Majalah Hijabista*" (*A Muslimah's Heartfelt Open Letter for Hijabista Magazine*), an "open letter" criticizing *Hijabista* magazine from an anonymous writer named "A Worried Muslimah". The main reason for including data from this is because in the digital sphere, the post received 221 comments from blog readers, 2200 likes on Facebook and 97 tweets on Twitter. Among the multitudes of feedback generated from that post, the study analysed blog comments obtained from its readers (which will now be referred to as "respondents"). Comments from 8 respondents were selected due to their significant inputs that are relevant to the established codes aforementioned.

Next, the study deployed qualitative content analysis (QCA), a method as "non-statistical" inquiry as compared to the elements of frequency-counting found in traditional content analysis; as such, it is concentrated more on the qualitative paradigms of research (Boyatzis, 1998; Schreier, 2012). Materials from both stages of data collection were coded and categorized simultaneously to explore consistencies between two different perspectives (media practitioners, or the informants; in comparison to media users, or the respondents). Qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti* was deployed to ensure data collected is organized systematically and to enhance reporting of findings on the themes highlighted.

Additional themes were also added to the coding frames after emerging during the coding process. Keywords that are observed during the coding process included but not limited to the term *hijab*; such as

*veiling, modesty, covering hair, hijab fashion* and the use of Malay popular and colloquial terms used in addressing Malay-Muslim women in hijab such as *hijabi, hijabster, hijabista, scarfleets, muslimah, tudung, menutup aurat, berhijrah* considering the focus of study on Malay media.

From the study, 11.8% of responses felt that media was an important channel of communication in relaying information on the developments of the *hijab* and creating awareness of how it represents an idealistic persona of Muslim women. In contrast, 17.6% are dubious towards the overtly modernized *hijab* wearers and felt that Western capitalism and current trends are apparent. Based on this initial find, the data suggested that the media is accountable for social outcomes. Further analyses of data were critically examined in the “Findings” section.

## 6.0 Findings

### 6.1 Perception on the current representations of hijab in Malay media

To address the first research question, findings saw the uses and gratifications applied in the aspects of *social utility* and *withdrawal*. Media users share these perceptions as a common conversational material. The availability of diverse media platforms allowed audiences to explore social virtual networks whilst finding companionship amongst other like-minded consumers. On the other hand, perceptions of media users also determine their personal association with the *hijab*, whether they support the movement or otherwise.

#### 6.1.1 Social Utility

Interview participants and respondents regarded the *hijab* as a debatable phenomenon that has gone viral with the ever-changing economic landscape. The common themes discussed by the affected media users is that female Malay-Muslims practice double standards and Muslimah “caste” system of which are determined by the type of *hijab* they wear. Magazines such as *Hijabista*, despite being Islam-centric are designed to boost the image and ratings for a media organization, of which contradicts Islamic teachings as seen in the following excerpts.

“I think this magazine are meant to generate income from readers by offering the ‘superficially beauty’ concept by portraying what they believe to be “fashion/trend” in line with our Islamic teaching. Unfortunately, it didn’t do much to educate readers on actual concept of covering our aurat.” – Informant 1

“Muslimah today seems to have a caste system, and double standards. Tudung Fareeda, Ariani Xcusive, al Humaira (just to name a few) are too expensive and they who own it feel proud and become arrogant. Sorry. If covering modesty means choosing brands and style then forget it”. – Informant 2

“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 true Islamic teachings.” – Informant 2

Considering the growing number of local and international celebrities such as Hana Tajima (a popular British-Muslim fashion designer) that are advocating the movement of the *hijab*, it can be summarized that star power played a crucial role in amplifying values of veiling to media consumers. Such an intervention can be connected to *parasocial interactions*, an extension of the U&G as discussed by Horton and Wohl (1956) where media consumers bond with media personalities to create an extension of their own lives. As a result, a media user follows media personalities as a person that is closely connected to them. Their individual image expressions are mirrored from these personalities and create a sense of belonging from the connection they made with the affected media use. However so, despite the depth of connections made through parasocial relations, media consumers may also condemn the public figures that are dear to them, as how they would be emotionally affected by incidents that happen to their real friendships. The following interview participant and respondent expressed both the advantages and the disadvantages of having celebrities as role models and reference points for the *hijab*.

“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.” – Informant 2

“I agree... not just magazines... but on tv there are many artistes that wear tudung which is not like the tudung.. apologies to Yuna fans, but to me the one that started this wrong trend is Yuna.. with her African turban.. leggings.. and many other artistes as well”. – Respondent 1

It is clear that Respondent 3 displayed frustration in the transformative force of Malaysian singer, Yuna, who was initially significant and respected in popularizing stylish and unconventional modest dressing for Muslim women until her foray into international music scene that required her to assimilate to a more plural identity that fit amongst American audiences. This was also a recurring discussion in social media where several articles highlighted the changes in her *hijab* style, that is very different from her earlier years as a singer <sup>8</sup>.

### 6.1.2 *Withdrawal*

It is observed that general perceptions on *Hijabista* depicted Islamic modesty that is vastly different from conventional Islamic education. Whereas its main purpose is spreading awareness to young Malay-Muslims on modesty, the diaspora of *hijab*-centric commodification in media has taken advantage of the media consumers' naiveté to market products and as such, consumers are enticed to project a modern Islamic identity with commodities that do not uphold Islamic values. Many of the respondents expressed disappointment, and even disgust that the magazine focused on the hegemony of modern Malay-Muslims rather than inculcating Islamic beliefs. Thus, the element of *withdrawal* in this section is related to audiences disassociating the *hijab* as it is in contradiction with their personal principles. Further to this, the affected audiences are also immersed in criticizing the *hijab* based on their perceptions of *Hijabista* magazine. While being liberal-minded meant being open and accepting to new ideas, it does not mean that Islamic teachings should be suppressed to make way for more tolerant and accommodating socialization similar to postcolonial Malay thinking that looked West for inspiration. Informant 2, a media practitioner that was interviewed, stated matters of male and female socialization should not be taken lightly despite anxieties to consistently appear modern.

“ When I first saw this magazine, as a new person I thought its good because of it showed ways to wear the *tudung*. But when I compared it with the religious teachings I obtained from sermons in mosques, ya Allah .. it's not only hair that is the *aurat* as a female Muslim. Never touched the magazine again.” - Respondent 2

“ I'm a non-Muslim woman and please no offense if I comment about this mag. One of my colleagues, she is a Muslim woman bought this. I do read magazines regardless in Malay or English. When I read *Hijabista* .. mmm.. I felt the fashion is not appropriate for anyone who call themselves Muslim. Appreciate their effort to be stylish but it is too much.” - Respondent 3

“ Sometimes they show these characters in *hijab* to be holding hands with a man or being in somewhat promiscuous situations where it is clear and known that all Muslim women should avoid such situations.” - Informant 2

### 6.2 *Factors that influence the acceptance of the hijab among Malay-Muslim women*

Related to the second research question, findings denoted *cognition* and *diversion* as recurrent themes in influencing the acceptance of *hijab* among Malay-Muslim women. Media audiences constantly seek to be informed of the surrounding social environment by accommodating popular culture to build their own conceptualizations and to in ease their sociological existence, a pre-condition that predict other humans and diagnose human meaning (Blumler,1979; Dominick, 2007). The cultural aspect of how interview participants and blog respondents perceive the *hijab* is determined of their exposure to frequent signifiers of the garment in the media and their interpretation of the construct. Eventually, affected audiences would acculturate the practice as social norm and review it as a form of stimulating entertainment and escape, particularly from the innovative and unique ways where the *hijab* is displayed.

<sup>8</sup> Yuna, a local singer that has achieved international fame is now seen sporting tighter clothing and shorter veils as reported by Astro Awani (<http://www.astroawani.com/berita-hiburan/yuna-dikecam-kerana-baju-ketat-paras-pusat-35941>) and popular gossip blogs (<http://beautifulnara.com/abang-nara-tak-sokong-yuna-fesyen-tudungnya-yang-terbaru/>)

### 6.2.1 Cognition

In the case of *Hijabista*, several women in the following excerpts have picked up the magazine to connect with the growing Muslimah trend, whilst also being able to differentiate and identify themselves as part of the new subculture. While the idea had become common, it gave women permission to be themselves in the society as the *hijab* is now more widely accepted.

“I see that this magazine is more towards attracting youngsters that have just started to dress modestly.. maybe first they would be attracted to the tudung fashion , perhaps in the long run they would be inclined to dress in complete modesty” – Respondent 4

“It’s (*Hijabista*) not wrong, at least there is a magazine that gives me suggestions of how to wear the tudung especially for special occasions such as office dinners”  
– Respondent 5

“They can be featured on magazines, on TV shows and almost anything relating to the media because they are no longer being judged by the way they dress. People have opened up so much more after that that it’s such a great thing for women (in *hijab*).” – Informant 1

### 6.2.2 Diversion

Excerpts gathered from the data found that both interview participants and respondents are active in seeking information about the *hijab*. Respondents and participants felt that even though there was much criticism about the *hijab*, the media (and *Hijabista* magazine in particular) contained information that could assist young women in appreciating the garment. Similarly, media audiences gain to seek forms of diversion and escape in their daily lives of which the media that they use become channels to free their minds at leisure, whilst having their intellect stimulated. Social media has become a platform that increased conversations on the *hijab* and created a positive wave of enlightenment about Islamic modesty.

“I feel my Facebook is an important tool and useful because this is the channel which I share information and events to other sisters” – Informant 1

“I rely on social network because what I want is not what they would give on TV. People who use social network to share their knowledge are more honest and they are not dictated by anyone about what they share or post” – Informant 2

“We actually have a lot on online communities where you have online seminars. The source is endless because of so many varieties. There are so many platforms you can gain knowledge from authentic sources” - Respondent 6

“They can get much information from blogs because nowadays there are many Islamic clerics have resorted to writing blogs to reach a wider audience in relaying their teachings”- Respondent 7

Both interview informants and respondents have agreed strongly with the advent of social media that propelled Malay-Muslims as the symbol of *hijab*, particularly Facebook as the sharing functions that it has to extend information to a wide network of users. Even if the discussions in *Hijabista* magazine itself about veiling are considered contradicting to Islamic teaching, there is room for two-way communication with participation from media users and media producers to continuously reproduce the structural experiences of the *hijab* based on consumer feedback. Furthermore, online platforms are not biased and allow a voice for Malay-Muslim women to be heard.

### 6.3 Relationship of Malay-Muslim Women with the Hijab and Media Dependency

In the final enquiry of the study, the relevance of *hijab* and media dependency among Malay-Muslim women was explored. Dominick (1999) determined that individuals foster relationships in using media and achieve gratification by observing other people’s behavior, which motivates the individual’s self-belief. Through

*affiliation* and support of the *hijab* movement, the individual's social capital is expected to increase, which will help encourage them to express their unique own *hijabi* image.

### 6.3.1 Affiliation

Despite its apparent disconnect to religion, readers of *Hijabista* magazine are responsive to celebrities in *hijab* as it may inspire them to do dress similarly.

“ I'm from the media myself so I know and understand how it works and what it can do to people. It's just that I don't agree how some of the shows solely use the TV for their reference because we have to understand that at the end of the day, what the shows want is to make a profit.” – Informant 1

“ 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*.” – Informant 2

While several respondents found that *Hijabista* followed a true representation flow of Islamic representation despite the marketing approaches discussed, another mentioned the *Fareeda* tudung, a variant of *hijab* that is popular on the market, claimed itself exclusive and not for the common folk in a YouTube post. As such, this incited feelings towards this particular *hijab* producer as discriminating. Therefore this illustrates *hijab* as a social cue, where the type of *hijab* person wears determines her social status and later her gratification towards being acknowledged. Respondents and participants found a plateau of Islamic modesty within *Hijabista* and various other media that were mentioned in their responses which included traditional broadcast and print. For *Hijabista*, it was still a channel to represent the new Malay-Muslim that are more progressive and accepted that will educate others on the benefits of covering up, internally and aesthetically. The commercialization of the *hijab* brought forth unconventional standards of beauty and fashion of which was not available from decades before where women now can drape themselves in modest dressing without fear of being judged as the more inferior gender or subculture.

### 6.3.2 Expression

In regards to expressing oneself with the *hijab* garment, it is found that women who wear the *hijab* are treated with more respect by others when displaying higher intellect in the public sphere as their dressing does not dictate their level of education. Synonymously, *hijab* in more modern times with intervention of media created plurality and diversity of women's voices and not limited to their outer persona.

“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*.” – Informant 1

“I think because they broke the stereotype of how beauty should be for a woman because I mentioned earlier, there are many women in Malaysia that wear the *hijab* so with that commercial, it was easier for these women to relate that beauty doesn't have to mean blonde hair or skimpy clothing.” – Informant 1

“ It's not wrong to be fashionable as long as modesty is protected” – Respondent 8

As Flew (2007) contended, the ever-growing global population had allowed penetration of media of which such collective cultural engagement is derived through common everyday experiences, as a lived and shared experience.

## 7.0 Discussion

Early uses-and-gratifications (U&G) scholars debated that the model was not sufficiently measured as it centred on self-evaluations of media audiences while it was also not savvy of the current media development. Further to this, it was thought that U&G theory did not address the dysfunctional tandems of individual growth and their immersion in society as well as the constrains of the text (Katz, 1987; Ruggiero, 2009). While the media played an important role in disseminating awareness of the *hijab* movement, there have been major paradigm shifts in content production as compared to the hypodermic needle effect. From the

perspective of a Malay-Muslim woman, the advent of today's technology saw remnants of the two-step flow theory that dwell on the impact of opinion leaders towards media users and their decisions in accepting the *hijab*. The dynamism of the "receiver" has shifted the power of demand into the audience's hand, allowing them to also become content producers aside from being media consumers in their ardent participations on the *hijab* in the public sphere.

On the surface, there are varied social and psychological elements that predetermines of a media user's gratification. The quality of relationship between the audience with family and peers engage their mental capacity and influence their choice of media (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). From a functional perspective, the ability of the media in providing useful news and information encourages audience engagement in media flows of the *hijab* whilst also increasing their social interactions with others (Katz and Foulkes, 1962; Greenberg and Dominick, 1969). Researchers delved deeper to examine audience motivations and as such the categories that were established in U&G. As a result, the media was found impactful with media audiences where their consumption determine their outlook of the world and ultimately their happiness; amplified by acknowledgement of their place in society in their socialization with other audiences as well as their interaction with media organizations, where the audience is in control (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

Inclinations for the *hijab* culture as examined in this study is relatable to the three-factor model developed from U&G (Hall, 2005) that discussed personality traits of the media user. Firstly, a media user's "extraversion" determined that they not only seek out knowledge but also seek media genres that satisfy their needs for social utility in order to develop personalities and relationship with others. Secondly, "neuroticism" or the anxieties suffered from media audiences drive them to find methods to stimulate their minds and seek relaxation - of which their usage is highly motivated from content they are able to select from the media. Blumler (1979) suggested that such diversion and escape shape audiences' perceptions of social characters portrayal in media, which they find believable and easy to emulate. Thirdly, the "psychotism: trait of this U&G extension is that individuals seek to be different and above social norms, of which they find their deviance transgressive and unique from "others". Aside from portraying themselves as progressive Muslims, the users' representation is also to display the supremacy of the Malay race.

Further to this, the *hijab* culture in Malaysia is driven by "parasocial interactions" as defined by Horton & Wohl (1956). The second layer to this U&G annexe prescribes that face-to-face interaction between media personalities and audience members is "parasocial". Even though most of the interactions are one-way, scholars have found that users find it real and tangible, particularly in their reactions towards developments of these sought after media characters (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). Studies have found that traditional media, particularly fashion magazines, despite its dwindling readership still holds credibility among audiences as a form of self-attachment, from allowing the consumers to feel privileged through more personalized denotations that allows the user to feel strongly about how the magazines is an "extension" of themselves, aside from associating them with prominent figures that are likened to everyday people such as they (Kim et al., 2015). For the *hijab*, apart from being strongly visual in its delivery on print media that resonated with the audience, this dimension allows them to feel that they are in solidarity with the prominent figures or organizations referred to in the publications. Besides, this enables the user to strike up conversations with others who can relate to the topics and as such increasing quality of their social interactions.

Similarly, the access of media users to mobile media and platforms of alternative communication such as the Internet allows higher level of interactivity compared to other media, and requires constant consumer involvement (Lim & Ting, 2012). The difference of this media is that it is more of a daily companion through its easy access, and reinforces messages from traditional media. Therefore, the availability of diverse communication technologies widens the discourse platform for media audiences and affects them externally as a significant part of the general public, as well as satisfying their emotional desires.

## 8.0 Conclusion

The fleeting messages of the *hijab* and expressions of Malay-Muslim women are a catalyst to the communal experience of media users. The rise of communication technology has extended the discourse of the *hijab* in cyberspace where online resources become even more abundant for conversational currency as suggested by the U&G theory. In the examination of developing media, scholar Jen Ang emphasized on localized globalization that have been "lived" and "mediated" through a process of systemic desegregation, of which local cultures are reproduced and lose their individual existence from the amalgamation of media flows and technologies (Ang, 1996; Flew, 2007). After examining the relevance of the Malay woman's socialization process to the uses-and gratifications model, media users are found to be engaged in ideas of modern Malay-Muslimness. In a progressive Malaysian environment with its growing media capacity, its Islamically-

inclined community reinstated the roles of wives and mothers within an ethical stance where their rituals and practices re-traditionalized Malays as Muslims (Ong, 1990), despite resisting such forms of modernity as implied by Kahn in order to maintain the dominant stride of Malay-ness in the country (Kahn, 1992). To conclude, with a more globalized outlook on the *hijab* as a signifier of female Muslims, the mobile accessibility of the Internet played a key role in resonating the modern *hijab* as a significant form of self-expression in the minds of urban Malay-Muslim women.

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