Rethinking Hijab: Multiple Themes in Muslim Women’s Perception of the Hijab Fashion

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ABSTRACT

Hijab, originally defined from Qur’an (24:31), especially addresses Muslim women. Wearing the hijab is both a religious and a cultural practice. In America, the rise of the hijab fashion may give a chance to redefine it as a Muslim symbol, although what potential this chance has is still waiting to be investigated. This project examined the responses of Muslim women in America to the rise of the hijab fashion. 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with Muslim women currently living in US. Encoding/decoding theory developed by Stuart Hall was used to theoretically explain their perceptions of the rise of the hijab fashion in America. The results showed that Muslim women viewed the rise of the hijab fashion in America based on their decoding of the hijab itself. Multiple meanings of the hijab were revealed as different themes: religious practicing, in-group diversity, political symbol, women’s rights, fashion icon, and market power.

Keywords: Muslim women in America, hijab, fashion, religion, gender, market

INTRODUCTION

The case that this project will investigate is American Hijab Design Contest, which started on October 25, 2012 and ended on April 28, 2013. According to its website, this is the first fashion design contest of hijab in America. The final part of the contest was held in Chicago, partly because Shaz Kaiseruddin, the creator of this event, is a human rights attorney working in Chicago. Shaz proposed a rebellious logo for this contest, as “hijab is as American as blue jeans” on its website. More than 30 designers and 30 stylists attended this contest, providing over 700 images, 151 design entries and 69 style entries. The hijab designs in this contest were stylish and fearless, out of the traditional norms. Aside from many advocates to this contest, there were also fierce dissents from Muslim community. Some activists thought that the fashion of this contest was hideous (Donahue, 2013).

This contest was on the frontline zone of American hijab fashion. The embedded controversy, both in this contest and in the whole hijab fashion, is likely to exert certain impact on the American Muslim community, especially Muslim women who are supposed to wear hijab everyday as a tradition. Therefore, this project was designed to find out how Muslim women in America perceive this event, American Hijab Design Contest and how this perception would be infused into their understanding of the hijab symbol. Hence this project set up the research question as:

How do Muslim women in America perceive the American Hijab Design Contest?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hijab as a Symbol

Hijab is the headscarf worn by Muslim women. The word hijab originally means veiling. According to Qur’an (24:31), this word refers to “…to wrap their head-covers over their chests…” especially addressing Muslim women. Muslim women in hijab are constantly displayed in both everyday life and various media texts. Wearing hijab is also the most visible difference between Muslim women and western women. Therefore, hijab is a symbol of Muslim women. However, for the descent of Muslim immigrants in America, wearing hijab somehow is not only an ethnic dress for Muslim women, but also a choice for them with various meaning.

Controversy Produced by Hijab

Although in Muslim countries hijab has often acted as a fashion factor stepping on media stage, such tendency is recent to American mainstream culture. When hijab becomes stylish, the inner dilemma of hijab fashion comes out. This dilemma comes from the contrast between the traditional modesty-hijab style that Muslim women are asked to show and the modern stylish-hijab style that fashion industry demands. The ancient meaning of hijab is veiling and secluding women from men, and hijab suggests modesty as “righteousness” (Martin, 2004, p. 721)which is on the contrast to ostentatious current fashion requirements.

During the post 9/11 period, hijab has become a controversial political issue especially when hijab was banned in public schools in France in 2004. American media widely reported this event as well. Byng (2010) examined 72 related stories to
this event in two mainstream American media. The study argues that America takes it for granted that American Muslim women do not veil themselves in public nowadays.

There is another hijab related event that is also an evidence for it to become a political statement. Umme-Hani Khan is a young American Muslim woman who was removed from her sales associate position at Abercrombie&Fitch in 2010 because of wearing hijab. Last week in 9 September 2013, federal court ruled that Abercrombie&Fitch violated anti-discrimination laws about employees.

**Redefining Hijab**

However, the rise of hijab fashion may give a chance to redefine hijab as a Muslim symbol, although what potential this chance has is still waiting to be investigated.

Redefining hijab may provide more freedom of choice for American Muslim women. Some young American Muslim women now choose hijab as another method to find self-identify. As Haddad (2007) asserts, young American Muslim women begin to use the action of wearing hijab to show their belief in American value, which guarantees their right to freely express their own opinions and choose their religion.

In addition, hijab becoming a fashion factor means that the symbolic Muslim clothes have been gradually involved in the mainstream American commercial culture. Increasing media coverage of hijab topic can also strengthen this trend. Lots of hijab-fashion bloggers want to advocate this trend for different aims. Around American Hijab Design Contest, various mainstream media paid attention along with the official site, related blogs, and social media comments. Also, trendy Islamic clothing boutiques, mosque sponsored fashion shows, and online hijab shops all show some evidence to the rise of hijab fashion in American mainstream culture.

**Fashion Communication**

Fashion communication scholars argued that there was patterned links between attires and self-identification. In terms of the hijab, or the veil of Muslim women, Balasescu (2009) proposed that, because fashion was historically evolved from western centralized space, whilst veiling as a religious practicing was not contained in this west concept, the veil is hardly to become fashion.

Barnard (2002) demonstrated that fashion can be disclosed both to produce and to criticize identities. Barnard regarded the clothing both in material and cultural function. The material functions of clothing include protection, modesty, and attraction. The fashion’s cultural functions contain communication, individual expression, social status, economic role, political symbol, religious condition, social rituals, and also recreation.

**The Encoding/Decoding Theory**

Since fashion can be a space filled with identities, it’s meaningful to explore how Muslim women in America would perceive this hijab fashion event. The encoding/decoding theory proposed by Hall (1980) provided a theoretical lens to observe audience perception. Hall emphasized that the meaning that media producer encoded into texts would not be necessarily decoded as they wished. Audience will employ different strategies to understand and explain what they see, hear and read. Muslim women in America will adopt their own decoding intention to express agreement with, indifference to, or dissent against the framed media texts of American Hijab Design Contest.

**METHOD**

Researchers interviewed 18 Muslim women currently living in the US. Interviewees, whose age varied between 18-40, were recruited mostly from the Muslim community living in Syracuse. Based on the Contest official website, researchers also contacted the organizer, one of the participants and a hijab fashion designer.

Research team obtained IRB approval from Syracuse University IRB committee and also obtained informed consent from the participants for the interviews. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and all the interviews were done in a place chosen by the participant. Researchers respected participants who had a preference to be interviewed by a female researcher. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. Except two online interviews all were done face to face. All the researchers recorded and fully transcribed the interviews. After an agreement on common themes, the relation, consistency and opposition in these themes were analyzed.

**RESULTS**

Based on Owen (1984)’s thematic analysis inquiry, we found six major themes from these 18 in-depth interviews: Religious practicing, In-group diversity, Political symbol, Women’s rights, Fashion icon, and Market power.

**Religious Practicing**

Religious practicing theme is tightly related to the multiple meanings of the hijab. Participants showed different perceptions of the word hijab, but all of them agreed with that wearing the hijab means religious practicing.

In western civilization it is usually assumed that hijab refers to a garment that cover women’s hair. The researchers conveniently chose to use the term since it is the most prevailed usage of such term. Still, respondents pointed out that it should be called headscarf, but there is a deeper meaning to the word hijab.

The word hijab actually means to cover. I lived in Arabic speaking country right? They don’t say that this is hijab. They call you a hijabi, somebody who wears hijab. But it means that you are completely covered (Interview 15, personal communication, 2013).

Also, since because of the discrepancy between what the word actually means and how it was used in the interview, respondents mixed using the word hijab and headscarf to indicate the exact same construct.
However, some participants expressed a positive opinion of American culture. For instance, one participant said, “It has cultural aspects to it because different cultures bring different nuances to it” (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013). When participants were given to answer what hijab means in a semantic sense, they resorted in explaining it by relating to its religious meanings. Though hijab has its place in Arabic dictionary, the tendency of Muslims finding the meaning in Quran indicates that the word hijab has religious meaning to them.

Hijab is basically a religious responsibility; it is an obligation from Allah who is our God (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013).

Most of the participants agreed on the religious meaning of hijab that it is an obligation for Muslim women as they hit puberty. When they explain the meaning of hijab, they referred to some Islamic rules and Quran verses. One of the main points of those explanations was, this was not a man-set rule but a rule coming from the God.

Participants said not to choose practicing this rule is not the end of the religion, although they all accepted that it was a religious requirement. One of them told that any Muslim woman who does not wear hijab could not be seen as "promiscuous" (Interview 6, personal communication, 2013).

The participants who are not veiled said that they were wearing hijab when they pray. It was also expressed as a way of showing respect to religious places like a mosque. Some participants explained the religious meaning of hijab with the whole body image and also the daily behavior. One participant stated that hijab was a way of life related with how Muslim women behave. Besides, some of our participants expressed clearly that hijab was not only covering the hair but also there are some general rules about the whole body covering. In that sense, researchers got more detailed information from the participants in Islamic clothing. Mostly emphasized traits of Islamic clothing were to be loose fitting and not to attract attention.

It is not like, ohh yes you are allowed to wear anything as long as you have a scarf on your head. No, that is not the case. For example you cannot wear too tight in Islam (Interview 8, personal communication, 2013).

Those Islamic rules were the common criteria on how they looked at different hijab styles. Most of the participants were open to different hijab styles as long as it fits the Islamic rules.

In-group Diversity

The in-group diversity theme showed cultural nuances of hijab meaning. Data that fit the in-group diversity theme showed that understanding of hijab and hijab style varied in different cultures, since they now are in the same social group of Muslim community in America, we defined these differences as in-group diversity. Some of the participants claimed that the initial idea of hijab was coming from the Islamic believes but the way people wore it depended on regions and cultures. According to those participants, main practices about the hijab such as covering hair was the same in different regions. One participant emphasized, “it has cultural aspects to it because different cultures bring different nuances to it” (Interview 15, personal communication, 2013).

The evidence found that most of the participants took the black hijab as the traditional style of which they also related with the Middle East, especially Arab countries. They pointed out that there was no alternative for the black color in those countries.

As the black hijab was tied to mostly Arabic countries, it was obvious in participants’ responses that some styles or hijab colors were associated with some countries or regions. One participant told that Asian women chose “more colorful clothes” whereas Africans preferred “different prints” (Interview 6, personal communication, 2013). Some others also drew different images for Pakistani and Turkish women when they were talking about the regional variations.

Political Symbol

The political symbol theme contained the data that expressed the political meaning embedded in the hijab in the everyday life, its potential to be changed by the hijab fashion trend, and its role in affecting the routine life of Muslim women in America. Participants varied in their views of if they had been seen differently when they were wearing the hijab in public. Many expressed negative personal experiences according to the attitudes of other social groups. One participant emphasized that,

I took Fatima and we went to her class. The teacher was organizing the bookshelf, she turn to us we were at the door and she do like this. Ah.. you know, like this. [The participant made a surrender gesture.] Like she saw people who have gun. … The news and media is telling them who is Muslim, Muslims are like this they are terrorist or they are doing these bad things. People in their mind unfortunately we are like this (Interview 11, personal communication, 2013).

However, some participants expressed a positive opinion of American culture. For instance, one participant said,

You could become a target because you have a scarf on. It just openly shows that you’re a Muslim and they don’t care if you’re a good Muslim or a bad Muslim; you’re just Muslim and you could just become a target, that could be a bad thing. But … I just received good support from the people around me. They were all supportive and they were saying, it’s not your fault. It’s just some people are just trying to hurt American people, etcetera, etcetera. (Interview 10, personal communication, 2013).

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Participants were divided in their beliefs about the ability of the American Hijab Design Contest to empower the Muslim women community in America. Most echoed the sentiments of one participant who said,

I think if the contest is done in a proper way and again it is all about bringing clothes to fit the Islamic clothing criteria, if you are bringing in designers to make the clothes to look pretty and at the same time they fit in the Islamic dress wear than that is a positive thing that is a great thing that the audience that might be seen I have something to offer to these Muslim women... (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013).

Others saw the contest as no influence. One participant said,

Maybe this design is okay this is also very interesting I saw in the design contest. The woman has hijab also very stretch ... We say stretch or very tight pants. It's not Islamic because it shows her body, the shape of the body. About the dress also doesn’t affect me(Interview 11, personal communication, 2013).

The political symbol is tightly related to mass media portrayal. Almost all of our interviewees think the portrayal of hijab on mass media is too simple. Although it is getting better, most of them are still related to negativity. They disagree with mass media description of hijab that the reason why Muslim women wearing hijab is that they are forced to do so, by their husbands, families, and they do not have a choice. It is an oppression for Muslims women and hijab is always associated with negative meaning, such as terrorist or death of husband.

Many times media tried to paint that Muslim women are forced, Muslim women are oppressed, and Muslim women do not have a choice(Interview 5, personal communication, 2013). I think media see it as oppression, like women do not have rights. They don't speak to their husbands or brothers(Interview 6, personal communication, 2013).

Some of them believe that the misunderstanding of hijab is the result of limited portrayal of mass media, as one participant expressed the idea that "Because they would show you only one part, and sometimes this part isn’t even real"(Interview 9, personal communication, 2013). Or as,

In America when you say Muslim all the time in the TV, for example, there is a gun in everyone persons hand, I’m really unhappy for that. This is not our fault, I cannot say anything for that because when you look at the Islamic countries. This is our frustration unfortunately(Interview 11, personal communication, 2013).

They all hope mass media could have a better understanding of the meaning of hijab and Muslim. And I think it is because how far people understand it, like the hijab means, and for me, because in their mind, there is a kind of limitation (Interview 1, Personal communication, 2013).

Women’s Rights

Concerning the gender politics, the women’s right theme emerged from interviews. There are two types of evidences: choice and control. The idea of choice is defined as hijab wearers having the garment on themselves by their own decision, rather than by being forced to wear headscarves by family member or other people around them. Participants always commented that they wear hijab at their own will when they were asked of the reason why they wear it. They tried to make it clear that their fathers, brothers, grandparents, or husbands did not make them wear such garment.

First, some participants mentioned that it is one’s own decision to have a religious belief. Well...it means like the religion is always a choice, and like you can choose which religion you want to follow, and then after you choose that religion, you know like...for... Christians like go to church on Sunday, but some Christians do and some don't, so it's like that, like this is the rule of religion, but if you like follow that rule, you do, but if you don't, it doesn't mean that you are getting out of that religion (Interviewee 1, personal communication, 2013).

Meanwhile, some other believed that every Muslim woman is supposed to wear hijab.

I think one thing to make it clear to everyone is that hijab is not a choice. Hijab we believe is a religious obligation by God. So if you are a Muslim woman, once you hit puberty- you know it means different ages for different people- hijab becomes an obligation (Interviewee 5, personal communication, 2013).

Still, whether it is personal choice or not, it is not a result of male oppression. They are following their religion’s rules, such that teachings from Quran, rather than listening to people around them. Look, there are two specific verses in Holy Quran. It’s our commitment to Muslim woman to cover herself(Interview 12, personal communication, 2013).

A participant is wearing hijab, even though her mother, who is also a Muslim, has never once worn a hijab.

Because I read the holy Quran, my mom is also a Muslim. There is no problem for our country, if you want you can use, if you don’t you may not. I chose to wear it because I feel like using it. But I don’t have any explanation about it. Because I feel it in my heart that I can make it, I feel it very deep(Interviewee 16, personal communication, 2013).

They are also aware of the tendency of non-Muslim thinking that hijab is a result of male oppression on female. And sometimes they experienced racism for wearing hijab.
Exactly, like after 9/11, it is more sensitive issue. I think in America, many people think like women use hijab is because of the death or husband’s pressure, so it is a kind of...em...limiting their freedom (Interviewee 1, personal communication, 2013).

There was also evidence of control. Control took place when participants believed or found that wearing hijab results in empowering for women. Not every participants delivered this message. But when they did, participants actively promoted how they felt empowered by wearing hijab. In every instance the evidence was found, participants were not given with direct question regarding empowerment.

I tell people I never felt more powerful because I set the rules for myself. And not just showing everybody. (...) And in the pragmatic sense God made this very logical for me. Because woman are very objectified in our culture. I didn’t have any control when I was just Mexican. (...) Now I can control what it is that represent myself what it is I believe in, and how I interact with the world around me, and people around me they are almost forced to get me for those things (Interview 1, personal communication, 2013).

She started wearing scarves because she thought that was really a feminism. She thought this is really amazing. People usually thought that to be able to equal with a guy you have to dress like a guy. Or, that we have to expose ourselves. But she found that true feminism is really having the choice to expose yourself to someone or not (Interviewee 17, personal communication, 2013).

**Fashion Icon**

Data that contained the fashion icon theme mentioned portrayals of hijab as a fashion icon within the Muslim community. When some participants regarded the hijab as a fashion icon, others raised different opinions with the impact in which fashion will bring to the meaning of hijab. For example, one participant stated that,

I don’t want to make it like...fashion, because the meaning of it is want to protect us, protect women...and then when you make it more fashion, I don’t think it protect us, because it is also attractive (Interview 1, personal communication, 2013).

Similarly, some participants expressed the same feeling. For me, basically hijab is not a fashion actually, more of a life choice, but maybe yes. I sometimes try to wear and be more fashionable. I do make choices of my clothes, but still for me, hijab is not fashion. It’s just feeling, Islamic rule, what I want (Interview 16, personal communication, 2013).

On the contrary to these opinions, other participants agreed with the idea of the hijab as a fashion icon:

They look more beautiful to me. So, I think if hijab is adopted as a fashion icon, and even if that’s a very good point of designers promote hijab as a fashion icon, and it’s going to make an impression over the general audiences as well (Interview 3, personal communication, 2013).

Another concluded that this American Hijab Design Contest showed some different expression of Hijab. [They] are trying to show people to modernize the hijab a little bit and I think that that is okay as long as it does not exceed a certain boundary. I think they are trying to show the people in the Western world that we are just like them, there is not many differences just because we cover our hair, we dress like you, wear like you, inside of us we think like you, we are human like you we are people (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013).

Many participants described more specific ways that how the hijab did or did not become a fashion icon in their everyday life. Some participants mentioned a discrepancy between the fashionable meaning and the religious meaning of the hijab, while others thought that there would be a combination. One participant, for example, pointed out that,

I think the fashion is against the rule. So, you know, when you look at fashion, and people think fashion is the center, and they think the rule limit the fashion. For me, the rule is the center, is the main point, and fashion is thin got write something to against it, but the rule always comes the first (Interview 1, personal communication, 2013).

Another participant, however, expressed that,

I think for the people who do not understand the religion properly it could be perceived as a fashion item... You are fulfilling your religious obligation but at the same time because they are so beautiful you get so many compliments walking down the street on the beauty of the hijab and the colors and the way you wear it, is also become a fashion item (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013).

One factor detected by participants was the younger generation’s impact on the fashion leading. Some participants pointed out,

I mean that the trends has replicated around the world that...em...the girls, especially teenagers, especially Muslim teenagers are willing to experiment hijab in different styles (Interview 3, personal communication, 2013). For the new generation it changes because religion comes second. The life is becoming more, how can I say, more important (Interview 11, personal communication, 2013).

The organizer of American Hijab Design Contest said "Fashion, like I said, it’s a self-expression. It’s an art. It’s a talent. It’s fun." (Interview 14, personal communication, 2013). She explained the slogan of the contest is "As American as blue jeans" as trying to make people understand hijab is just as American as blue jeans, therefore, when people see a woman
wearing hijab, they don't assume that she's not from here. She believes that America in general is starting to become more used to seeing women in hijab and women who wear hijab are tending to explore different types of fashion more.

**Market Power**

Market power theme is related to all contents of marketing and business from interviews. Some of our interviewees mentioned that this American Hijab Design Contest is about the money and it's basically just business. Although the organizer said that "they did not ask any brand to sponsor the contest" (Interview 14, personal communication, 2013), the participants hold the opinion that this contest is about selling, business, and money since they don't think it is culturally based and the hijab in the contest are not based on the ideal meaning of women wearing hijab.

That is how they make money (Interview 10, personal communication, 2013).

They mentioned that according to their religion, the meaning of wearing hijab is to show their modesty, protect themselves, and not draw too much attention from other males, therefore the hijab should be loose and very simple that should not contain too much exposure and show the figure of women's body.

You know those fashion shows and things like that, I don't think they represent modesty in that sense. It's not that I will never wear any fresh dress or something. But they are like commonplace or something. So I don't think... (Interview 12, personal communication, 2013).

However, they think the hijab showing in this contest are not showing modesty of women because they are colorful, some of them are tight, and those women who wear hijab in the contest may not wear them daily, they are just models and do it for money.

But this is a business, this is a job they have to sell something. It's basically about selling (Interview 15, personal communication, 2013).

However, one of our respondents believes that it is not entirely about money; it depends on whom we talk to.

For the everyday person like myself it is not something how much money I can make it is more I need a right one to make myself comfortable with and at the same time I look appealing and I am not looking very different but it really depends on who you are talking to. I think for some people it could be a money issue. It could be you know how much can I gain from this image (Interview 5, personal communication, 2013).

Another interviewee believed that it is not about money, instead, it is calling and telling all Muslim women to come together, and kind of work on this together.

I don't think so. It's really, it's really involving...like, because it's a contest, it's calling, it's telling, like, I mean, like...calling all Muslim women to come to together, and kind of work on this together, and inspire other women to come out with their design skills and I think it's working and cooperating women and empowerment as well (Interview 4, personal communication, 2013).

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of American Hijab Design Contest in Muslim women community in America. The results showed that Muslim women viewed this event based on their decoding of the hijab itself. Multiple meanings of the hijab are revealed as different themes: religious practicing, in-group diversity, political symbol, women's rights, fashion icon, and market power.

**The first theme of religious practicing** showed the difference between mass media portrayal and perception of Muslim community. According to Islamic order, it is a personal choice to be a Muslim, and wearing hijab is not to be forced. Interviewees were aware of the stereotypical misunderstanding of outsiders, such as wearing hijab was always a result of oppression from males, regime, or family members. In addition, some participants expressed the idea that Muslims could find more religious freedom from wearing or not wearing hijab in America. They appreciated this freedom with making comparisons with countries where women were forced to veil themselves and also with the countries where women cannot veil in governmental positions or public schools. Although some of the participants talked about a few cases that they faced with some negative personal reactions against hijab, there was no evidence for any common opposition against hijab in America. In Muslim women's point of view, the religious practicing is the baseline of the hijab meaning evolution; even the creator of the American Hijab Design Contest admitted that the most important meaning embedded in the hijab is praying.

The participants illustrated the **second theme of in-group diversity** against the common media portrayal of over-generalized Muslim community. **The third theme of viewing the hijab as a political symbol** came from this over-generalization. Almost all interviewees were well aware of that there are historical, cultural, and regional differences in Muslim community. Hijab, and the American Hijab Design Contest, are examples of the cultural artifacts that represent the in-group diversity. While it tends to be thought to display only one style, the hijab actually has variety of styles, as this Contest and other hijab fashion showed. Although the hijab concept was coming from the same religious sources, there was an agreement on that there were cultural influences on how it was practiced. They implicated that beyond the fact that hijab was providing an identification of Muslim women in general, the style of hijab was also effective in identifying the in-group differences. One participant expressed that she could easily recognize the nationalities by just looking at the hijab style outfit.

**The fourth theme of hijab as women's rights** is also based on the elucidation of the religious meaning. The Muslim women's reflection on hijab's impact on relationship between individuals does not fall far from the teaching of Islam, "to protect women". However, participants displayed that wearing or not wearing hijab is an issue of personal choice, free
from the oppression of males or society. Some participants went deeper to indicate wearing hijab as a feminist action to empower women, which means that they acquired control on their relationship with male in their vicinity by wearing headscarves. They found that they can choose to reveal or not to reveal themselves, and are not objectified since they wear hijab. The dilemma here is that wearing or not wearing hijab can both become an action indicating women’s rights. Wearing hijab can be the submission to males’ power and also the anti-hegemonic strategy to male gaze.

This dilemma can also be extended to the fifth theme of viewing hijab as a fashion icon. According to Islam order, wearing hijab is to maintain modesty. However, the fashion industry tends to look for attractiveness. While participants said that they are following Islam order, many of them answered they like “better looking” hijab. The point where “modesty” becomes “trying to look attractive” varied between participants. Some participants thought this Contest violated the religious rule of modesty, paying too much attention on showing attractiveness. From the view of the fashion industry, one participant is a Hijab fashion designer and she explicated that hijab design should get the balance between modesty and fashionable. The organizer of the Contest also emphasized that she had done lots of effort to maintain appropriate meaning of hijab design in this event before she established this contest.

Related to the fashion icon, the sixth theme of marketing power emerged. Interviewees’ approach of viewing the American Hijab Contest as a marketing scheme was unexpected for the researchers. This view shows that to some extent, hijab is perceived as everyday normal garment, rather than a religious statement. Interviewees regarded this Contest and the hijab fashion as a function of marketing power. As a fashion item, hijab is a commodity with a potential in market. However, as echoed the organizer’s opinion, some participants indicated that the Contest and the hijab fashion could bring some new changes to the common representation of hijab in American culture. From British cultural studies’ lens, the hijab can be viewed as a symbol of the Muslim community’s subculture. Using market as an instrument, the hijab fashion can be infused into American popular culture. This Contest, as other hijab fashion events, was pushing the hijab and the underlying meaning into American culture fashion domain. Some participants indicated three clues that have impact on this marketing power: 1) the rise of younger Muslim women generation; 2) celebrity’s promotion; 3) the role of Muslim hijab designers who know both hijab meaning and American culture.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

A possible limitation of this research could be that most of our participants did not know about the American Hijab Design Contest before our interview. We showed them the introductory video of the contest via Youtube. Some communication problems occurred with non-native English speakers when they used religious terms.

In the light of our research, further study could be done with American people about how they perceive the hijab and how do they think about hijab as American as jeans idea. Future work could also examine the opinions of Muslim men in hijab fashion. This would give Muslim men a chance to express their ideas in the hijab concept where they are generally seen as oppressive.

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