# Malaysian's Young Consumer Preferences of Hijab

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Abstract: Researchers have long been interested in understanding young consumers' purchasing behaviour, especially in terms of their purchasing preferences and decision-making styles. Zooming to hijab preferences, different angles of hijab have been studied. Out of 32.4 million of total population, Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia. Thus, this research aims to obtain young consumer preferences of hijab. It was conducted through focus group interviews in one of the public university located in Selangor, Malaysia. The focus group interviews were audio taped and transcribed. There were 13 Malaysian female respondents; students of aged 20 to 25 years old. The findings thus far revealed that young consumer's selection of hijab to wear and attend lectures is highly influenced by easiness to wear hijab, boost confidence as well as their moods and face shape. These factors make them feel more comfortable to move around with their active lifestyle as university students. Limitations and recommendations for future studies are discussed.

Keywords: Hijab, Malaysia, Muslim, young consumers, preference.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Researchers have long been interested in understanding young consumers' purchasing behaviour. Various aspects have been investigated to understand their purchase preferences such as who influence them to purchase and where they will purchase the products (Levy and Lee, 2004; Lee and Marshall, 1998; Batounis-Ronner, Hunt and Mallaliue, 2007; Shoham and Dalakas, 2003) as well as decision styles. Besides understanding making young consumers based on their purchasing preferences and decision making styles, the behaviour of these young lucrative consumers (Brazil, 1999; Tootelian and Gaedeke, 1992; Loussaief and Haque, 2018) also differs across cultures such as countries, ethnicity and religion (Shoham and Dalakas, 2003; Ganesh, 1997; Stafford, Ganesh and Garland, 1996; Hopper, 1995; Martinez and Polo, 1999; Fikry and Jamil, 2010) and product types (Fikry, 2009) such as television, furniture and food and beverages that may require interferences from other family members in making such decision (Shoham and Dalakas, 2003; Davis, 1976). Besides relying on families to make purchase decision for them, normally, with regards to items for their selfconsumption such as clothing apparel, mobile phone and game console, young consumers will rely on the mass media, parents and friends to assist in their decision making (Alhabeeb, 1996; Fikry and Bustami,

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2012; Grant and Stephen, 2005; Shoham and Dalakas, 2005).

Zooming to clothing apparel preferences, different types of clothing apparel have been studied (Alhabeeb, 1996; Grant and Stephen, 2005; Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). Alhabeeb (1996) provides a profile on female teenagers spending on clothing apparel and found that with the increase in age, female teenagers with higher income will spend more on buying clothes as compared with their male counterpart. Taylor and Cosenza (2002) also attempted to provide a profile and segment female teenagers, focusing on female teenager's choice of shopping mall to purchase clothing apparel. Looking at tweenaged girls (aged 12 and 13 years old) buying behaviour of clothing apparel, Grant and Stephen (2005) found that majority of them relies on peers and parents in making decision for purchases of their clothing apparel. In spite of all these findings on young consumer preferences, research that specifically focuses on young consumer preferences of hijab is still lacking. Although Alhabeeb (1996) and Taylor and Cosenza (2002) focused on profiling female clothing apparel preferences, the hijab preferences among female young consumer were basically ignored.

On the other hand, it is worth noted that Malaysia a Muslim country, having a rising population (estimated at 32.4 million population with annual population growth rate of 1.1%) comprised of those in the age of 15 to 64 years old which includes the youth population (69.7% or 22.58 million) and of Bumiputra ethnicity (69.1% or 20.07 million). Majority of this Bumiputra ethnicity are Muslims (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018) who

are potentially to wear hijab, as wearing hijab is part of the Islamic requirements and also a trending culture in Malaysia. Therefore, in an attempt to further tap these lucrative young Malaysians' Muslim consumer markets, this paper aims to explore Malaysian's young consumer preferences of hijab.

#### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hijab is defined and viewed in different perspectives. Wilson and Liu (2011) described hijab as a headscarf used to cover and conceal a female's chest area and all of the hair on her head. Everett, Schellhaas, Earp, Ando, Memarzia, Parise, Fell and Hewstone (2015) viewed hijab as modest styles of Islamic dress, referring to the common headscarf, covering the hair and shoulders but not the face. Women who wear hijab are deemed to be modest; hijab being associated with submission to Allah SWT, moral deterrent and peace of mind (Jackson and Monk-Turner, 2015). Wearing of hijab (or the so-called veil) can safeguard the wearer from any harm or danger. This is further supported by verses in Al-Quran that mention:

> "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."(Surah Al-Ahzab:59).

Past research on Hijab mainly focused on the impact of wearing hijab among working women (Omar and Davidson, 2001 and Omair, 2009) of which different viewpoints have been revealed based on different perceptions among managers having subordinates wearing hijab. Omar and Davidson (2001) and Omair (2009) insisted that wearing hijab is only a woman's clothing that is linked to local tradition. It does not limit the capabilities of woman in doing her job properly, as it is only a reflection of a woman's commitment to Islam.

Looking at different angles, other researchers have debated on the challenges of wearing hijab for sports (Azizi and Hassan, 2014) and travelling activities (Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015 and Shakona, Backman, Backman, Norman, Luo and Duffy, 2015). Azizi and Hassan (2014) emphasized that wearing hijab does not restrict sports women to excel in both national and international competitions. However, Shafaei and Mohamed (2015) and Shakona, Backman, Backman, Norman, Luo and Duffy (2015) believed that wearing hijab limits body movements in travelling and sport activities. The negative views of hijab has gone to the extent of perceiving that those who wear hijab is feeling suffocated (Hamzah, Ismail, Mustari and Basiron, 2014), advocating a ban on those who wear hijab (antihijab antigations) (Razick, Long and Salleh, 2015).

From a different perspective, past studies such as by Albrecht, Jacobs, Retief and Adamski (2015) focused on young consumer preferences of Muslim dress where in general, the subject on hijab is slightly touched, with a great concern on cross culture comparison between Western and Islamic beliefs that influenced the preferences of female Muslim dress. In another study, the study of Shah and Tabassum (2015) covers on Malaysia, but specifically focus on religious affiliation among women academicians in Malaysia's universities, thus differ from the current study in this paper. Similarly, studies by Dhanda (2008) focused on public challenges faced by women's wearing veil, thus directly ignoring the concern of researchers on consumer preferences of hijab. The study by Rabolt and Forney (1989) covered on the impact of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics on Saudi Arabian female preferences of dress with hijab slightly covered in their study. In spite of the many studies concerning female Muslim's dress in general, covering on different perspectives ranging from managerial, social and political aspects, very limited studies specifically focus on young consumer preferences of hijab.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Focus group interviews are the best method to explore what individuals believe or feel as well as why they behave in the way they do (Rabiee, 2004). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, focus group interviews are being used as a means of qualitative data collection to capture young individual consumer behaviour i.e. preferences of hijab. The focus group setting and format are discussed in the next section.

#### Focus Group Setting

Malaysia is a country with an area of 330 803 square kilometres, covering 16 states. In the first quarter of 2019, Malaysia's total population was estimated at 32.66 million, an increased by 1.1 percent as compared to the first quarter of 2018 (32.29 million).

Out of the 32.66 million total population, Selangor (6541.7 million) recorded the highest population followed by Sabah (3932.0 million) and Johor (3776.2 million). Based on these population distributions, Selangor is clearly the most populous state thus making it suitable and relevant to choose respondents for focus group from one of the public universities located in Selangor (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019).

Noting that Islam is the most widely professed religion in Malaysia (61.3%), followed by other religions embraced by Malaysians, including Buddhism (19.8%), Christianity (9.2%) and Hinduism (6.3%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019), it is high time to focus research related to the religion of Islam i.e. hijab. Zooming into Muslims' women in Malaysia, it is believed that majority of Malaysian's women will dress modestly, covering from head to feet. It is further observed that these women usually wear long skirts, shirts with sleeves (Razick, Long and Salleh, 2015) and hijab.

#### Focus Group Interview Format

The focus group interviews were held using a structured format consisting of two areas, focusing on hijab preferences that they will wear for daily lectures. The structured format of the focus group interviews covered on the following two key areas:

- Demographic Profiles of the respondents determining the general profile of respondents such as age, education level and marital status.
- Consumer preferences of hijab identifying consumer preferences of hijab by covering questions such as brand, price range and types of hijab article.

The discussion with the respondents for each segment lasted approximately between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Since some of the respondents answered the questions in both English and Malay languages, therefore the recording and the field notes were transcribed using both languages. There were 13 Malaysian female respondents selected for this study, students of aged 20 to 25 years old. The main reason for selecting this segment of respondents is to identify the similarities and differences of Hijab preferences among them.

## 4. FINDINGS

#### **Respondents Profiling**

Based on Table **1** below, it can be seen that majority of the respondents are in the age of 21 years old (4 respondents), followed by respondents in the age of 20 years old (4 respondents), while the remaining respondents (5 respondents) in the age between 22 years old to 25 years old. All of them are of single marital status, with one of the respondent studying for Master Degree and the remaining (12 respondents) are studying for Bachelor's Degree.

Table 1:	<b>Detail Profiles of Respondents</b>	
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Respondent	Age	Marital Status	Qualification
Respondent Y1	22	Single	Degree
Respondent Y2	23	Single	Degree
Respondent Y3	21	Single	Degree
Respondent Y4	21	Single	Degree
Respondent Y5	24	Single	Master
Respondent Y6	25	Single	Degree
Respondent Y7	21	Single	Degree
Respondent Y8	21	Single	Degree
Respondent Y9	20	Single	Degree
Respondent Y10	25	Single	Degree
Respondent Y11	20	Single	Degree
Respondent Y12	20	Single	Degree
Respondent Y13	20	Single	Degree

#### **Hijab Preferences**

## Types of Hijab Articles

There are different types of hijab articles namely scarf, Turban, Telekung, Mini Telekung, head Selendang, Coats, Abaya and Nigab (Shah and Tabassum, 2015), haik and chador (Dhanda, 2008), of which caters to different needs and time of wearing such hijab article. In Table 2 below, when asked on the types of hijab that respondents prefer to wear for lectures, it was found that majority of the respondents prefer to wear Bawal hijab to go to class (twelve respondents), while the remaining one respondent prefer to wear either shawl or express hijab to attend lectures. More than half of the respondents (seven respondents) prefer to wear shawl to attend lectures, followed by five respondents who preferred to wear express hijab. Besides, one respondent highlighted her preferences of wearing satin and Syria hijab to go to class respectively.

Respondent Y2 affirmed that "I would wear shawl when I am happy. When I am not happy, I would prefer to wear Bawal hijab to boost my confidence. When I am in a hurry, I would prefer to wear express hijab because it is easy to wear it....".

Respondent Y3 added that "Bawal hijab is easy and fast to wear, and less time consume to iron it as compared to shawl because shawl hijab is wider and lengthy, making it consume more time to iron and wear it..".

Respondent Y8 further added that "*I would* wear Bawal hijab when I am lazy because Bawal hijab is easy to wear....".

Respondents Y4 further mentioned that "*I* would wear hijab that suits my face shape.....wearing Bawal hijab can easily be adjusted according to my round face shape as compared to shawl type hijab".

The abovementioned statements indicate that most of the respondents share similar thoughts regarding the types of hijab article. The selection for types of hijab to wear to attend lectures, depend on several factors such as easiness to wear hijab, boost confidence, as well as their mood, and face shape. Apparently, hijab fit seems to be one of the matters of concern among hijab consumers, especially in terms of how the hijab garment looks on the body (Ashdown and DeLong, 1995). In line with that, focusing on different types of clothing i.e. jacket, Alexander, Connell and Presley (2005) discovered that body parts such as face has significant difference across body cathexis. Surprisingly, none of the respondents is particularly concerned with the syariah compliance aspect of the hijab article. This is somewhat contradicted with the study of Tawfiq and Ogle (2013) where respondents highlighted that the selection of their clothes must be modest and fulfil minimum guidelines of aurat. In line with that, one can conclude that students tend to follow the norms (Workman and Freeburg, 2000) and trends (Rabolt and Forney, 1989).

#### Hijab's Brand Preferences

Referring to preferred brand of Hijab as illustrated in Table **2** below, majority of the respondents (eight

respondents) do not have specific brand of hijab that they will purchase to attend lectures, while the remaining five respondents prefer Kangaroo or Aidijuma brand of hijab to wear whenever they go to classes.

Table 2: Types of Hijab Articles and Brand Select
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Respondent	Types of Hijab Articles	Brand
Respondent Y1	Shawl/Bawal	NS
Respondent Y2	Shawl/Bawal/Express Hijab	NS
Respondent Y3	Bawal	NS
Respondent Y4	Bawal	NS
Respondent Y5	Syria/Express Hijab	Kangaroo
Respondent Y6	Shawl/Bawal	Kangaroo
Respondent Y7	Satin/Bawal/Shawl	Kangaroo
Respondent Y8	Bawal/Shawl	NS
Respondent Y9	Bawal/Express	NS
Respondent Y10	Bawal	NS
Respondent Y11	Shawl/Bawal	NS
Respondent Y12	Bawal/Express	Aidijuma
Respondent Y13	Shawl/Bawal/Express	Kangaroo

\*NS= Not specified.

Respondent Y1 mentioned that "I don't care about brands, as long as the hijab looks beautiful on me, I would purchase it....." and Respondent Y4 further added that "I don't mind about brands, as long as the hijab is suitable with my clothes, I will buy it, disregard of whether it is cheap or expensive".

In contrast, respondent Y3 mentioned that "...no specific brand of hijab. As long as it is affordable, I would buy it. After all, I am still a student".

In another, respondent Y5 mentioned that "I would prefer to buy Kangaroo brand of hijab since it is affordable for me as a student'. Respondent Y6 further added that '...I would prefer to buy Kangaroo hijab because the material is quite heavy and nice".

Respondent Y9 further affirmed that "I don't mind about brand, but usually I would buy Kangaroo brand because it is affordable and within my budget." The above statements indicate that majority of the respondents do not have any specific brand of hijab, while some prefer to buy the Kangaroo or Aidijuma hijab brand. The Kangaroo brand is affordable to these young consumers, with the price ranging between RM 10 and RM20 per piece. On the other hand, the price of Aidijuma hijab is slightly higher, in the price of RM50 and above.

Ironically, despite of being young consumers, these respondents do not care much about fashion when it comes to purchasing hijab for daily wear. Noting that these respondents are young consumers, in the age range of 20 to 25 years old, who are still studying and do not have permanent income, it is of no surprise when their main concern in selection of hijab brand is purely based on affordability, heavy material, beautiful and suits with their apparel attire. This may be due to the nature of the respondents who are students in a university that requires them to wear hijab that is comfortable and practical for their daily student's activities (Albrecht, Jacobs, Retief & Adamski, 2015).

The finding of this study contradicted with the study of Taylor and Cosenza [20] and O'Cass, Lee and Siahtiri (2013). Taylor and Cosenza (2002) found that female teenagers is brand conscious who are willing to pay high price to purchase clothing apparel that reflects their social status. Zooming into young Muslim consumer market, O'Cass, Lee and Siahtiri (2013) discovered that fashion conscious young Muslim consumers are also willing to pay high price for clothing consumption that reflects status. Indeed, only those of high income earners young consumers can afford to be fashion conscious nowadays.

#### Location to Purchase Hijab

When asked about location of purchasing hijab, majority of them preferred to purchase hijab at the night market, followed by kiosk booth and online (refer Table **3** below). Majority of the respondents prefer to purchase at night market and kiosk booth due to the affordable price offered and the ability to feel the texture of the hijab material beforehand. This will definitely increase their satisfaction after the purchase of such hijab. Only some of the respondents (3 respondents) prefer to purchase hijab through online means due to the convenience offered.

According to respondent Y4:

*"I would purchase hijab at night market or kiosk booth available in the university area* 

because of the affordable price offered. I would never purchase hijab through online means as I can't look and feel the texture of the hijab material before I purchase it".

This is further supported by respondent Y9:

"I prefer to purchase hijab at night market and kiosk booth because I can feel the hijab material before I purchase it. I am not familiar of purchasing hijab online, mainly because I do not know the types of material sold online, and I cannot feel the hijab material before I purchase it".

Respondent Y6 further affirmed by stating that:

*"I am hijab collector. I would purchase hijab in large quantity, various types of color. So, I would prefer to purchase it at street market such as at Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman.I can get cheap price of hijab when I buy in large quantity there".* 

Respondent Y5 on the other hand, prefer to purchase hijab through online means due to the convenience offered. Respondent Y5 stated that:

*"I prefer to purchase hijab at shopping complex, night market and online. Most of the time, I would purchase hijab through online since it is more convenient to me".* 

Indirectly, the selection of location to purchase hijab among these respondents reflects the character of young consumers that enjoy shopping, following latest apparel trends but at the same time are price and time (convenience) conscious (Zhang, Carpenter and Brosdahl; 2011). However, Rabolt and Forney (1989) discovered that those who are in the age of 20 to 35 years old would prefer to purchase hijab at boutiques and departmental stores. This may be due to high socioeconomic status of the said respondents in their study, as compared to respondents in this study, who only comprised of students with limited income to purchase hijab.

#### **Hijab Purchases Influencers**

There are various factors that have influenced young consumer purchases of hijab. Based on the focus group interviews, majority of the respondents purchase hijab due to the influence of their friends as

Table 3:	Location, Influen	cer and Price Range of Hijab
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Respondent	Where Purchase	Who Influence	Price Range (RM)
Respondent Y1	Night Market	No influence, sometimes social media	Below RM50
Respondent Y2	Night Market /Boutique Concept Store	Media (TV-Hijabista)	RM 50
Respondent Y3	Night Market	No influence	RM15
Respondent Y4	Night Market /Booth	Friends	Below RM30
Respondent Y5	Night Market /Online/Shopping Complex	Fashion (trends), sister, Online (Youtube)	Below RM50
Respondent Y6	Street Market	Fashion/online (instagram)	Below RM20
Respondent Y7	Night Market /Booth/Online	No influence	Below RM20
Respondent Y8	Night Market /Booth	Friends	Below RM25
Respondent Y9	Night Market /Booth	No influence	Below RM20
Respondent Y10	Night Market	No influence	Below RM20
Respondent Y11	Online/ Night Market /Supermarket	Mother/Friend	Below RM20
Respondent Y12	Night Market	Friends	Below RM15
Respondent Y13	Street market/ Night Market /Supermarket	Sister/Friends	RM 5- RM 10

well as fashion trends shown in mass media and social media such as Youtube and Instagram (refer Table **3**).

According to Respondent Y9:

"No one influences me to purchase hijab. I would make decision to purchase hijab by myself'.

However, family members also have high influence for the purchase of hijab, as being emphasized by respondent Y11, respondent Y13, and respondent Y4. According to respondent Y11:

*"My mother and friends will give suggestion on types of hijab that suitable with me".* 

Respondent Y13 further affirmed that:

"My sister will influence me to purchase hijab. My friends will give suggestion on what types of hijab and hijab design that is suitable to me".

Respondent Y4 added that:

*"My family and Youtube influence me a lot. If my family suggest a certain design of hijab for me, I'd buy it. I'd also look at Youtube to discover new trends of hijab,* 

and will purchase hijab following trends showed in Youtube".

Besides family members, friends and mass media also play important roles in giving ideas on what types of hijab is suitable to young consumers, as confirmed by respondent Y3, respondent Y1 and respondent Y2. For example, Respondent Y3 emphasized that:

> "Usually, I would ask my friends to follow me whenever I want to purchase Hijab. My purchases of hijab would be influence by them. I'd ask my friend's opinion first before I decide to purchase the hijab. If they say it's beautiful, looks good on me, I would purchase it".

#### Respondent Y1 further supported by adding that:

"For some of my hijab, I would decide to purchase it by myself. But I would also look at what types of hijab that looks good on my friends. If the hijab looks good on them, I would consider to try it as well'.

#### Respondent Y2 added that:

*"I would look at television programme such as Hijabista to learn new trends, and will purchase based on what is shown in television".* 

Looking at the findings above, it is further discovered that opinions from friends can affect consumer's purchases of hijab (Workmand and Freeburg, 2000; Bachleda, Hamelin and Benachour, 2014). Noting that these respondents are in the age group of 20 to 25 years old, it is of no surprise to find out that friends have significant effect on these young consumers. In making purchase decision for clothes including hijab, what their friends say seems to be more reliable as compared to their family members. This is further supported by the study of (Albrecht,

However, the findings of this study contradict with that of the study by Najarporyan (2014). Najarporyan (2014) found that families have more influence on students' decision to wear hijab. Noting that the respondents covered in the study of Najarporyan (2014) resides in rural area where family strictly controlled the socialization activity of these students; family influence in student's decision to wear hijab is as expected.

Jacobs, Retief and Adamski, 2015) who revealed that

purchasing of clothes may be influenced by peers.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study thus far reveal that young consumers aged between 20 to 25 years old shared a number of similar preferences with regards to purchasing hijab for daily activities. Out of 13 university students in a metropolitan area in Malaysia interviewed in two different sessions of focus groups, it was found that the selection of wearing hijab article to attend lectures will be highly influenced on easiness to wear hijab, to boost confidence, mood, and face shape. These university students or the so-called young consumers prefer to wear Bawal hijab, shawl or express hijab, does not care much on brands of hijab to buy but will opt for hijab that is affordable, made of heavy material, beautiful and suits with their apparel attire. This will make them feel more comfortable to move around with their active lifestyle as university students.

Apart from that, these young consumers placed greater concern on hijab fit as compared to syariah compliance. The question of how the hijab looks on their body seems to be of more important than whether the hijab is syariah compliance, covering women's aurah. Noting that peers play great influence in these young consumers, it is expected that the way they dress need to be socially accepted by their peers. In fact, the findings of this study further confirmed that purchases of hijab among young consumers are highly influenced by peers and fashion trends shown in mass media and social media.

Noting that majority of these young consumers are still studying and do not earn a steady income, they would prefer to purchase hijab at the night market and kiosk booths. Purchases of hijab at these places enable them to look for hijab offered at a lower price. Besides, these young consumers are able to feel the texture of the hijab material beforehand, indirectly reduce purchasing risk and feeling of disappointment resulted to purchasing of hijab that does not fulfil their satisfaction.

#### 6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the context of Muslim university students in metropolitan area in Malaysia. Future researchers could compare the purchasing preferences of students from different campuses around Malaysia as well as students studying abroad.

Another limitation is that only undergraduate and postgraduate students were used as the focus of the study. Future researchers could focus on other population groups such as school students, women athletes and working women, which would result in different purchasing preferences of hijab. Also, it is further suggested that future researchers expand this study using quantitative methods and covering on a larger population in order to gain better insights on young consumer preferences of hijab. This method of research would provide the full pictures of the purchasing preferences among Islamic female.

#### 7. CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study provides a new insight in understanding the youth market preferences of hijab, of which is lacking in the youth market research. As been highlighted earlier, past studies on youth focuses more on other types of consumer products such as electrical and electronic items and other types of clothing apparel (Shoham and Dalakas, 2003; Fikry, 2009; Davis, 1976; Alhabeeb; 1996) except for hijab. Thus, this study provides new insights for future researchers who are interested to tap these lucrative youth market.

The findings of this study will also contribute to those future researchers who are interested to focus on research in the area of Asian Muslim's youth decision making, as they can utilize the findings of this study and further apply it in the consumer decision making process.

Besides, this study also will give insights to clothing apparel (i.e. hijab) retailers and fashion designer to on ways to influence these young consumers to purchase hijab. For example, noting that these young consumers are easily influences by social media and peer in making decision to purchase hijab, thus more advertisement in social media such as Instagram and hijab tutorial on Youtube need to be done in order to influence them to purchase hijab. After all, the promotions through social media can cut overall selling cost of hijab, thus retailers are able to sell their hijab at a low prices; of which will be affordable to these young consumers.

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