

## A Comparative Analysis on *Hijab* Wearing in Malaysian *Muslimah* Magazines

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the renewed perception of Muslim women through the attributes of two Malaysian *Muslimah* (female Muslim) magazines. Through the years, Islamic magazines have evolved but the objective to enrich Muslim women with religious knowledge is inextricably maintained. An example is *Nur*, a popular monthly magazine with a focus on female modesty which has received positive response in the last decade. However, in June 2012, its publisher *Karangkrak* introduced *Hijabista*, a more “contemporary” *Muslimah* monthly amidst the proliferation of *hijab* trends in the global media. This new magazine aims to penetrate the urban community by emphasising on the fashionable and glamorous aspects of *hijab* wearing. As such, its stylish issues posed minimal discussions on religiosity and the role of *hijab* as a marker of piety. This paper applied a content analysis approach to interpret articles and related visuals produced by both *Nur* and *Hijabista* through the “framing” theoretical framework. Findings of the study revealed dissimilarities between the two magazines that were contributed by the growing preoccupation of the modern *hijab*. The mainstreaming of this *hijab* culture was presented largely in *Hijabista* through the recursive highlights on elite opinion leaders and fashion editorials of the *hijab* that are unfavourable to a conventional *Muslimah*. Findings also included analyses of predominant themes and messages that enhance the cultural hegemony of the modern *hijab* in the Malaysian media sphere.

**Keywords:** Cultural identity, media effects, framing, content analysis, *hijab*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Holy Quran states that it is mandatory for a Muslim woman – as ordained by God—to cover herself from strangers and distant relatives with the veil or *hijab*; this includes the hair, arms, bosom, feet and other parts of the body (Abdullah, 1999).

The *hijab* is a special symbol in the Islamic faith that assigns women to different roles that sets them apart from the opposite sex. With Islam as the official religion of Malaysia, a majority of Muslim women use the *hijab* to cover their heads; nevertheless it remains a choice to many as the use of *hijab* is not compulsory despite

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the implementation of *shariah*<sup>1</sup> laws. Once considered a symbol of anti-modernisation because of strong postcolonial ties of the nation state, the meaning of the *hijab* has long been debated by the society particularly due to the resurgence of Islam in the 1970s. The *hijab*'s social movement was partly shaped by the contradicting political views of UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and PAS (*Parti Agama Islam Se-Malaysia*) where the identity of Islam is regarded as dynamic, tolerant and modern despite certain opposing worldviews (Othman, 2008). Muslim-centric content emerged in the Malaysian media as a result of Islamic globalisation and the emergence of Muslim consumer culture in the Middle East, Europe as well as neighboring Indonesia. Hashim, Murphy and Hashim (cited in Dłużewska, 2008) asserted that the *hijab* has become even more visible as a Malaysian identity from tourism campaigns that presented visuals of *Muslimah* in covered and modest clothing. The term *Muslimah* is generally used to refer to the “female Muslim”, representing the Islamic culture and faith (Contractor, 2012).

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

According to *Media Planning Guide Malaysia* (Perception Media, 2012), 49.3% of media users aged 20 to 44 years old prefer magazines as their favorite pastime; 17% of total magazine consumers are reported to trust its advertisements and 17%, its editorial contents such as articles. Hence, magazines to create awareness about a phenomenon and are able to reach a niche audience.

Among the various titles available at newsstands, 3.4% are targeted at the female Muslim audience such as *Nur* that has had a low-key presence among magazine readers since its inception in 2002. Its content is fairly standard of a women's magazine focusing on image, lifestyle and career guidance but representing the worldview of a *Muslimah*. *Nur* is produced by *Karang kraf*, a renowned and established Malaysian publishing house.

A decade after the first appearance of *Nur*, *Karang kraf* introduced to readers, *Nur*'s sister monthly, *Hijabista*, as its 29th conceptual magazine. *Hijabista* was the first of its kind to depict a more daring and *avant garde* portrayal of the *Muslimah*. The arrival of this magazine brought forth opportunities for advertising revenue that capitalised on the modernity of the *hijab*. The trailblazing *Hijabista* which features fashion trends for the *Muslimah* derived its name from the fusion of the words “*hijab*” and “*fashionista*”. According to an interview by *Sinar Harian* (2012) with *Hijabista*'s former editor Nursuziana Zulkifli, it was revealed that the magazine was established to cater for young females aged 21 to 35 years old in view of the global *hijab* revolution.

Both *Nur* and *Hijabista* maintain websites to connect with loyal readers. The strategy may have paid off more for *Hijabista* which achieved 47,514 “likes” on its Facebook page within its first year of publication, compared to *Nur*'s 50,582 “likes” despite having established their page for more than four years. Furthermore, *Hijabista*

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<sup>1</sup>In Rosly's research on the parameters of *shariah* (2010), “*shariah*” is defined as principles that make permissible values of right and prohibitions or wrongness in Islam.

is also trending popularly on other social media platforms such as Twitter (7,249), Instagram (11,448 followers) and Pinterest (61 pins)<sup>2</sup>.

Hence, a comparison was made between the new *Hijabista* against the conservative *Nur* to examine the extent of *hijab* representation in both magazines. By doing so, the study assessed the multifaceted development of Muslim women in the Malaysian print media.

### **1.2 Statement of Problem**

One global misconception of Muslims lies in the socialisation of the *hijab* or veil, which may lead Islam to be perceived as an oppressive religion whereby the garment is associated to failure in conforming to progress; However, in recent years Muslim-majority countries have ironically presented *hijab* as a symbol of freedom. This new breed of *hijab*-wearing women arises with the modernisation of countries and redefines a Muslim woman's place in the society. The resurgence of Islam post-9/11 has seen popularisation of Islamic modesty in print, broadcast and even social media. Women in Islam continue to seek opportunities of empowerment to rise above discriminating stereotypes coined by the West.

The phenomenon has largely affected Malaysian Muslim women whose perceptions are influenced by their consumption of various media content. In upholding the principles and beliefs of female empowerment, the patriarchal roles of males in the *Quran* and *Sunnah* become endangered. Psychological and subconscious effects of the modern *hijab* on female Muslims are linked to ideas of beauty and self-image rather than religiosity. Included in this equation is the fact that Malaysia has a fraction of the world's Muslim population. Despite the promising growth of the *Hijabista* magazine in local *hijab* activism, criticisms surfaced from the local public. In the Facebook page of *Muslimah* Interest Zone and Networking Association Kuala Lumpur (MIZAN), among others, a member under the pseudonym of "A Worried *Muslimah*" wrote an open letter disapproving the representation of women in *Hijabista*, asserting that the magazine has no respect for modesty.

"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."

(MIZAN, 2013)

Although the local media increasingly features visuals of fashionable and chic Islamic clothes as much as the non-*hijab* clothing, Woldesemait (2012) argued that

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<sup>2</sup>Follower information updated as of 15 March 2013.

the modernised representations of the *hijab* do not meet the standard *hijab* wearing requirements. The increased *hijab* exposure in the public sphere only enhanced the opacity of *hijab* wearers rather than protect the modest *Muslimah* image. The image presented in *Hijabista* may not be entirely ideal for women seeking religious affirmation and embracing their true calling as a Muslim.

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions**

In view of the discussion above, this research aimed to examine the construct of the *hijab* presented in Malaysian *Muslimah* magazines by comparing two mainstream Islamic publications targeted at Muslim women: *Nur* and *Hijabista*.

For the purpose of this study, the following questions were explored:

- RQ1 : What was the extent of *hijab* wearing that was covered in the magazines?
- RQ2 : Who were the sources of information for the coverage of *hijab* wearing in the magazines?
- RQ3 : What were the media frames used in the representation of *hijab* wearing in the magazines?
- RQ4 : How many photographs accompanied the coverage of *hijab* wearing in the magazines?

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Findings generated from this exploratory research provide beneficial information on development of the *hijab* phenomenon among Malaysian female Muslims. The study aims to provide an insight into the *hijab* as a cultural identity whilst also assessing acclimatisation of the *hijab* ideology by the Malaysian media.

The results of this research are expected to benefit media practitioners as well as create awareness on important issues concerning female modesty. Furthermore, this study aims to educate non-Muslim countries on Islamic global flows and its potential for creating new and acceptable societal practices. It is also hoped that this study can contribute to the social assimilation of the *Muslimah* who has often been referred to as the “other”.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Studies of *hijab* in the media found that the visual and textual representations of the Muslim woman reflect significantly upon the image of Islam. Islamic religious teachings encourage followers to create art and beauty provided that it does not contradict the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, in reference to the Arabs that produced colourful clothing and covering for women that were rich in design as well as embroidery (Potts, 2009: 9). Having its origins as a religious symbol and an ethnic identifier, the *hijab* spiralled into a wave of creative expressions for female modesty. Opinion leaders who discuss the ideal representation of the *Muslimah* on media platforms are also influential in moulding the cultural identity of the *hijab*.

In Malaysia, the practice of *hijab* wearing evolved with the sociopolitical landscape; left hanging in the balance amidst continuous debates of opposing Islamic views by the modern Islamists of UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and the conservative Islamists of PAS (*Parti Agama Islam Se-Malaysia*) who argue women who do not cover their hair are the source of social ills (Othman, 2006). After the East Asian economic crisis and controversies surrounding the Anwar Ibrahim scandal, then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad introduced the privatisation of media companies in the late 1990s to gain a tighter control on the press. By doing so, he encouraged the emergence of commercial media that focused on Malay audiences (Othman, 2008: 32-33; Wang, 1998; Nain and Wang, 2004). Under the Malaysian Federal Constitution, all Malays are compulsorily Muslims (Yang & Ahmad Ishak, 2011). Tun Mahathir's successor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi promoted Muslim governance through the concept of *Islam Hadhari* when he took office in 2003, emphasising on religiosity in administration and flow of information despite conflicting ideologies with the humanist and individualistic *Islam Madani* by Muhammad Iqbal (Ahmad and Abdul Rahman, 2001; Chong, 2006). Advertisements and public displays of women in the media were inclined towards the Islamic code of conduct, thus deterring the *Muslimah* from appearing in improper clothing which increased the likability and familiarity of the *hijab* as a reminder that Islam prevails (Naseri and Tamam, 2012). Thus, a *Muslimah* is susceptible to acts of female modesty through the media choices she makes.

The practice of covering *aurat*<sup>3</sup> was made familiar to the Malaysian public through the introduction of the *Muslimah* couture in the 1980s. *Busana Muslimah* was coined which means “dress for female Muslims”. Some of the more popular Islamic styles during this period were the *jubah* (a long loose maxi dress), socks and wrist covers. Currently, the variations of *hijab* have become more conspicuous in line with the struggles of the *Muslimah* to be accepted in a fast-moving modern society. Islamic upheavals in the Middle East inspired *Al Jazeera*, a renowned international media company, to provide an exemplary practice of *hijab* wearing with all of the network's anchorwomen. This approach was a powerful statement from an Arab country that embraced female modesty rather than submitting to the pressures of Western values and expectations. On the contrary, scholars Kılıçbay and Binark (2002) discovered visual codes that have Western influences in Turkish veiling or *tesettür* and gives the wearer an illusion of heightened *status quo* through English names and styles of dressing. The *hijab* is associated with chic modernity through images of high-end fashion models posing with technological gadgets such as mobile phones and receives positive responses from Muslim women.

Trends of *hijab* in Indonesia manifested from the fandom of elite religious personalities inspired local designers to popularise contemporary *hijab* designs in

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<sup>3</sup>Abdul Majid et. al (2012) conducted a study on the female *aurat* and polygamy, of which “*aurat*” literally means “genitalia” hence reasons for it to be protected. The study went on to disprove the debate by Sisters in Islam on how the *aurat* is dictated whereby it is merely the need to dress decently, rather than to cover major body parts as advised by the *Quran* and *Hadith*.

exclusive Islamic magazines such as *Noor*, *Paras* and *Alia*, ironically contradicting the idea of protecting a woman's beauty or lowering a man's gaze (Amrullah, 2008). According to *hadith*, a woman who wears clothes but exposes parts of her body such as her legs, thighs, bosoms that could incite sexual urges from a man or who wears transparent or tight clothing that leave little to the imagination – these women are considered “naked” and “Hell Dwellers” (Al-Balali, 2006: 38). The same goes to women who wear their hair crowned under the *hijab* high that is likened to humps of camels (Al-Balali, 2006: 38). According to Beta and Hum (2011), the majority of South East Asian countries including Malaysia have embraced Islamic cosmopolitanism that allow *Muslimahs* to express their personalities and styles through fitted clothing, multitudes of accessories and loud unconventional colours despite having to conform to covered dressing. This capitalist deconstruction of conventional and pious “Islamic” image sought a more sophisticated representation of intellectual and elegant Muslim women.

Nevertheless, the embodiment of the cosmopolitan *Muslimah* is fast growing into a force to be reckoned with amidst the transnational flows of Islamic globalisation. Young (cited in Potts, 2009: 10-11) stated that 50% of the world's 1.6 billion Muslim women are turning to Islamic clothing which can be extrapolated to a potential USD 96 billion global market. Gökariksel and Secor (2009:7) discussed how the *hijab* could provide economic gain in Muslim countries, demonstrating “... 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”. Wok and Mohd (2008) found that urban Malaysian women tend to imitate images akin to those projected by the broadcast and print media.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1970s attempted to revive the financial state of Malaysia through a boost in the economy and increase of job opportunities. Consequently, postcolonial Malay Muslim women escaped the confines of their villages to find a living in the city which imposed a more liberal way of dressing and attitude, thus creating a similar precedent for later generations (Ong, 1990). As much as the Islamic resurgence in Malaysia has encouraged *hijab* wearing today, the negotiation of this new identity versus modernity created dilemmas for the Muslim women who wear it. Muslim magazines such as *Ummi* and *Ibu* produce constructs that provoke the readers' insecurities, yet stimulate desires to own the commercial images and messages presented to them (Khattab, 2012).

The informed and educated *Muslimah* cannot escape media marketing that propels the *hijab* into an elite lifestyle that includes upscale variations, luxurious fabric cuts and colourful, tight-fitting clothing that stray away from the norms of a conservative *Muslimah* (Gökariksel and Secor, 2009: 8). This paradox transforms the *hijab* as a socially desirable experience where elements of cosmopolitanism increases the acceptance of Muslim women into the modernised Islamic global community. The consumption culture highlights incoherence of religiosity where a veiled woman sees herself as privileged rather than closer to God as they belong to a special community of *Muslimahs*. This is further bolstered by imageries offered by the lifestyle and



fashion of Muslim women magazines – an investment of piety where strategies of consumerism triggers a discourse within the self (Kılıçbay and Binark, 2002; Beta and Hum, 2011; Peow, 2011).

Furthermore, McQuail (cited in Boni, 2002) asserted that consumerism is a social construct of its own, where the media, magazines in particular, are primary contributors that create conflict within the self and the feminine realm that does not need a body of theory or research to be deliberated. Thus, the portrayal through recursive representations in magazines ensures that the identification of female ideals are accumulated and formed by the beholder. Therefore, a routine or habitus is formed and this can be related to Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, whereby consumption is a creative and productive process that makes claims of authority or difference and creates a sense of power and status. True to this, the emergence of *Muslimah* magazines not only shuns patriarchal dominance but has become a catalyst to a new breed of the Muslim female body, hybridising the clash of moral and aesthetic ideals among *Muslimahs*.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The research employed an exploratory approach to probe the *hijab* culture among Muslim women in the print media. The framing concept applied in this study focuses on the changes in an environment that provides social cues for a specific change in attitude or action rather than an analysis per se. Goffman (cited in Baran and Davis, 2000) argued that individuals sometimes do not realize their flexibility in adapting to changes as they move through time and space. Frames allow interpretations of social cues in media representations where individuals plan their actions in everyday encounters.

“Framing is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”

(Entman, 1993)

According to Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009: 23), there are two groups of researchers that study framing in communication research: the first establishes frames in societal discourse or “frame building” whilst the second ventures into “frame setting” which frames effects upon the audiences. This particular study analysed the former where the variables look at “frame building” in the cultural context and present the audiences a frame to apply information and meaning that have been imbued. Gamson and Modigliani (cited in Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009) described this culture-specific perspective as a form of “cultural resonance”.

Furthermore, Scheufele (1999) discussed the “frame contest” whereby elites who appear in media routines and practices influence an audience member's negotiation and interpretation of a specific popular culture, which in this study, refers to the phenomenon of *hijab* wearing among the *Muslimahs*.

Media frames can be determined inductively and deductively through qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis, respectively (Tankard, 2001; Reese, 2001; De Vreese, 2005). While deductive analysis already has a pre-defined package consisting of extensive elements of the framing mechanism – for example, headings, subheadings, leads, etc – this study adopted an inductive, qualitative analysis due to its exploratory nature where frames emerge from materials analysed during the course of analysis.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The content analysis method was used to compare two popular *Muslimah* magazines for adult Malay women. The magazines chosen were *Nur*, a monthly Islamic women magazine and *Hijabista*, another monthly Islamic women magazine. *Nur* is one of the oldest and leading Islamic magazines in Malaysia and has been in print for almost 11 years since 2002 whilst *Hijabista* is a new publication from the same company (as *Nur*), *Karang kraf*, established in 2012. Based on the *Advertising Print and Online Ratecard* (Kumpulan Media Karang kraf, 2013), both *Nur* and *Hijabista* are the only Islamic magazines targeted at female adults published by the media company; circulation numbers are encouraging at 46,000 copies and 45,000 copies, respectively. The issues chosen for the analysis were from June 2012 to August 2012 as it coincided with the launch of the *Hijabista* magazine to identify similarities and differences with its sister publication, *Nur*. The sampling of issues within this quarter was also due to two important festivities observed in the Muslim calendar, the *Ramadhan* and *Syawal* celebrations that anticipate high volumes of product consumption during these holy months. Evidently, it is important to examine the framing approach of each magazine chosen in this period on the coverage of the *hijab* to understand their representation of female modesty.

Due to the preliminary nature of this pilot study, the researcher focused on three issues of *Nur* and *Hijabista* each (six issues) with a total of 73 articles obtained from all issues analysed. The hard copies of the magazine issues were collected from the headquarters of *Kumpulan Media Karang kraf*. Each issue of the Malay-language magazines was skimmed through for Malay keywords such as *hijab* and *tudung* (which is another word for *hijab* or veil). The units of analysis applied may be textual or visual and covered editor's notes, feature articles, news reports, fashion reviews and letters from readers.

To accomplish the research objectives proposed in this study, a standard coding sheet was established to record findings from all 73 articles. A standard 30-item coding manual was prepared to guide the coder on the targeted elements in the content analysis. This study adapted the analysis components from Entman's (1993) five traits that have impact on frame reference and information-processing, which are 1) important judgments; 2) agency, or the answer to a question; 3) identification; 4) categorisation and 5) generalisation in a broader national context. Four elements were adapted into the following operational definitions:

- 1) Extent of coverage – measured from three dimensions: number of article, type of article and writing style (whether it is an analysis or human-interest focus)



- 2) Article sources – refer to the information and references collected about the *hijab* through interviews with industry experts, community leaders or readers.
- 3) Frames. The five categories of frames established in this study were:
  - i. Focus on business owners – texts that involve interviews of business owners of *hijab* products
  - ii. Profile of prominent figures – texts that involve interviews or discussion with notable public figures and their relationship with the *hijab*
  - iii. Highlights of events in the *hijab* community – texts that cover newsworthy events related to *hijab* wearing among Muslim women.
  - iv. Sharing of *hijab* styles – texts that provide tutorials and guidance on methods to wear the *hijab*
  - v. Reiteration of modesty – texts that present a religious discussion or debate on the social issue of female modesty and promote awareness of the *hijab*
- 4) Photographs – refer to the incidents of photographs of individuals or groups that accompany headlines and content discussing the *hijab*; indicates if any reference to religiosity was made.

The researcher engaged a second coder with relevant communication background for the study to ensure reliability. The coder was trained by the researcher who also acted as the first coder. The second coder was briefed on the coding manual and was assigned to collect data from 30 articles. Similarities and dissimilarities were discussed and agreed upon. The data collected were tabulated manually and presented in the form of descriptive statistics.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Extent of Coverage

With reference to Table 1, *hijab* wearing was given extended coverage by *Hijabista* magazine with a total of 40 articles while *Nur* featured 33 articles. Stressing more on fashion compared to *Nur*, the stylised *Hijabista* played a pivotal role in framing the *Muslimah* as a modern fashion trend.

**Table 1.** Extent of coverage on *hijab* wearing

	<i>Nur</i> (n=33)	<i>Hijabista</i> (n=40)
	%	%
Editor's Note	9.1	7.5
Feature Writing	42.4	20.0
News Reports	27.3	17.5
Letters from Readers/Opinions	0.0	10.0
Fashion Reviews/Recommendations	21.2	45.0

As the new Islamic women magazine in the market, *Hijabista* had much to prove in terms of its contribution to Malaysian Muslim women compared to *Nur*, which has been in circulation for more than 10 years. Therefore, the frequency of *hijab* wearing mentioned in fashion-related articles acted as a branding property for *Hijabista* thus superseding the importance of *Nur*'s feature articles that normally covers various aspects of lifestyle such as career advice, human interest stories and health tips. *Hijabista* improvised creatively to promote *hijab* wearing by turning almost every page into a fashion spread including profiles on successful businesswomen in the community (Figure 1). As such, characteristics of the modern *Muslimah* were made “hegemonic” when this magazine uses narrative construction that disengaged the *hijab* of conservativeness.



**Figure 1.** Article from *Hijabista*'s October 2012 issue, entitled “4Mumpreneur” featured businesswomen with the backdrop of a fashion show to illustrate the importance of dressing right for success.

#### 4.2 Article Sources

The top sources of information used to produce articles for the two *Islamic women magazines* were feature writers from the editorial teams who wrote about “act-of-veiling” and served as an instrument of awareness (Table 2). *Hijabista* further endorsed the idea of veiling by highlighting a significant number of feedback from style experts in 37.5% of its articles.

*Hijabista* established a panel of style experts ranging from fashion designers such as Ezuwan Ismail to experienced make-up artists such as Saidatulnisa. In addition, it also maintained a regular column called *Soal Jawab Fesyen* (Fashion Question and Answers) where renowned actress and *Muslimah* celebrity Wardina Safiyyah answered enquiries from readers on the guidelines of wearing the *hijab*. Credibility is an important aspect for both magazines, where a reader trusts and relies on the expertise and knowledge imparted by the writers of the published articles. The availability of an expert opinion further added clarity on wearing the *hijab*.

**Table 2.** Article sources

	<i>Nur</i> (n=33) %	<i>Hijabista</i> (n=40) %
Feature writers	22.5	27.3
Editors	6.1	5.0
Readers	6.1	12.5
Style experts	18.2	37.5
Religious elites	3.0	0.0
Business owners	9.1	0.0
Product consumers	0.0	10.0
Prominent figures	15.1	12.5
Academicians	0.0	0.0
Students	0.0	0.0
Professionals	15.1	0.0
Others	0.0	0.0

### 4.3 Framing the Hijab

There were several similarities between both magazines in their coverage of the *hijab* culture. Evidently, there was feature writing on female modesty that profiled key opinion leaders<sup>4</sup>, namely celebrities and famous personalities that have attained noteworthy achievement to a certain degree in their lifetime. With reference to Table 1, 18.1% of articles written in *Nur* tackled the issue of *hijab* wearing. For example, an article entitled *Juma – Tidak Boleh Muncul di TV* (Juma – Cannot Appear on TV) featured former television presenter, Datin Norjuma Habib, who married an aristocrat and has since started a fashion business selling *hijab* through the upscale brand, *Aidijuma*. This was followed by another article entitled *Yatt, Ana – Indahnya apabila bertudung* (Yatt Anna – Wearing the Veil is Beautiful) in the August 2012 issue detailing the experiences of two renowned Malay celebrities. Yatt Hamzah and Ana Raffali, a television presenter and a singer respectively. The celebrities related that they felt a sense of “acceptance” and “belonging” when they participate in religious forums whilst realizing that they are now “different” from others after deciding to veil themselves.

*Hijabista* also explored its secondary theme, the frame of *hijab* elite, in its introduction issue of June 2012 that featured film actress, Diana Amir. The actress and former sex symbol mentioned that she adapted quite easily to the *hijab* with the availability of

<sup>4</sup>According to Valente & Pampuang (2007), an opinion leader is an individual in the media that is capable of influencing the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations and behaviors of others. However, there is extensive literature that this leads to leadership and management of contained groups. Nevertheless, in a nutshell, the opinion leader is someone credible that may act as a role model to the public audience.

designer clothes such as collections from Wanpa, Khairi Sufi and Raffiey Nasir that cover the *aurat* in accordance with Islamic *shariah* whilst emphasising the importance for fellow *Muslimahs* to keep abreast of *hijab* fashion trends. Hana Tajima, *hijab* fashion designer and YouTube celebrity, accentuated class and personality in wearing the *hijab* during her interview featured in one of the articles. Indonesian designer, Dian Pelangi, highlighted in the article *Fashion is An Option – Love it or Leave It*, conveyed that she strives to change the perception of the public – that the *hijab* is not “backward” or only for village damsels.

However, the researcher found that the articles from each magazine were not written similarly. *Nur* used a very straightforward reporting method whilst *Hijabista* projected narratives that were more stylistic, using terms such as “*hijabista*”, “*hijabster*” “*hijabi*” interchangeably with reference to the readers. This approach seemed very unconventional yet provided personalisation that strengthened the bond between the magazine and its readers, creating the frame of ‘belonging’ to this newfound *hijab* community.

The misconception of *Hijabista* as a magazine for the *Muslimahs* was reiterated when its contents were found skewed towards fashion reviews and style recommendations. Best practices of *hijab* wearing from various sources increased its commodity as fashion rather than religiosity.

Table 3 illustrates the percentage of religiosity included in the magazines’ *hijab* wearing coverage. Maria Elena, a YouTube celebrity, revealed in one of the *Hijabista* issue that her fame was due to regular appearances in *hijab*-wearing tutorials and ability to share her fashion expertise. Maria is highly influential to the extent that she is currently the co-host and column advisor in the popular magazine show *Entri Jameela* on *Astro Ria*. Furthermore in the same issue, Hana Tajima was interviewed on her opinions of today’s *hijab* styles where she shared veiling trends in her hometown of London, also citing the term “*hijabi*” while adding on a new jargon called the “scarflets community” that referred to stylish Malaysian women in *hijab*. *Nur*, despite also focusing more on fashion advertorials and sponsored beauty columns from brands such as Alya Maysara, Sugarscarf and Radiusite, reiterated the importance of protecting one’s modesty, especially through its decent visuals at 48.4%. Most of its topics were relatable to religiosity as well, such as *Ramadhan semarakkan kasih sayang* (Ramadhan keeps the flame of love alive) and *Baru berhijab? Panduan buat anda* (A guide for those of you who have just begun wearing the *hijab*).

**Table 3.** Percentage of religiosity presented in articles

	<i>Nur</i> (n=33)	<i>Hijabista</i> (n=40)
	%	%
Article headline	15.1	15.0
Story content	24.2	22.5
Visuals used	48.4	30.0

**4.4. Visuals of the “Hijabi”**

As with other women magazines, photography is an essential retention point considering that these publications are meant for leisurely reading. All articles in both magazines except for three articles in *Hijabista* were accompanied by photos. Nevertheless, fashion editorials and advertising dominated the spread of the *Hijabista* magazine.

**Table 4.** Incidences of photographs in the coverage of hijab wearing

	<i>Nur</i> (n=33) %	<i>Hijabista</i> (n=40) %
June 2012	45.5	81.4
July 2012	61.1	77.1
August 2012	50.0	75.0

The analysis revealed that *Hijabista* devoted up to 81% of its content to fashion editorials and advertising with various professional photo spreads dedicated to present the contemporary *Muslimah*, comparable to international fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Cosmopolitan*. A discursive strategy emerged through these repetitive yet varied visuals that attempt to speak to the *Muslimah* audience on how to present themselves. In modeling products from retail and designer brands, some examples like Setinggi Angkasa in *Hijabista*’s introductory issue displayed models in silverish *hijab* wear in a spaceship-like setting. There were also many *hijab* tips that advised readers on the latest *hijab* trends, types of *hijab* to purchase and how to wear them. The main products that were advertised by *Hijabista* were scarves, clothing and accessories (such as bags, shoes, etc). A column called *Tiru Gaya* is a typical fashion magazine section that featured snapshots of celebrities and the clothing they wear while writers compiled information and visuals of similar clothing from various fashion suppliers to match the photo. An accompanying illustration showed how a *Muslimah* would possibly look wearing the ensemble in *Hijabista*’s June 2012 issue and this was consistent in the following issues.

Although it focused less on hard news, *Hijabista* still functioned in explaining the roles of the *hijab* and its importance to *Muslimah* readers. This justified its foray into *Muslimah* high fashion by featuring a detailed research on the “explosion” of *hijab* around the world in its July 2012 issue entitled *Cetusan Hijab Seantero Loka*. This feature story chronicled the evolution of *hijab* from its original purpose of protecting women in the Arabian peninsula to how Egypt and Turkey diversified materials, colours and designs to suit the extreme weather in the Middle East. To further add appreciation to the piece, public opinions from young women aged 23 to 31 years who agreed with the creativity and hybridity of the *hijab* fashion seen were also presented.

**Table 5.** Percentage of most emphasised frames

	<i>Nur</i> (n=33) %
1. Focus on business owners	21.2
2. Profile of prominent figures	18.1
3. Highlights of events in <i>hijab</i> community	15.1
	<i>Hijabista</i> (n=33) %
1. Sharing of <i>hijab</i> styles	27.5
2. Reiteration of modesty	13.5
3. Profile of prominent figures	12.5

To reassure the readers that they have made the right choice to veil, a more mind-stimulating feature article in the *Fakta* segment discussed scientific advantages related to the practice of *hijab*, where fragments of *The Science behind the Veil* were quoted. The author, Karima Burns highlighted that the brain controls the temperature of the body, hence by protecting it with the *hijab*, it will nurture a healthier individual. There were also interviews with readers and fashion designer, Siti Salmah Nordin of the up-and-coming brand *Yasalma* on current opinions and ideas for the celebration of *Eid*, one of the most anticipated festivities of the Muslim calendar besides *Ramadhan*. Respondents in this piece were 30 years old and below who preferred “modern” and “contemporary” styles to appear more “visible”, “trendy” and “classier” than others.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Scheufele (1999) claimed that framing, as a theory of media effects, benefited researchers as an independent variable in producing illustrations of a phenomenon through a more exploratory approach. Using this framing typology, the study found a structural dimension that touched upon patterns in arrangement of words and phrases. Several dissimilarities were identified in the analysis of the two magazines.

Conventional Islamic magazines for women such *Nur* is slowly losing its appeal to modernity and challenges of a globalised Islam. In a study of Malay women and the female body, Ong (1990) found that the Islamic revival in the 1970s saw a positive change among urban, educated women who embraced Arabisation and committed themselves to proper *dakwah* or abiding by the teachings of the Quran especially in dressing rules which were proliferated in the media (1990). This bricolage of ideas brought about many conflicting identities where resistance towards modernity by the 1980s was significant and enforced by religious nationalism and politics. Almost three decades later, scholars have asserted that the current “re-introduction” of the contemporary *hijab* or veiling-fashion has become a strategy for Muslim women to disassociate themselves from the labels of oppression and backwardness by emerging



as fashion-conscious consumers. This trend has also proved to be profitable for many parties such as advertisers and other media players (Wok and Mohd, 2008; Gökarıksel and Secor, 2009; Flew, 2007). With the growth of economy and consumer culture, media frames allow the audience to sift through and select their interpretation of an ideal personality that they would like to project. Thus, the frame built in *Hijabista* satisfies these desires by focusing on the retailing and glamorous aspect of the *hijab*. The frames produced by the *Hijabista* magazine are structured from cultural-based marketing whereby this strategy builds 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. Furthermore, key opinion leaders such as celebrities make the concept of the modern *Muslimah* a commodity through the reinforcement of keywords such as “*hijabista*” or “*hijabsters*” in the articles published, thereby inciting a sense of belonging and identification.

In comparison to a study by Boni (2002), magazines of the new millenia have become the showcase of luxury products and items that are claimed to boost self-confidence and sensationalise overnight transformations, modelled from the tradition of cosmopolitan female monthlies of the West. Similar to men in Boni’s research (2002) who in general may not be as concerned with keeping up appearances, conservative Muslim women are influenced to sexualize their images and persuaded to present themselves as “desirable”. As such, the frames presented in magazines not only offer the transformation of physical identities but also condition the inner discourse within.

Although *Nur* has long existed to guide the *Muslimah* on spiritual and religious matters, *Hijabista* editorials provide a global view of the *hijab* to create awareness of its culture and entice readers into applying the veil in what is considered as a widely-accepted projection in progressive Muslim-majority countries, including Malaysia. The communal experience rendered by the visual and textual information in the magazines which are mainly aesthetic, provides a sense of female empowerment as well as liberty from patriarchal forces whereby women can express their personalities through dressing and pursue liberated lifestyles like other women without the *hijab*. However, the *hijab* becomes a key evidence to the wearer that Islam is indeed the foundation of their faith, hence sets several limits and moderates their socialisation. This idea creates embedded memory within the minds of the readers that can be related to a study by Wilson (2012) who coined 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 religion-centric marketing to sports and music where it obtains “fans” or followers who can relate to the magazine’s content.

The usage of media frames in this study can be further extended and operated on a micro-level for future studies whereby in-depth analyses of individual frames and in-depth interviews can determine respondents’ perception of these frames, allowing congruence with the initial findings from this study.

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