The Influence of Popular Media on Young Indonesian Women Wearing Hijab

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Abstract : *Indonesia has been experiencing a rise in Islamic conservatism, and with that, a rapid increase in the number of women wearing the hijab. There has also been an increase in the production and consumption of Islamic content in popular media targeted at young Indonesians. This study analyzes how popular media influences girls in their decision to wear hijab. Findings from in-depth interviews using a snowball sampling technique of 10 university hijab-wearing students show that though they decided to wear the hijab because they believe it to be proper Islamic behavior, still, family, friends, and celebrities have also been influential in their decision. Indonesian popular media portray women in hijab in a positive light. All respondents agreed that throughout their experience wearing the hijab, popular media has served them in various ways, including style inspiration. Based on Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, most respondents have taken the Dominant-Hegemonic position when consuming media messages pertaining the hijab. A small minority, however, took the Negotiated position because they feel that the media should portray women who wear the hijab just as any other woman..*

Keywords : *Hijab, Indonesia, Reception Theory, Stuart Hall.*

BACKGROUND

Indonesia, a nation of 280 million people and the world's largest Muslim population, has been experiencing a surge of Islamic conservatism in recent years. Such movement is noticeable in almost all aspects of Indonesian society, including fashion (Harefa, 2018), tourism (Widagdyo, 2015), and media content (Indah & Zuhdy, 2020) and politics (Women's Media Center, 2022). Moreover, this movement has resulted in the upward trend in the wearing of the headscarf, or hijab. According to the 2021 Human Rights Watch report on Indonesia, approximately 75% of Muslim women wear the hijab, compared to 5% in the late 1990s. The increase is very noticeable in the hijab market. For instance, in Bandung, West Java, the hijab market's revenue went from 3 billion Rupiah (approximately US$212,169) in 2012 to Rp 15 billion in 2018 (Qibtiyah, 2019). Nationally, the Muslim fashion industry has also grown exponentially, reaching a US$44 billion global expenditure in 2016–2017, and is expected to reach US$311 billion by 2024. Vice President Ma'ruf Amin is of the opinion that being the world's largest Muslim-populated country comes with

opportunities and potentials for Indonesia to become the hub for global Muslim fashion (Antara, 2022, para. 9).

Muslim scholar and commissioner of Indonesia's National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) Alimatul Qibtiyah (2019) observes that there are

three main hijab styles worn by Indonesian women: 1) Simple veils, donned by up to 70% of Indonesian hijab-wearers, and come in many colors; 2) Conservative veils – also known as the shariah veil –, which are larger and cover the entire upper part of the body, and usually come in brown, black, and white. These are used by 10% of hijab-wearers; and, 3) Fashionable veils – usually worn by middle-class and urban women –, which are usually more expensive and come in various styles and colors (Qibtiyah, 2019). With such a prospective market, many Indonesian celebrities have decided to wear hijab and become endorsers of hijab fashion brands. Among the most prominent names in Indonesia's Muslim fashion industry is Dian Pelangi, who in 2010 founded the Hijabers Community along with 30 other Instagram celebrities (Harefa, 2018; Qibtiyah, 2019).

This rise in the number of hijab-wearers, however, is not without controversy. The NGO Human Rights Watch (2021) reports that the rising conservatism in Indonesia has led to discriminatory dress codes to girls and women. In January 2021, a public school non-Muslim student complained that she was forced to wear the hijab. The government reacted by prohibiting regional governments and public schools from making religious artifacts mandatory on student uniforms the following February. However, the Supreme Court canceled this decree by May, through a panel of three male judges claiming that those under the age of 18 cannot choose their attire (Salvá, 2022). Human Rights Watch (2021) also stated in its report that women and girls who refuse to wear the hijab are facing social pressure, bullying, and threats. Criticism also comes from some Muslim scholars (e.g., Latiff & Alam, 2013) who feel that it is wrong for modern Muslim women to chase after the latest fashion trends, "while there are those who like to romanticize and claim that at last the Hijab is becoming hip, what we are actually witnessing instead is the deliberate watering down of God's directive on the Hijab" (p.1).

Aside from the increasing number of hijab-wearers, the age of which Indonesian girls start wearing the hijab has also become significantly younger, as it is not uncommon to see babies and toddlers wearing a hijab in Indonesia. There are opposing views even within the Muslim community regarding this, however. Those who are for dressing young children in hijab claim that it will help them get accustomed to it, whereas those who are against it claim that the hijab is for sexually mature women to cover up their aurat, or private parts, and thus by dressing young children in hijab the children are being regarded as sexual objects and/or subjects.

This study seeks to analyze how the media influences girls in their decision to wear a hijab. In doing so, online in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 female students of 3 universities in

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the capital area of Indonesia. The 3 chosen universities are universities in which students wearing a hijab are a minority: Two of these are Christian universities, and the other one is an international university. The participants were selected using a snowball sampling method, and the average age of when they started to wear the hijab is 15 years old (based on the sum of the ages when each participant started to wear the hijab, and then divided by 10).

LITERATURE REVIEW
The History of the Hijab in Indonesia

Historical records show that the hijab was initially worn in 17th century by noblewomen in Makassar in the 17th century. Eventually in the 1900s, women in Java started to wear it after the founding of the Islamic NGO Aishyiyah. "Only a few of the Indonesian Muslim heroines wore the hijab in the past, and most of them did not wear it. This phenomenon tells us that the idea of wearing hijab is a personal preference" (Qibtiyah, 2019, para. 14).

Under Soeharto's New Order regime (1967 – 1998), religious issues in the public arena were under tight governmental control, thus women were prohibited from wearing the hijab at schools because it was deemed a foreign political symbol from Egypt and Iran, hence could pose a threat to government stability. After Soeharto's downfall, Indonesian society grew more accustomed to the hijab, and shortly it became trendy as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations, both agree that Muslim women ideally should wear the hijab (Karyadi, 2015). Numerous literatures, however show that there are opposing views regarding whether the hijab is actually mandated by God, or culturally prescribed in accordance with the life conditions during Prophet Mohammad's life. According to Smith (2010), the Quran does not really specify how much of the female body must be covered. Those in favor of the hijab, often cite certain Quranic passages such as Surah Al-Ahzab (33:59): "O Prophet! Say to your wives, your daughters and the wives of the believers, Let them cover their headscarves all over their bodies, this is so that they are easier to recognize, so they are not disturbed. And Allah is Forgiving, Most Merciful." and Surah An-Nur (24:31), which recommends women that "they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons or their sister's sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess or male servants free of physical needs or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex" (Ali, 2005).

Egyptian anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2011) posits that most Muslim women wear the hijab as a way of religious identity expression and that compared to those who do not, they believe that wearing the hijab makes them more pious. This is in line with findings from a 2014 survey, which found that 95% of women who wore the hijab did so for religious reasons. Other reasons include security, comfort and political reasons (Jakpat, 2014). Many public figures, especially politicians,

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however, often wear the hijab in political campaigns in order to secure more votes from religious sympathizers (Candraningrum, 2013).

The Hijab in Indonesian Popular Media

Studies of Indonesia's rise of Islamic conservatism indicate various methods of activism and agendas of diverse religious orientations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Salafis, Front Pembela Islam, and Traditionalists. Abdullah and Osman (2018) analyzed different new mediums of Islamic propagation using film, radio, and social media after Soeharto's downfall of Soeharto. Though popular culture is not always highly regarded in political and social studies, findings show, however, that Islam-based media, including pop culture, has proven to be a type of bottom-up Islamization in Indonesia, showing resistance against Western globalization. These Islam-based media play an essential part in the pluralization of the different Islamic discourses as well as normalizing Islamic conservatism (Abdullah & Osman, 2018).

One example of how pop culture has strived in Islam-based media is the rapidly growing hijab fashion trend and the emergence of Hijabers Community. The internet has given various choices of platforms for Muslim women to showcase their identity (Harefa, 2018). In 2011, fashion designer Dian Pelangi and Ria Miranda established the Hijabers Community. They eventually collaborated with 30 young women who wear the hijab. The community focuses on showing modern and youthful styles of wearing the hijab, while still adhering to the rules. The community ventured social media and initially thrived in Facebook and Twitter (Dewi, 2019). Today, Hijabers Community has branches in several cities in Indonesia, which hold various activities ranging from Hijab tutorial classes and Muslim fashion bazaars to monthly prayers (Dewi, 2019).

The increasing number of Indonesian women who wear the hijab cannot be separated from Dian Pelangi's mission to promote trendy headscarves and veils to girls and women and thus change the mindset that hijab wearers are old-fashioned (Harefa, 2018). At the time this paper was written, Dian Pelangi's Instagram account had 5.1 million followers. According to Dewi (2019), the meaning of the hijab itself has shifted. In the past, wearing the hijab was a symbol of women's obedience to their religious teachings, today wearing the hijab has become a lifestyle in itself, enabling women to wear make-up different styles of hijab to express themselves.

Traditional media have also served as platforms for the rising interest in the young Indonesians' religious life. There has been a rise in the supply and demand of Islamic themed transmission on popular media, targeted at teenaged audiences, ranging from TV programs and movies to Islamic teen literature, conveying Islamic teachings to its audience (Muzakki, 2010). Today's Indonesian media portray hijab-wearing women as figures who are open, smart, have high social awareness, and dare to appear as Muslim women who can be role models for other Muslim women (Miasih, 2015). However, according to Hermawati et al., (2016), the idea of beauty of hijab-wearing Muslim women portrayed on Instagram has shifted as it no longer prioritizes spiritual beauty, but

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has to include physical beauty, and this is influenced by patriarchal culture. These beauty myths are produced and transformed through media and technology internet using art, photos, designs, and make up.

Unfortunately, the rising Islamic conservatism has also led to a rise in harassment cases against girls and women who are not hijab wearers (Salvá, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2021), "In at least 24 of the country's 34 provinces, girls who did not comply were forced to drop out of school or withdrew under pressure, while some civil servants, including teachers, doctors, school principals, and university professors, lost their jobs or felt compelled to resign, according to the research" (Salvá, 2022, para. 18). The contents of mass media have also, deliberately or not, amplified this discrimination. This was evident in 2017 when a celebrity who goes by the name Rina Nose decided to no longer wear the hijab, and numerous celebrity gossip shows and online media made headlines that discredited Rina Nose's life choices, resulting in severe judgment and bullying, including a televised criticism by a famous ustadz (chaplain), Abdul Somad on the TV show Go Spot on November 30, 2017 (Hardyanti, 2019).

Stuart Hall's Reception Theory

Stuart Hall (2003) posits that message and reality are the effects of mass media ideology. The construction of reality is highly dependent on how a phenomenon or fact is interpreted or signified; thus, the mass media can become a means of ideological representation in certain public discourses. Encoding happens when the sender organizes ideas into symbols, including words and gestures for the purpose of communicating with the receiver. Decoding happens when the audience, or receiver, receives and compares the meaning of messages that have been stored in the minds of the audience. According to Hall (2003) messages can be decoded through three points of view or positions:

1. Dominant-hegemonic: The audience works within a code that dominates and exercises greater power than others. The audience accepts the meaning of a message as produced by the media.
2. Negotiated: The audience accepts the dominant ideology but will work with some exceptions to cultural rules.
3. Oppositional: The audience substitutes alternative codes for the codes provided by the media. Critical consumers will reject the meaning of a message that is chosen and determined by the media and replace it with their own thoughts about a particular subject. (West & Turner, 2008).

For Hall (2003), the process of decoding and encoding in humans is influenced by several factors. When there are differences in meaning, it is usually because there are also differences between the cultural experiences and social positions of the audience and the media producers. Effective communication will be achieved if an equal atmosphere or various meanings or understandings can be presented or have been built beforehand between the sender and receiver of the message (Hardyanti, 2019).

Therefore, the act of media consumption is not passive but rather active because consumption leads to a specific meaning (Hall, 2003; Hardyanti, 2019). In the case of the hijab, how Indonesian popular media constructs the wearing and not wearing of the hijab becomes a means of ideological representation in public discourses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Dominant factors that influenced decision to wear the hijab

As mentioned earlier, the number of Indonesian women who wear the hijab today have increased 70% compared to in the late nineties (Qibtiyah, 2019). They are also starting to take on the hijab at a younger age than did their sisters and mothers. This phenomenon makes one wonder what factors influenced these young Muslim women's' choice to start wearing hijab. Half of the respondents claimed that they decided to wear the hijab because of the religious calling:

> Because I understood that to wear the hijab is obligatory for girls and women in order to cover their private parts. However, one main reason was because when I got back from umrah, I read in the Quran that angels would follow me for 40 days after doing umrah, and that is why girls and women must cover up, so I did it for 40 days and just never stopped to this day. (D)

> At that time, I thought as a Muslim woman, I was supposed to cover my private parts. (C)

> My awareness about my responsibility as a Muslim. (G)

> Due to religious orders. (I)

Whereas the other half admitted that they were influenced by other people, such as family, friends, and celebrities, to wear the hijab:

> I felt so comfortable when I wore it and didn't want to take it off. Also, I admired someone who had already been wearing the hijab since she was young. She is Dian Pelangi. A fashion designer who has really succeeded until now. Because of her, many women have decided to hijrah (move) toward wearing a hijab. (A)

> …My family, especially my mom, and my best friend too. (B)

> In my extended family, once you become a teenager, you are advised, but not forced, to start wearing the hijab, so I felt compelled to do it. It still came back to my own decision, but when I was still a teenager, I already felt confident in wearing my hijab. (F)

> My parents, of course, because in our religious teachings it is written that a Muslim woman is obliged to cover her nakedness and wear the hijab to protect her body from all possible harm. (H)

My mother didn't wear a headscarf before, either, she started wearing one when I was about 3 years old. Then, my mother started to increasingly justify wearing her headscarf according to Islamic law. Therefore, my parents played an important role in this. (J)

It can be concluded, then, that the respondents willingly decided to take on the hijab in their teenage years based on their own understanding about their duties and responsibilities as Muslim girls. However, it must be noted that other people, especially family, friends, and celebrities play an important role in this decision.

Perception of how Indonesian popular media portray women in hijab

When the respondents were asked about their opinion on how Indonesian media, including TV, film, magazines, and social media, depict women who wear the hijab, all respondents agreed that the media depict these women in a positive light. Women in hijab are portrayed as good, pure, delicate, religious, beautiful, flawless, and stylish:

I feel that it all changed with the Muslim fashion designer Dian Pelangi. She was suddenly in all major fashion events like Paris Fashion Week and London Fashion Week. In regards to the Indonesian media, I think that women who wear hijab are always portrayed as good characters. There are many actresses today who are wearing the hijab, for example, Dewi Sandra and Laudya Chintya Bela, and people like me not only copy their fashion but also their behavior, we try to be more religious and use the hijab and participate in Quran recitations or donate to orphanages, just like our favorite celebrities do. (A)

For now, I saw a lot of celebrities who change their outlook to be more religious. And that is a good point. But it would be better if they didn't just show the changes. I mean, it could be more beautiful if the media showed the changes in their personality after wearing the hijab. Not only about the hijab itself, but how the hijab can change people to be better. (B)

I feel that the Indonesian media tend to depict women in hijab as delicate and are usually the ones being tested, what a shame! Hijab-wearing women should be depicted just as independent and strong as other women. (D)

Indonesian media often portray women in hijab as benevolent, pure-hearted, flawless women. Actually, that's not always the case in real life. Women in hijab make mistakes too. (F)

In my opinion, nowadays the media depicting women wearing hijab is no longer a taboo or strange thing, but nowadays many television programs are holding hijab contests, which symbolize that women wearing hijab can still look beautiful and fashionable. (G)

To be honest, I still see on several TV shows that women who wear the hijab are often played by housewives with plain appearances. However, now there have been changes such as women who wear the hijab, from children, teenagers to adults. Their style of dress is no less interesting, inspiring other women wearing hijab, including me. (H)

This is in line with findings from previous studies (e.g., Miasih, 2015; Hermawati et al., 2016) that show that Indonesian popular media portray women in hijab as not only being intelligent and having spiritual beauty - pious, have high social awareness, and are good role models to other Muslim women - but must also be physically attractive and stylish.

The influence of popular media on the decision to wear hijab

When being asked whether popular media had influenced their decision to wear the hijab, a few respondents claimed that the media had nothing to do with their decision. However, they admitted that once their decision was made, the media helped them:

Of course not…I am very happy and hope they can be an inspiration for women who have not used the hijab. (I)

The media doesn't affect me in my decision to wear hijab…I am proud, because now women who wear hijab can express freely, with no restrictions on positive things, such as fashion. (C)

No, because my decision came from my heart and then after I started wearing it, then the media helped me to beautify my hijab style. (A)

The majority, however, admitted that the media was influential in their choice to start wearing the hijab:

Yes, because media such as the internet makes it easier for us to choose and see the ongoing hijab trend, we realized that women wearing the hijab are actually quite common…Women who are successful in certain fields by wearing the hijab are still quite rare, such as in the fashion sector, very rarely do they use the hijab, so when someone succeeds or goes international, it immediately becomes an extraordinary topic. (E)

I once saw a program broadcast on TV, which stated that wearing the hijab is mandatory because if you don't, with each step that you take when leaving the house and meet people who are not your muhrim (no blood ties), your father will be tormented in hell. Then I also often saw women wearing hijab on social media, Instagram. I am very happy to see photos of them who are beautiful but still stylish and the styles are appropriate for my age. These have influenced me a little, though that is not the reason I wear the hijab. (F)

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The media is also very influential in influencing the decisions I make. One of them is the television broadcast of lectures about how for a Muslim woman, wearing the hijab is a must, and what the punishments are if she chooses not to. (G)

Yes, especially now that it is easy to access information in various corners of the world. If I'm going out of the house, I often see or watch videos of hijabers for reference to dress styles. There are also many hijabers on Instagram, for example, who make hijab tutorial videos and the like. (H)

You could say yes, because of the style accounts and several of these celebrities, I feel more confident when wearing different hijab styles. At first, my hijab looked ordinary and boring, and it became a style that was praised by my friends. I also learned how to mix-and-match hijab styles like them. (J)

It can be concluded that popular media has a strong influence on the respondents' experience of wearing the hijab. To some, the media inspired them to try different styles of hijab once they already decided to take on the hijab. However, to most of the respondents, popular media was actually influential in their decision to start wearing the hijab. Some of the factors include: Fear of punishment in the afterlife, inspiration from celebrities and public figures, and the realization that there are countless women their age who are wearing the hijab and do so stylishly.

From the perspective of Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, the vast majority of respondents as consumers of popular media have taken the Dominant-Hegemonic position, as they have accepted the meaning of a message as produced by the media. There were only a couple of respondents who took the Negotiated position, as they agree that it is the duty and responsibility of Muslim women to cover up with a hijab, but they also view that Indonesian media portray women in hijab as delicate and perfect, whereas they feel that Hijab-wearing women should be portrayed just as strong but also imperfect as other women.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analyzed how the media influences girls in their decision to wear hijab. Findings from in-depth interviews with 10 university students who wear the hijab show that they understand the wearing the hijab to be mandated by their religion, and believe it to be the right Islamic behavior. Nevertheless, other people, especially family, friends, and celebrities have also been influential in this decision. Indonesian popular media tend to portray women in hijab positively. They are depicted as good, pure, delicate, religious, beautiful, flawless, and stylish. Even though not all participants agree that they were influenced by popular media to start wearing the hijab, they all agree that in the process, the media has served them in various ways, including style inspiration. From the lens of Stuart Hall's Reception Theory, most respondents have taken the Dominant-Hegemonic position when consuming media messages pertaining the hijab. This means that the respondents have accepted the meaning of a message as produced by the media. A small

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minority, however, took the Negotiated position because they feel that popular media portray women as delicate, pure and perfect, whereas women who wear the hijab are just as strong but imperfect as any other woman. Nevertheless, they are pleased with the surge of Islamic content portraying hijab-wearing women in the media, and they agree that it is the duty and responsibility of Muslim women to cover up their aurat.

The in-depth interviews, however, did not discuss the controversies and criticisms pertaining to the hijab, including the pressure and bullying toward those who refuse to wear the hijab, as well as the commodifying of Islamic culture through popular media. Such topics should be discussed in future research studies using in-depth interviews with not only media consumers but also Muslim scholars and media experts.

As the surge in the number of women wearing the hijab started with the downfall of Soeharto's dictatorship, which strictly limited the wearing of religious attributes in the public arena, the Indonesian government, NGOs, schools and other public institutions must now work together to make sure that today's freedom to wear the hijab will not result in other people's reduced freedom.

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