

# INFORMATION DISCLOSURE IN THE BLOGS WRITTEN BY YOUNG MUSLIM WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is an examination of the usage of blogs as a platform for communication among a group of young Muslim women known as “Hijabista Bloggers”. The study adopted a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with the 10 young Hijabista bloggers to identify self-disclosure information in their blogs. All the bloggers were based in Kuala Lumpur and aged between 26 to 33. The findings indicate that the blogs, blogging practices and self-disclosure information reflate to major aspects of these bloggers’ lifestyles and identities as young Muslim women, focusing on narratives around the value and practice of wearing the hijab, fashion, religion, beauty, and the commercial aspects of blogging. Additionally, other than blogging, the study indicated that bloggers used new social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook to communicate and exchange information with other Muslim women regarding beauty, fashion, faith, and hijab related issues. That is to say that these bloggers appear to be more likely to self-disclosure and portray idealised Muslim women identities in online platforms. As a result, most of these Muslim bloggers become Hijabista social media influencer who represents the modern and modest Muslim women in Malaysia. In sum, this study demonstrated the young Muslim women empowerment through the usage of online digital communication technology for their visibility and well-being.*

**Keywords:** Self-Disclosure, Blogging, Blogs, Hijabista, Muslim Women, Identities

## INTRODUCTION

The adoption of blogs in Malaysia has seen a significant growth in the last few years (2000-2004) and many people in Malaysia reported feeling satisfied using and reading blogs (Subramaniam, 2014). Also, Malaysia is the home of 500 thousand active bloggers, which places the country among the topmost users in the world after Indonesia (1.5 million bloggers) and the European Union (26.5 million bloggers) (Utusan, 2011; Technorati statistics, 2011). Based on Technorati statistics (2017), various niche areas of blogs are found, such as technology, politics, parenting, travel, interest and music blogs, but personal blogs are among the most widely published blog types in Malaysia, with more than 15,000 bloggers who are more likely to write about personal stuff. Also, Technorati statistics data (2011) reported that 81 percent of Malaysians are most interested in reading personal blogs, especially those written by their friends or family. This evidence of the popularity of personal blogs over the other blog genres in Malaysia further supports the need for closer examination to understand these practices in greater depth.

Regarding gender and blogging in Malaysia, evidence supports the notion that personal blogs are widely used among Malaysian women for various purposes, such as to share and exchange information about their interests, experiences, as well as to record more personal matters (Mustapha and Wong, 2012; Yusof, 2009). In fact, the female bloggers (55%) overtook their male counterparts (45%) in the number of personal blog users (Internet Users Survey, 2017). Overall, personal blogs continue expanding their influence on women in society, especially among young women, as they dominate the blogging activity. According to

Technorati (2015), the findings from an online survey on the blogosphere in Malaysia conducted in 2015 showed that the majority of bloggers (76.8%) were young adult women (aged 25-35 years old). Among the popular personal blogs in Malaysia (e.g. Rnadia.com, Myamethyst.com, Pelik.com, Cikepal.com and Honeykoyuki.com), are those written by a group of young women bloggers known as the *Hijabista* (InTrend, 2011). Given the statistics on the growth of female blogging in Malaysia, it is pertinent to consider the nuances of the blogging culture.

The choice of studying the personal weblogs of the group of Malaysian female bloggers collectively known as *Hijabista* is based on their active participation in blogging, their influential personalities (e.g., young, fresh, stylish, modern hijabi) and the popularity of their blogs. The *Hijabista* is a group of young hijabi female bloggers, who actively blog to document their personal lives. Also, this group of bloggers have received much attention in the local media, including newspapers (e.g. Berita Harian, Utusan Malaysia & The Star) and magazines (e.g. InTrend, Jelita & Hijabista) for their blog stories, which focus more on their achievements, especially in their careers, as well as their interests in fashion, in particular the hijab, that are reportedly inspiring many young women in Malaysia (Aquila Asia, 2011). The explosive popularity of this group of female bloggers makes them an excellent choice to understand the blogs, blogging practices and self-disclosure information.

## Problem Statement

It is well established that blogging has become a global social phenomenon. Despite the rise of Microblogs (e.g., Twitter and Instagram), blogging is still one of the major digital platforms of communication for many people to engage in self-disclosure and to express ideas and feelings online (Boyd, 2014; Guernsey, 2002). However, most of the research on blogging has focused on Western communities and contexts, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom (Blood, 2002; Bronstein, 2013; Herring et al., 2004; Mienel, 2015; Pedersen & Macafee, 2007; Rettberg, 2008), while only a small number of studies have been conducted in Asian countries, such as China and Taiwan (Chen, 2012; Hsi & Kuo, 2009; Tang and Wang, 2012). Hence, more research is required to gain a comprehensive and representative picture of the blogging and self-disclosure phenomenon in other Asian countries. Researching Muslim females' self-disclosure in their blogs in Malaysia may provide unique insights as women in Malaysia have the democratic right to express and share their opinions on the Internet, e.g. the freedom of speech. Also, gender, culture and religion seem to have an important influence among Malay women bloggers' self-disclosure in Malaysia.

In fact, studies on self-disclosure among Malaysian bloggers, blogs and on blogosphere are quite limited. According to Lee (2015) most studies on self-disclosure in Malaysia have focused on various SNSs, as compared to blogs, such as youths' self-disclosure in social media (Salleh et al. 2012), factors influencing self-disclosure on SNS (Elmi et al., 2012; Tanakinjal et al., 2012) and disclosure in the the SNS community (Kok, Lee & Chong, 2015). Meanwhile, research regarding information disclosure on blogs is still limited to self-disclosure and well-being among Malaysian bloggers (Lee, 2015), self-disclosure and privacy of Malaysian cancer patients blogs (Zakaria, 2007), and self-disclosure among various bloggers in Malaysia (Lee, 2015). However, little research has specifically investigated on women bloggers and their information disclosure on blogs. The following research questions have been addressed:

## Research Questions

- RO1: What are the types of information disclosure that shows blogger's identity on blogs?
- RQ2: What do self-disclosure patterns reveal about *Hijabista* identities on blogs and in what form?
- RQ3: What are the other self-disclosure topics that do not fall into any expected or main topic category?

## Aims and Objectives

The general aim of this study is to explore the types of information disclosure in the blogs written by young Muslim women in Malaysia.

Specifically, focusing on a group of *Hijabista* bloggers in Malaysia, this case study on the Muslim women bloggers is the first to investigate types of information disclosure via blogs. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

RO1: To identify the types of information disclosure that shows blogger's identity on blogs.

RQ2: To investigate self-disclosure patterns on blogs in various forms, such as personal information/text, photos and videos incorporated in the blogs and reflect *Hijabista* identities.

RQ3: To identify other self-disclosure topics that do not fall into any expected or main topic category.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Blogging, Gender and Self-disclosure

Blood (2002) defines blogs as frequently updated websites containing reasonably concise materials, which are posted and listed in reverse-chronological order, with the most recent posts usually showing at the top of the page. According to Schmidt (2007), blogs are often created with trackbacks and comment functions. Huang, et al., (2007) described the blog as an interactive computer-mediated communication due to its features that have a mixture of text, images, audio and video items to facilitate communication, while Kaye (2007) described blogs as a combination of website, bulletin board and e-mail, usually used as a one-way or two-way form of communicating. Since 2000, blogs have been used widely as an alternative communication tool for people to share their ideas, thoughts, feelings and personality traits on the Internet (Fung, 2006). The popularity of weblogs is closely related to the extremely easy software for anyone to become an online publisher without having much technical knowledge of web design (Derr, 2011).

Blogs can be viewed both as gender spaces as well as a space for performing gender (Chow, 2006). Prior studies have investigated gender in relation to blogging and self-disclosure and found that gender and age have a significant relationship to self-disclosure on blogs (Dindia, 2002; Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Hollenbaugh, 2011; Lenhart & Fox, 2006). According to Herring et al. (2005), young female bloggers are motivated to use blogs as a medium to disclose about the self and private topics. Regarding the age of blog users, Steinberg (2002) finds that blogging is particularly attractive among young females aged between 25 to 30 years because it has the potential to contribute to the growth of self-consciousness and self-awareness. Similarly, Blood (2000) found that younger females are mostly attracted to blogging, as the blog enables them to create a personal space to participate in discourse, develop online friendships and use technological features (e.g. visual images, text and sound effects) to communicate with one another. Thus, gender differences, age and the website features can be the main predictors of online self-disclosure (Kim, 2007; Kim & Dindia, 2008; Wright & Webb, 2011), which this study will explore.

Numerous studies on gender and CMC have found that gender is performed quite distinctively in the context of blogs (Karlsson, 2007; Kim & Dindia, 2008; Wei 2009). For instance, women bloggers disclose more intimate information on their blogs compared to male bloggers (Bortree, 2005) and they are more likely to share their personal experiences in their blog posts (Lenhart and Fox, 2006). In addition, in the study of gender and blogging, Argamon, et al., (2007) found that female bloggers are more likely to post about personal and private issues, whereas male bloggers are more interested in blogging about business and politics. Similarly, Pedersen & Macafee, (2007); Tang & Wang, (2012) found that blogs have become an essential platform for many women to convey their feelings and thoughts, while men's blog content focuses on sharing information and providing opinions. Therefore, Pederson (2010)

claimed that women are more likely to use blogs to explore themselves and be with like-minded people (e.g., join special interest groups and build communities online).

In communication studies, self-disclosure has often been considered as important aspect for social interaction, or for a relationship to be developed in offline and online settings (Baym, 2010; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Also, Greene, Derlega & Mathews, (2001) propose that self-disclosure can be described as any kind of verbal or nonverbal type of communication by which a person discloses to others. For instance, verbal communication includes personal opinions, feelings and experiences. Meanwhile nonverbal self-disclosure is generally concerned with physical appearance. According to Dindia (2000), self-disclosure has been defined traditionally as occurring face-to-face in the offline context where people reveal things about themselves directly to others including private, intimate and risky information. It is generally true to say that self-disclosure is a process of communication for a person to willingly open-up his/her personal information to others. Self-disclosure is a significant concept to this study, as this paper analyse blogging and information disclosure on Muslim women's blogs. Overall, blogging and blog provides new spaces for women to participate in discussion, enabling their voices to be heard, and to enact their feminine identity online (Chen, 2015). Other than communication, blogs provide a place for women to construct narratives and share real stories, which is an important aspect of their identity portrayal.

### **Identity in Online Environment**

Identity plays an important role in the study of self-disclosure online (Thompson, 2007). Castells (2004) defines identity as a set of behavioural or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group. Ellison (2013) identifies two spectrums for understanding identity: firstly, identity is a construct that encompasses what people believe about themselves, as well as how they behave and affiliate with others in a broader setting. For instance, identity can be seen as individual or personal differences, such as the different ways people interact with others. Secondly, identity attributes are associated with the individual's gender and ethnicity as it connects to their culture and social identities. Therefore, the information that people disclose about themselves online is usually the reflection of their social, cultural, and personal identities, which include gender, ethnic and religious identification.

Nowadays, SNSs and blogs offer unprecedented opportunities for people to be themselves by encouraging disclosure of personal information (Wright & Webb, 2011). According to Boyd (2014), in this new digital era people go online to socialize with friends they already know from physical settings or to develop new relationships. In this case, people are tied to the real connections and they prefer to use their real names and reveal true information. Therefore, Haimson & Hoffmann, (2016) claim that nowadays people often construct and enforce authentic identities online. Authentic means a person being true to one's own personality, spirit and character (e.g. the identity is non-anonymous or known by others). In the case of personal blogs, authenticity can be understood as something that bloggers socially construct rather than inherit (Pederson, 2010). Therefore, scholars have theorized the blogs as a technology of identification in which blogs have become a new context for people to present their identity online (Ellison, 2013).

According to Benkler (2006), the blog is considered as one of the technologies of the self in which females enact their identities and reveal their femininity on the blogs. Similarly, Stern (2004) argues that the blog is an important component of the identity construction process for women, while Mohaini (2006) finds the blog is a projective medium for women to reflect on their individual authentic identities online. Therefore, through personal blogs, women are able to enact their gender and identities by disclosing both verbal and visual information (e.g. pictures and videos) and form relationships with those who read their blogs (Doorn, Zoonen & Wyatt, 2007). This study aims to explore deeper into what has been argued about women blogging so far and to develop a better understanding of whether biological factors (e.g. nature,

individual/personal or socio-cultural) drive them to blog and to follow specific patterns of self-disclosure and identity portrayal which are demonstrated in their blogs.

### **Blogging and Identity in the Malaysian Blogosphere**

The rise of cyber communities (e.g. blogging) has led to the identity transformation of bloggers upon going online, where they need to transform their real selves into virtual identities, while maintaining their authenticity (Yusoff & Hussin, 2014). In fact, many researchers (Mohani 2006; Rak, 2005; Yusoff & Hussin, 2014) found identity empowerment through blogging in which users can create and re-create their online identities due to the nature of CMC. Furthermore, blogging was found to render the most accurate reflection of a person's real self on blogs compared to other SNSs. In fact, bloggers commonly construct their real online identities on blogs as their blogs mostly focus on and reflect their own personal lives.

In fact, Abdul Latiff Ahmad (2011) argues that in Malaysia, blogging has created an impact on individuals' lives in these three important aspects: identity, empowerment and interaction. First, blogging has brought Malaysian identity to a new level of authenticity online, especially when users portray his/her real self. Second, blogging provides a form of empowerment for many Malaysian bloggers to deliver their opinions online. Third, blogging has increased the level of interactivity and confidence among Malaysians to communicate with one another (Abdul Latiff Ahmad, 2011). Therefore, blogging gives many Malaysians the opportunity to develop their individual identities online. Thus, there is a need for this study to investigate the way in which a group of Malaysian Muslim female bloggers' identities are being portrayed through blogging.

### **Women Empowerment through ICTs in Malaysia**

Since Malaya achieved independence on 31 August 1957, women in this country have had the right to vote in elections, get involved in politics, seek higher education and hold upper-level jobs in both public and private sectors (Kalthom, Noor & Wok, 2008). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2016), the population comprised 15.3 million females and 16.4 million males. In the last ten years, there has been a big shift in the gender balance in Malaysia, especially in university enrolment and within the educational work sector. In fact, the number of women (280,296) had begun to outnumber men (230,858) in university enrolment and women were also dominating the teaching industry. Hirschman (2016) found that women in Malaysia were actively participating in the economy as they also contributed to human and socio-development in the country. These conditions have led Malaysian women to dominate many work sectors and contribute to the growth of socio-economy and education in the country. Hirschman (2016) therefore claimed that women in Malaysia seemed to be treated equally as men, in being given many opportunities to develop their own careers and contribute to economic growth.

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly the Internet, has effected changes to the organization of work and daily lives of many people in a developing country like Malaysia (MCMC, 2019). In fact, from 2000-2005, Malaysian women were found to already have better access to the facilities and at ease with the technology as compared to women in other Asian countries, such as Indonesia and Thailand (Norizan Razak, 2005) . According to Farida (2004), women in Malaysia had become active users of the ICT and e-commerce in society (e.g. using the Internet for a variety of reasons - for communication, leisure, entertainment and work) due to early exposure to computers and to the Internet. For example, many women engage with information technology through the Internet in various contexts, such as at university, through public access points and at work. Although the progress achieved by Malaysian women in Internet and communication technology is remarkable, still more research needs to be conducted focusing on women's involvement in new media.

Therefore, this study fills the gap by studying Malay Muslim women, specifically a group of young Malay Muslim female bloggers, identifying their uses of blogging as a new communication platform.

### **Hijabista Bloggers and their *Hijab* Identity in Malaysia**

The maintenance of women's Islamic identity in Malaysia has been upheld through the embodiment of specific interpretations of the Islamic values of modesty and femininity, expressed through dress codes (Hirschman, 2016). According to Hassim (2014), the changes in Malay Muslim women's dress codes and veiling were associated with wider political and social transformations in the country, so too is the *hijab* movement encouraging many Malay Muslim women to adopt the Islamic dress code. In addition, Saleh (2010) claims that the Malaysian government also emphasizes the enforcement of specific dress codes for women (e.g. baju kurung, long dress or blouse), especially in public places in this Muslim-majority country. Therefore, Yang and Ishak (2011) point out that the identity of Malay-Muslim women has been shaped by local politics and developments in the socio-economic landscape since the independence of Malaya in 1957 where Islam is established as the official religion in Malaysia.

Ironically, the *hijab* or known as headscarf was never really a strong part of Malay tradition, but the increasing knowledge about Islam has created a newfound awareness of Islamic culture and Malays have started looking towards other Muslim countries for ideas and inspiration, especially in making decisions about covering their heads. For instance, in 1980, many Muslim women in Malaysia were influenced by the Malay Muslim women students who studied at universities in Arab countries and brought home ideas of dressing in the long dress and *hijab* after the Iranian revolution of 1979. The practice of covering one's aurat (body) was made familiar to the Malaysian Muslim women through the introduction of the Muslimah couture in the 1980s (Hassim, 2014). Since then, many Malay Muslim women have made a huge change in their appearance by wearing loose attire and the *hijab* to cover their heads (Saleh, 2010). Therefore, Mouser (2007) argues that the 1979 revolution is marked as the year of the adoption of the Islamic dress code consisting of the *hijab* and long dress, which have been widely accepted for Malay women as an act of practising the religion.

In a study of weblog usage in the Malaysian blogosphere, Mustaffa (2011) found that blogs seem to be among the most influential media in Malaysia, enabling young Muslim women to provide essential information regarding lifestyle, beauty, parenting, the *hijab* and fashion to their readers. According to Hassim (2014), in Malaysia, young Muslim women also use the blog as an online activism platform where they develop the modern Malay Muslim identity, centring on their lifestyles, fashion and the *hijab*. Further, Hassim (2017) found that the local *hijab* phenomenon (e.g., evolution and visibility of the *hijab*) is strongly associated with the diversity of content and the accessibility to a multitude of social media platforms. Therefore, Hussein (2009) found that the growth of the *Hijabista* movement was a result of a global Muslim women's movement, based on various digital media consumptions. This therefore calls for further studies to understand women and the *hijab* movement via blogging in the Malaysian context.

In addition, Hassim (2017) defines *Hijabista* as an expression of the female Muslim cultural identity centred on the *hijab* as a transformative socialization agent for Malay-Muslims, which is far from the traditional use of the *hijab*. Hassim (2017) also claims that the globalization of veiling across Muslim-majority countries have commodified the *hijab* as a product of Malay sovereignty rather than a symbol of religious obligation. In fact, *hijab* becomes the one of essential accessories to match with everyday outfit. The *Hijabista* phenomenon in Malaysia is heavily tied to women's media production and consumption. Hence, the growing prevalence of these new images of young Muslim women hints at the potential to re-shape imaginations in the West and open up possibilities for Muslim women to disseminate ideas about the Muslim feminine movement around the world.

Overall, identity plays an important role in the representation of the *Hijabista* bloggers in the Malaysian blogosphere (Hassan & Harun, 2016). They were mainly comprised of a group of young Malay Muslim women bloggers, young (between 25-35 years old), wear the *hijab* with trendy clothing, as well as construct the ideal representation of their religious identity (e.g., modern and modest Muslim women). Most of the *Hijabista* bloggers are inspired by the diverse representations of Islamic modest fashion promoted by famous international *hijabista*, such as Hana Tajima, Dian Pelangi, Dina Tokio and Ameenakin that enables them to experiment with their looks and identities on their blogs (Shea, 2010). According to Hassim (2014), these *Hijabista* bloggers take an active role in the social construction of identity in the Malaysian blogosphere. For example, by deciding what to wear or consume, these young Malay Muslim women construct their online identities as modest Muslim, young, trendy and Malaysian. Also, Salleh (2012) highlighted that these young bloggers display the spirit of fresh, cool, modern and fashionable Muslim women in Malaysia, making blogging about lifestyles and *hijab* fashion increasingly popular.

## METHODOLOGY

### The Qualitative In-depth Interviews Method

The qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to examine bloggers' information disclosure and drivers for self-disclosure on blogs. Ten of the *Hijabista* bloggers were selected, via purposive sampling, to be interviewed. Participant selection is aligned with the purpose of the study. Basically, the participants were drawn from within the *Hijabista* bloggers. In total, the 20 *Hijabista* bloggers were identified. Based on the purposive sampling, participants were selected according to the three primary criteria relevant to this study:

1. Participants must be among the *Hijabista* bloggers as this study focuses on the information disclosure on their blogs.
2. Their blogs must be popular and have higher number of viewers; this will be determined by the total number of page views (more than 50,000 views is set as the minimum).
3. The bloggers must be active in blogging by updating their blogs on a regular basis.

To begin the recruitment, the selected individual bloggers were contacted by email through the links provided on their blogs. The email invitation included a description of the background and importance of the research, and the reasons for choosing interviews as the method for data collection. Participants were free to decide whether or not to allow their real names to be used in the research. It is believed that the semi-structured interviews may lead to a better understanding of the issues. Data from interviews was transcribed and analysed using NVivo 12 software. Thematic analysis was employed to identify the main themes emerging from the data.

Furthermore, the interview topic guide was used as the main instrument to interview participants (See Table 1). The topic guide does not comprise a list of fixed questions, but rather a guide of topics or areas of discussion. This is precisely the element that encourages open discussion between the interviewer and the research participants. In fact, it allows the participants to convey their answers freely, without any influence from the researcher. Therefore, open-ended questions are normally used in the interview to encourage participants to talk on specific issues as well as to make them feel comfortable throughout the session (Hammersley, 2012). Also, the order of the topics in the interview guide can vary depending on the type of the interview, the nature of the topic under discussion and the profile of the interviewee (Angus, 2013).

<b>Table 1</b> <b>QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW TEXTS</b>	
Discussion area: The degree and drivers of bloggers' information disclosure on blogs. 1) Understanding information disclosure, its dimensions (breadth/topics) and drivers for self-disclosure in blogs 2) Blogs as communication platform for young Muslim women bloggers 3) Bloggers' identity portrayal on blogs	Thematic analysis: 1) Explore the theme 2) Explore contrasting views 3) Identify new theme

In addition, thematic analysis was employed to this study (See Table 1). The coding process was developed and the coding of the interview data was both question-driven and data-driven (from the transcripts of the in- depth interviews). This study used thematic analysis as it can produce an insightful analysis of qualitative interview data to help answer the research questions. In fact, this approach facilitating deep investigation of the findings from two perspectives: (1) from the data perspective, it provides sufficient information to the study of self-disclosure; and (2) from the perspective based on coding in a deductive way, it provides a good way of checking if there are new possible themes to be generated from the interview data. Therefore, using thematic analysis of interview data served the purpose of the study, as it enabled the effective categorization of coding on the theme of information disclosure on blogs written by young Muslim women bloggers.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Basically, the interview findings bring up two primary themes concerning the self-disclosure information and identity portrayal among the *Hijabista* bloggers: (1) lifestyle themes including hobbies and interests, health, groups and communities, events and activities, physical appearances, and future plans and inspirations; and (2) views and experiences related to the *hijab* and fashion as well as religious issues. Also, the findings indicate that *Hijabista* bloggers appear to be more likely to self-disclosure and portray idealised Muslim women identities on blogs.

### Lifestyle and Hijabista Identities

Lifestyle covers various aspects of bloggers' private lives including their hobbies and interests, groups and communities, events and activities, health, future plans, as well as their physical appearances and the condition of their bodies. One of the bloggers, Yana, states that blogging about her lifestyle involves doing so about anything relating to her private life and the things she loves the most. She says that blogging about lifestyles is a trend, suggesting that almost every personal blogger discloses such topics on their blogs:

*Most of my blog posts contain information regarding my lifestyle. The topics focus on my typical life, such as day-to-day activities, hobbies, interests, events, health, groups and communities. It's a trend! I witness many personal bloggers simply share information about their lives and whatever else might be going on, on (their) blogs.*

Moreover, several participants mention that blogging about lifestyles may influence others to maintain a positive outlook on life. In fact, these bloggers believe that personal lifestyle topics bring more positive vibes and inspire others in various ways. The finding suggests that postings on lifestyles make for relaxing reading, through which most of the bloggers aim to influence their peers. For instance, Nurul mostly posts on her blog about the things she does to improve her everyday lifestyle. She likes to focus on a healthy lifestyle, a positive attitude towards life, and all the activities that make her feel happy. Also, she offers diet



tips on her blog, along with ideas for fun activities, and she shares great life experiences that readers can delve into. She states, in this respect:

*I like to share details about my personal lifestyle on (my) blog, especially regarding a healthy lifestyle where I try to provide the information related to diet and food. I have always had a positive attitude towards my life and I would love to provide some advice to my readers - to stay positive, and avoid negativity. Obviously, I like to have day-to-day activities that make me happy including cooking my favorite meals, attending social events, gardening and travel. It seems like I'm having a good time every day! I hope sharing this would motivate people to have a good life.*

Overall, most of the *Hijabista* bloggers explicitly stated that they often disclose information regarding their lifestyles on their blog posts. For example, Nadia feels comfortable talking about her lifestyle on her blog. She pointed out that it is good to share lifestyle information with her readers, such as interests, hobbies, events, health updates, and activities with some limitation (e.g. at the intermediate level) as she does not want to overshare certain aspects of her everyday life. For instance, when discussing diet, food and a healthy lifestyle, she decides not to disclose her body weight (too intimate for her). She prefers to talk about her 'favourite foods', 'balanced meals' and 'exercise routines' as this information is also commonly shared by other female bloggers. Thus, the finding reveals that most of the bloggers express cautiousness in the disclosure of such information, where they apply selective self-disclosure for lifestyle topics.

### **Hijab, Fashion and Religion**

*Hijab*, fashion and religion are some of the significant findings highlighted for information disclosure on *Hijabista* blogs. Most of the participants often disclose their fashion choices (e.g. styles, looks, outfit of the day), hijab stories and issues concerning the hijab on their blog posts, while the majority of them view blogging as a platform for demonstrating *dakwah* (convey Islamic missionary act), sharing knowledge and creating discourse around the *hijab*, including stories and issues related to the *hijab* as well as *hijab* tutorials. Many individuals, groups and organizations use blogs to spread the Islamic faith. In fact, Mohamed (2017) added that blogging for *dakwah*, particularly among Muslim women, represents a very broad wave or cultural phenomenon of raised Islamic consciousness among Malay women, suggesting that the *hijab* and fashion are used as missionary tactics to represent the symbol of modest and modern Muslim women as opposed to the Western ideology on the *hijab* and its oppression.

Moreover, the ability to use blogs as a medium for *dakwah* and their religious responsibility to educate other women in Malaysia about covering the head and body according to Islamic teachings can be located in the blog story of Nurul and Jez who agreed on posting more topics about fashion and the *hijab*, as well as photos of their everyday outfits to encourage many other women in Malaysia to be fashionable, while at the same time covering their heads with the *hijab*. Nurul, for instance, is more likely to share her everyday outfit with the aim of providing ideas on how to match the *hijab* with her outfit. She points out that fashion and the *hijab* trend in Malaysia have evolved over time. Meanwhile, Jez remembers and refers to when, in the last couple of years (2010- 2013), the era of colour blocking/bright colours was popular in Malaysia and many young women started to wear the *hijab* with colourful outfits. At that time, many female youngsters referred to blogs as a source of fashion and *hijab* inspiration. Thus, by blogging and sharing posts about the *hijab* and fashion (e.g. the outfit of the day, looks, Islamic perspectives), she specifically aims to contribute something to the religion (e.g., do good deeds through *dakwah*) and to all Muslim women in Malaysia.

*"Hijab and fashion may differentiate Muslim women and non-Muslim women. This topic strongly appeals to Muslim women due to its focus on covering the body through hijab and fashion. I prefer to talk about everyday outfits, Muslimah looks, and DIY hijab and fashion topics on my blog with the hope*

*to present the real identity of Muslim women and encourage more women to wear hijab and be proud of themselves!"*

In addition, Jez highlights the major differences between Muslim women and non-Muslim women in terms of the *hijab* and the clothes they wear. She suggests that Muslim women should represent their own identity through their everyday outfits. By posting topics such as 'DIY everyday outfits', 'my everyday outfits' and 'Glam Muslimah styles', she aims to educate women about the *hijab*, fashion, and religion. Initially, those topics were dedicated to other Muslimah of her age to support them in becoming fashionable and modest. She encourages Muslim women in Malaysia to wear loose dress, especially in their everyday outfits to represent the identity of Muslimah as modern and modest. This conceptualization of blogging as a medium for *dakwah* has led many *Hijabista* bloggers to disclose more information on these topics - the *hijab*, fashion, beauty, and faith in relation to Muslim women in Malaysia.

Furthermore, the *hijab* and fashion are topics that are strongly associated with these *Hijabista* blogger's identities where they demonstrate fashion-conscious on blogs. This indicates that blogs can be considered a platform for sharing about the *hijab* and fashion, and through which this group's members express their need for affiliation to this and other groups (e.g. the *Hijabista* community online). This indicates that these bloggers use blogging to portray the identity of modern clothing styles of a specific group and to connect with each other within the group and with other groups and communities as well. For instance, Ida mentions the *Hijabista*'s identity as creating new trends both within their community and among other young Muslim women in Malaysia:

*"Hijabista bloggers create trends of wearing the hijab and fashion in Malaysia. There is a great amount of pictures and videos showing bloggers with colorful hijab and fashion styles attached to the blog posts, - thus making Hijabistas' identity more visually identifiable. It is good to be in comfortable surroundings where a lot of Muslim women look alike. The amount of pride and dignity that the group carries through hijab and fashion is so rewarding!"*

Further, most of the bloggers agree that disclosing more information regarding personal lifestyle, the *hijab* and fashion often attract like-minded audiences with similar discourses about their personal experiences and perspectives on the *hijab* and fashion in Islam. Meanwhile, through blogging, they managed to share knowledge on fashion and *hijab* styles with the aim of inspiring many Muslim women in Malaysia and in other Asian countries, such as in Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei to wear the *hijab*. The adaptations of the *hijab* and fashion by Muslim female bloggers have inspired many women to wear hijab-friendly clothing, suggesting that the *hijab* may be both a religious symbol and fashion item to Muslim women. Hence, the information disclosure can be the important which crosses through the topics of *hijab* and fashion as well as the usage of blogs as a platform to communicate *dakwah*.

Overall, the findings indicate that the *Hijabista* bloggers also make use the advancement of communication technology by using and linking other social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook to their blogs with the aims to communicate and exchange information with other Muslim women regarding beauty, fashion, faith, and *hijab* related issues. That is to say that these bloggers appear to fully utilize the social media usage to be more likely to disclose and portray idealised Muslim women identities in all media platforms. As a result, most of these Muslim bloggers are more visible online through social media platforms and become *Hijabista* social media icon and influencer who represents the modern and modest Muslim women in Malaysia. Thus, this study demonstrated the Malaysian young Muslim women empowerment through the usage of online communication technology for their visibility and well-being.

## CONCLUSION

The interview findings highlight two primary information disclosure on blogs written by young Muslim women in Malaysia (e.g., personal lifestyle and *hijab*, fashion and religion),

which reveal the Hijabista's identity on blog. Simply put, bloggers' identity portrayal on blogs can be summed up based on their self-disclosure information (verbal and via images) that they choose to disclose. Therefore, the combination of self-disclosure information on blogs (e.g., texts, pictures, videos and other SNSs links) and the usage of other social media platforms provide unique characteristics that help to define the *Hijabista* bloggers online. For instance, for the posts related to fashion and the *hijab* styles, the bloggers often incorporate their 'ootd' (outfit of the day) photos to reflect the image of modern and modest women, with bright colour outfits, branded items, and showing a different class and identity of new modern Malay Muslim women in Malaysia.

Blogs have allowed participants to present more idealized identities through diverse types of self-disclosure content that represent diverse aspects of their identity, such as their popularity, being a *Hijabista*, and being a modern and modest woman. Also, this study indicate that career women, fashion icons, 'hijabsters', mothers, young entrepreneurs and social media influencers are among the various identities that these bloggers highlight on their personal blogs. These performances are linked to their education level, work/career and social status in society. Therefore, blogging around the topic of *hijab* and fashion can be interpreted as statement messages about Muslim women's empowerment in which *Hijabista* are using blogs to send messages and make connection with each other. In sum, the findings of the study are relevant to gender and new media scholars, content developers, media practitioners, bloggers, and blog readers, as they provide an understanding of the growth of the *Hijabista* phenomenon and modern *hijab* culture in Malaysia, by focusing on how personal blogging enables self-disclosure of personal information (e.g., lifestyle, the *hijab*, and fashion). Future study should pay attention on the motivation for information disclosure among the *Hijabista* bloggers to fully understand the current phenomenon on the *Hijabista* culture, particularly in Malaysia.

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