

Probing *Niqab* Wearing as an Islamic Identity, Cultural Piety and Women's Empowerment: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

Artefact is an object that made by a person, such a tool or a decoration, especially one that is of historical interest. The Islamic artefacts use in everyday life constantly support or contradict our beliefs, values, and self-identities. The concept of Islamic communication is one of those activities that are intertwined with all of human life completely. Niqab, a piece of clothing and an artefact, is a religious dress and visible sign of Muslim women. Recently it is took place divisive and controversial meanings around the globe. Niqab wearing women are facing significant problems by some Muslim and non-Muslim people in the society. Many countries recently imposed restriction to the Islamic devote culture and think that the face covering are often imposed to women which indicates fundamentalism and an offense to human dignity even though wearing niqab is women's personal choice. The aim of this phenomenological research is to examine and explore the meanings, structures, essence and living experience of the niqab wearing Muslim women. This qualitative study involves in-depth interview with purposively sampled 33 niqab wearing Muslim women and 4 focus group discussions of 12 Muslim and non-Muslim women. The results indicate that wearing niqab is women's empowerment and Islamic identity rather than cultural piety that gives meaningful impact to the niqab wearing women of the whole world as their fundamental right.

Keywords: *Communication, Culture, Islamic Artefact, Niqab, Phenomenological Research*

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1. Introduction

Islam began as a new faith community in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia) by the prophet Mohammed (s.a.w) at the beginning of seventh century. Since then Islam has grown as one of the major religions in the worlds. Islam means peace and submission. A Muslim therefore, is a person who submits to his Lord peacefully bearing witness or declaring this testimony is a key of Islamic faith. It also introduces a worldview and identity that is shaped by Islam (Omar, A. 2011).

Islam is not confined to any particular culture as is practiced by a diverse range of ethnic groups throughout the world. It is the second-largest religion in the world after Christianity and currently the fastest growing religion (Carter, 2008). There are over 1.7 billion Muslims throughout the world (Lipka, 2016). Even though they speak in different languages and live in different countries, they still share a common Muslim culture. This culture is surrounded in certain common beliefs that, there is no god but Allah (s.w.t.) and Muhammad (s.a.w.) is His messenger.

In 1871 Sir Edward Burnett Taylor gave very initial and obvious definition culture in his book 'Primitive Culture'. That was the first modern anthropological definition of culture. According to him the, the culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by member of the society (Long, 2016). Muslim customs and traditions include Islamic/Muslim clothing, food, wedding traditions and other aspects of Islamic life that Muslims have adopted in their own countries throughout the world. One could argue it is not possible to distinguish Islamic identity from ethno-cultural identity. The principles of Islam are deeply embedded within the beliefs and practiced by the whole Muslim world.

2. Islamic Artefact and Niqab

The "cloth culture," that is, how the Muslim live, what they carry with them, and how they dressed have been traditional focuses in their life. People are judged by the type of clothes they wear, and how they choose to represent themselves. There are different forms of attire for different occasions. Some culture like bright colour but Islam says simple and light colour. People choose to do this in the same way in how they personalize their homes with different objects and decorations (Tristam, 2013). Wood (2011) describes these objects and representations as artefacts, or personal objects use to announce their identities and heritage and to personalize their environments. Muslims perceive Islamic artefact to influence their attitude which includes the types of cover and the dress but there are also forms of attire that we wear to represent our identity. The same kind of attire is *niqab* that is worn by Muslim Women as a Islamic identity.

As Islam spread through the Middle East to Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa, and Central Asia to many different religious and societies around the Arabian Sea, it also incorporated some local veiling customs and influenced the whole region for centuries. Face coverings also play a significant role in many religions, including Orthodox Catholic Christian, Judaism and Islam. Such culture has been started before the advent of Islam.

Now niqab is considered as Islamic religious dress and important Islamic artefact. It is the Arabic term for face veils which cover women's hair, neck, shoulders and face, except two eyes are visible. In Islam *niqab* is the wider meaning of modesty, privacy, and morality. Wearing niqab is the most visible sign in Islam as a religion (Amer, 2014). Al Qur'an Sura No. 24 (An-Nur), ayat 30-31, Allah(s.w.t) says *"to the believing men and women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do"*.

3. Islamic Identity and Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment means choice, freedom, capability to decide or choose about what kind of life to live in the world. The root of this concept came from the power. Some describe, power is one person or another group ability to do something against their will (Rowlands, 1997). Women's empowerment includes consciousness about their rights to start with and may also be comprehensive to feelings of independence, confidence, manage, influence to make decisions and in later stages women's ability to get positive changes in the society (Ali, 2016). There are many factors which are associated with empowerment including economic, social, political and personal factors (Eyben, Kabeer & Cornwall, 2008; Yogendrarajah, 2013). Wearing niqab is women's personal empowerment and It highlights the need for women to have personal autonomy and agency (Eyben et al., 2008).

Wearing *niqab* is sometimes not only religious matter, because its meaning social, cultural, and political configuration of power (Kwok Pui-lan, 2012). The research of Leila Ahmed has shown that, the niqab which traditionally symbol of patriarchy and oppression of women has been seen as a re-appropriated by Muslim women for their own empowerment. For those women wearing the niqab might mean assertion of identity of community, of pride in heritage, of rejection or resistance to, or even of protest of against, mainstream society (Ahmed, 2011)

Islamic identity, the strength to which Muslim women identify with Islam and its associated practices, is conceptualized as a form of cultural identity. After September 9/11 Muslim women more like to wear niqab as a religious dress and express Islamic identity. Women began wearing niqab to protest against perceived discrimination and prejudice and convicting of Muslims with terrorist. They want to show that Muslim are not terrorist but productive

member of society. Wearing niqab becomes a means of public display of identity and solidarity against Islam phobia and the general acceptance of diatribe against Islam and Muslim (Kwok Pui-lan, 2012).

Now a days, Muslim women do not view the niqab as a restriction but more as a symbol of empowerment. Their niqab can be a regular face covering that cover their hole body only two eyes keeps visible that feel them safe, freedom and liberal. But they try to show their form of niqab came in the way of a successful and meaningful life. According to Hamdan (2010), *It has come to symbolize everything from Islamic Fundamentalism and women's subordination to freedom of religious expiration and women's empowerment and equality.*

4. Controversy from Muslim and Non-Muslim

For long decades wearing niqab is Islamic tradition and many Muslim women associated with this culture. In recent years significant attention has focused on the *niqab*. Some people argues that the *niqab* has evolved from a symbol of cultural piety, purity and religiosity into a cultural and political statement (Abdel-Mageed, 2008). When a Muslim women wear niqab, many non-Muslim and some secular Muslim trend to assume that someone cored these women differently (Amer, 2014)

In the 1970s Islamic resurgence movement started around the Middle East and Islamic culture of covering with niqab was disappearing (Bullock, 2010). Many scholars said, the unveiling movement came from Western colonialists who controlled most of the Middle East. According to Schick (1990), since World War 11 colonial power viewed the face covering as a sign of backwardness and oppression, and they encouraged Muslim women not wear Islamic veil. In the early twentieth century Arab champions for the liberation of women, such as Quasim Amin in Egypt and Kamal Ataturk in Turkey, said that the niqab is a symbol of Muslim backwardness and encouraged women to unveil and catch up with modernity. There are some controversy from Muslim scholar. In October 2009, grand sheikh of alAzhar University, Sheikh Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, when toured a school in Cairo and saw a teenage girl with niqab then he said, *“the niqab is a tradition; it has no connection with religion.”* He then instructed the girl not to wear niqab again and issued a fatwa (religious edict) against its use in schools (The Daily Telegraph, 2009; Chesler, 2010). The Iraqi religious authority, Sheikh Ahmad al-Qubaisi, supported this Egyptian decision and issued a fatwa which stated, *“People have the right to know the identity of the person they are in front of in order not to feel deceived. The obligation of niqab was only for the Prophet’s wives as they were the mothers of all believers”* (Chesler, 2010).

Many critics of the Muslim face covering tradition argue that women do not wear the niqab by choice, and they are often forced to cover themselves. But on the other hand, many Muslim women and Muslim immigrants in the West, argue that the veil is a symbol of devotion and faithfulness and own choice. The critics regard it as a question of religious backwardness, but for Muslim women it is a self-expression of Islamic identity (Harris & Nawaz, 2015).

The purpose of the study is to explore the feelings and experiences among Muslim *niqab* wearing women in order to reveal the *niqab* that is Islamic identity and religious dress. This phenomenology research study was analyzed with Nvivo 10 software and Microsoft Excel to categorize the collected data and the results demonstrate the result in main themes and sub themes.

5. Methodology

This study was carried out in Muslim *niqab* wearing women by using qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), decision of qualitative research is made to get deeper insight into the participants point of view. Since the aim of this research was not generalization but in depth exploration, it was decided to choose limited number of participants. Participants were selected purposively by using snowballing approach (Crossman, 2016). For this study 33 *niqab* wearing women and another 4 focus groups consist of 12 participants were selected for interview. During analysis focus group was validate main interview data. The nature of this research assert that saturation was reached 25 of 33 participants. Measures were taken to select the cases which were unique in every respect to allow richness in the data collected.

The data for this research has collected through face to face in depth interviews using semi structured model interview of the participants opinion, experiences, perceptions and narrative of research (Creswell, 2007). Each participants interview lasted for 40 to 60 minutes and transcript have been read carefully to identify codes. The codes were assigned to the data which enable to identify similarities and differences. The code were read repeatedly several times and themes were derived. All possible measures have been taken to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The hermeneutic approach was used to this phenomenological research and attempted to interpret the experiences of the research participants as they described their cultural adoption and their lived experiences.

6. Participants and Procedures

This qualitative phenomenological research investigated a purposeful sample of all together 45 participants. The principles of qualitative research, sample size in the majority of

qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation (Mason, 2010). The interview participants were mix religious and also various and divers Islamic background, educational level, profession, marital status and nationality. The focus group discussion was validated with the participants main interview data. In this research the audio recording data was transcribed and answered to the following research questions:

1. What is the meanings and essence of *niqab*, is it a symbol of cultural piety and Islamic identity?
2. What is Islamic requirement of *niqab* and how important is it for Muslim women?
3. What are the ways Muslim *niqab* wearing women may avoid confusion between Muslim and non-Muslim society?
4. Is *niqab* banning discriminatory to religious beliefs?
5. How does media represent *niqab* wearing women to other people?

7. Results and Discussion

The following chapter describes results obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions. We will start with descriptive analysis of respondents followed by the findings of interviews and focus group discussions.

7.1 Women's Experience about Culture

Culture embraces are all the beliefs that a person has, their practices and rituals, and what they have innate from previous generations. Culture also includes people's race, society, gender, religion, and socio-economic position (Lauren, 2016). Women face covering not only for Muslim related culture, it was a pre-Islamic Arabian culture and Christian, Jewish women also have worn niqab. Even though, the niqab remains as a traditional gesture within a Christian wedding ceremony and their prayers, their religious practices and traditions are different from Islamic societies concept (Razack, 2004). Interview participants exhibit the study result 17 of 33 participants wear niqab as a culture and 16 of 33 participants wear niqab as a religious faith.

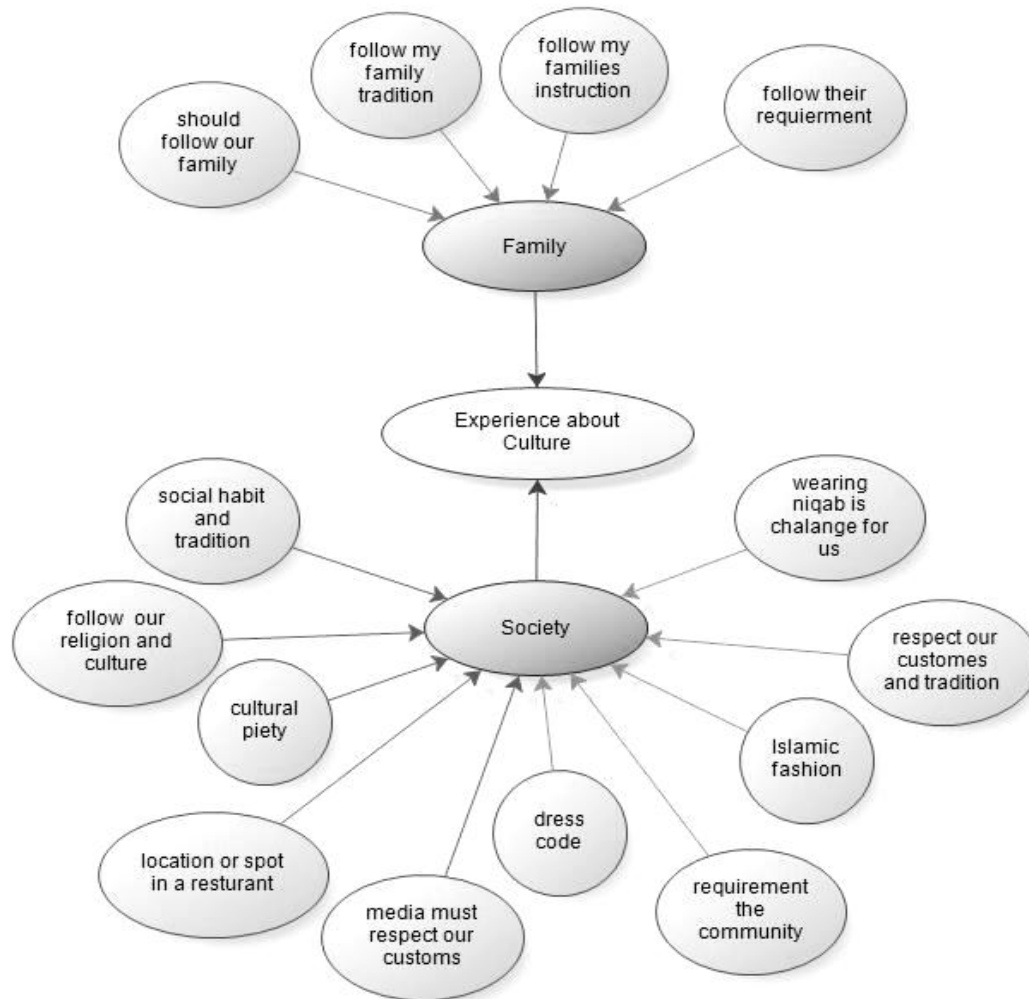


Figure 1: Framework about culture, thematic coding by participants

Figure 1 is a participants data framework that elaborated the participants experience about culture. According to interview on participant's lived experience about niqab, two sub themes are related with culture and it about family and society that discussed below.

7.2 Niqab Wearing Women's Understanding with Family

Figure 2 highlights the experience about family based 10 response of 33 interview participants who wear *niqab*. This section has addressed the issue that, religion and family

constitutes an important strong social unit. The family is one of the wellbeing pillars of society (Callan, 2014). Muslim families are associated with their understanding and life experience. A person's identity is acquired from family unity, structure, physical and psychological support. In traditional Muslim family most of the women stay within family boundary.

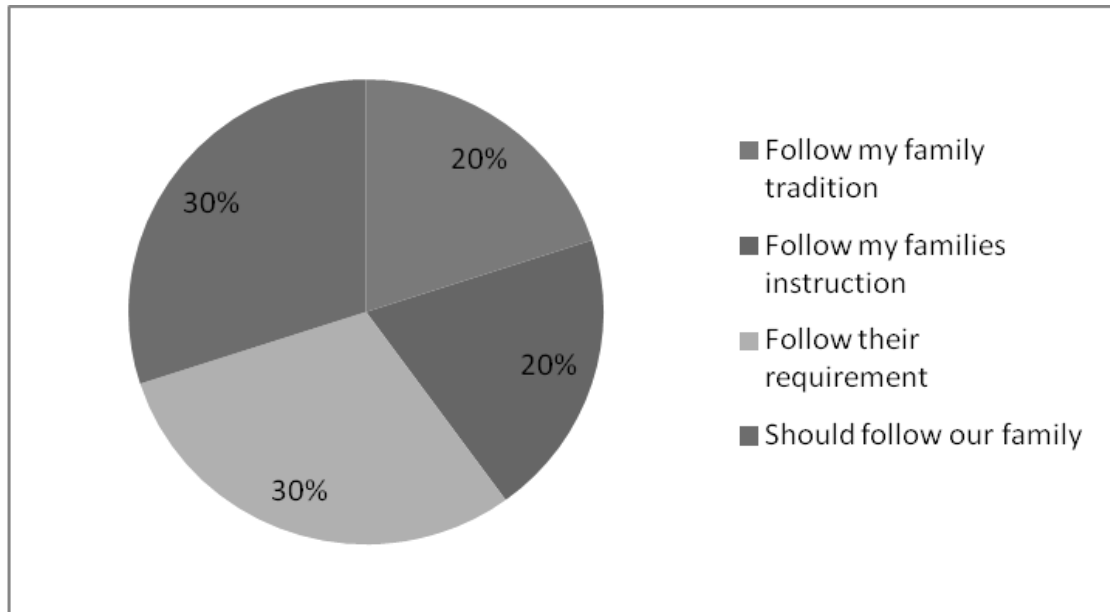


Figure 2: Families understanding with niqab

In Figure 2 the result shown that, 30% response of 33 have to follow families requirement. Another 30% response as a Muslim should follow family tradition. 20% response have to follow families instruction. Participants who are under age group 20-25 demonstrated, they started to wear niqab very young age and they just follow their mother and sometimes family also give them instruction have to wear niqab. Most of the participants view is wearing niqab women's personal choice and better understanding in Islam. Participant no.13 is a teacher, she has negative answer, she said wearing niqab is subjected to ridicule even by her own families and some Muslim people also don't like to wear niqab. Participants no. 30 her family is conservative said, most of the family encourage and give priority women's choice but few families are very conservative, as she stated:

I personally don't like to wear niqab because I have some problem and my another friend also got asthma and breathing problem. We don't feel comfortable with niqab. Even though we have some other problem but still we are wearing niqab because our families tradition and their requirement. (Participant 30)

I am a medical doctor. I appreciate niqab wearing women because of their sacrifice. At the starting of my medical study, I faced lot of problem but my family was not agree to open my face cover. (Participant 31)

Muslim women wear niqab because of family encourage to follow the tradition. Callan, (2014) on his research indicated that, the Muslim family is an complete one, and a person identifies herself with the family entity which agree with the current study. As a consequence, women find themselves living within family boundaries that are ruled by religious and cultural values. Islamic culture encourage everybody to follow their family tradition. According to Monshipuri (2009), the identity of an individual or a group of people are essentially described by family and the characteristics and what makes them different or unique from others. These properties form a core personality that gives meaning to a person's self understanding in various contexts (Merry, 2008).

According to interview participants view of family it is true, some family are conservative and very strict about *niqab* and they think, wearing *niqab* is obligatory for Muslim so they sometimes forced to wear *niqab* but that types of family is very few. The Quran clearly states that, '*there is no compulsion in religion*' (Al-Baqarah, 2:256) any types of dress Muslim people can wear but it should be modest. Dhami & Sheikh (2000) on their research shown, women who choose to wear niqab, they do not make the decision very lightly. That is why, family gives them instruction to wear niqab properly, it is not a force. In fact many participants said that, they faced great encourage to their families when they decided to cover themselves. Some participants decided to wear *niqab* based on families' instruction and peer encouragement. Participant no. 12 is a housewife said, all niqab wearing women are not conservative they like to communicate other women but sometimes they feel shy. Her husband encouraged to wear niqab, he didn't force but appreciate, she will be more beautiful if she wear niqab. Franceschelli, (2016) stated that, not only most Islamic countries but all the religions family is the part of strongest social unit, and it is considered the foundation of a healthy and balanced society. Participants no. 29 who is very young and wearing niqab as a tradition, stated as:

I am 20 years old. Next year I will take admission one of University. Initially when I was teenager like 13-14 years old that time I started to wear niqab and that time I was little bit worried about niqab. I thought my family was forcing me to wear niqab But after that I realised that it was wrong. Now I thought Islam is true religion and show us the right path so, we should obey our family and culture. (Participant 29)

Based on interview participants view, family didn't force them to wear niqab and it is women's personal choice. According to Dunkel et al. (2010), women are not forced to wear the niqab by their male dominated family. They believe their religion required it for women and helped them maintain identity and respect as Muslim niqab women. Many people impose negative stereotypes on the women who wear niqab as a visible sign of faith. Cole & Ahmadi (2003), on their view is, niqab embedded in national heritage and place of residence.

According to Anwar, (1998) the traditional Muslim family is complete, frequently across three or more generation hold family tradition. A complete family structure got many advantages, with faithfulness, unity and physical and psychological support (Dhami & Sheikh, 2000). For example, a consultation paper from the UK Government in 2010 states that 'Strong family give love, identity, a personal history and a secure base from which to explore and enjoy life as they grow up. Strong family also help build strong communities, so they are crucial for a successful society' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010). Without family support the society will breakdown and cause a wide range of social problems (Callan, 2014), whereas supportive families are the foundation of a consistent society (Centre for Social Justice 2007).

7.3 Understanding with Society about *niqab*

Society is very important aspect in our daily life. The results indicated that, every society have their traditional dress. Most of the participant think wearing niqab is most of the Arab countries tradition and social habits. In other countries, Muslim women wear niqab from their Islamic beliefs even though it is not their culture. Muslim women who wear niqab in harmony with their Islamic beliefs. Some non-Muslim people say niqab wearing women is oppressive, offensive, and an outright rejection in the society. In our societies some Muslim people who don't agree with *niqab*-wearing as many scholar also adopt that *niqab* is a religious dress and is not compulsory. Figure 3 societies view on *niqab* and this analysis came out from 33 interview participant's data.

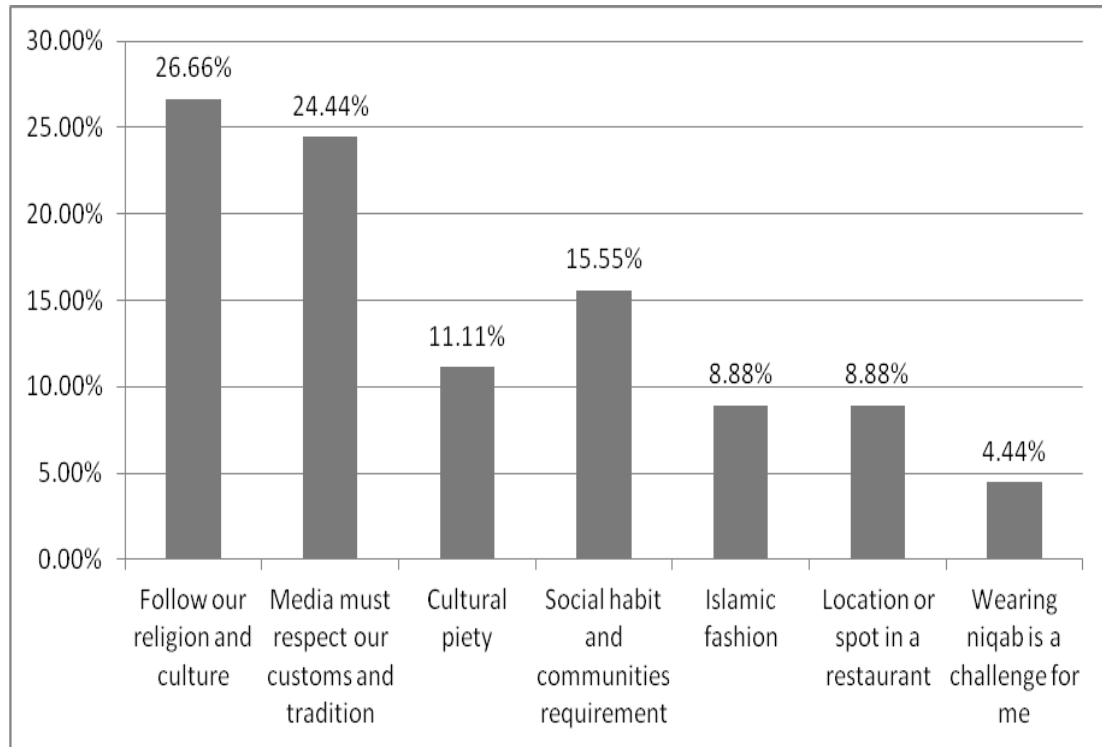


Figure 3: *Niqab* wearing women's view on society

Figure 3 based on participants code among total 45 respondent. The result obtained from NVivo 10 software shows that 26.66% response with 33 interview participants said, everybody should follow their religion and culture and this is the most coded theme about societies understanding among *niqab*. 24.44% response is media must respect Muslim customs and tradition. The common misconception about Islam came from majority of non-Muslims mind because of lack of understanding about Islam. 15.55% response is wearing *niqab* is some countries social habits and communities requirement. Interview participants revealed that, Islamic face covering according to their practices, beliefs, culture, and societies requirement. 11.11% response is wearing *niqab* is cultural piety and they are very happy to wear *niqab*. Basically, any Muslims religious group, their liberty of choice and practice is Islamic faith and traditions.

Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi (2014) on his research said that, therein lies the dynamic aspect of religion and culture interact with one another. Culture depends country to country but Islam is world religion. It is not confined to one nation or country. There are always many misconceptions about *niqab* such as non-Muslim people always blame *niqab* wearing Muslim women, they have linked with terrorism and extremism. However, interview participants strongly believe that every culture, tradition and religion should be respected and treated

equally. Sameera, (2013) on her research also agree with that. Participants no. 15 wear niqab as a Islamic requirement, said as:

"Wearing niqab is not a culture. It is an optional whether we want to wear it or not. And I opt to wear it. Wearing niqab does not make you better than others but at least for me, it can prevent me from doing something bad" (Participant 15).

International media mostly controlled by Western world. Western country and media make lot of propaganda about niqab wearing women. Niqab is women's won choice and without niqab they feel unsecured. In that case it showed respected Muslim customs, tradition and Islamic requirement. According to Islamic preacher Dr. Zakir (2010) said, Muslim women are utilizing this tools to portray the right image of Islam. A clear concept of which the researcher conceptualized is the powerful media creating stereotypes of Muslim women's face covering and they always convincing other people from media specially the niqab wearing women. Not all Muslims are extremists and not all Muslims think alike. The niqab is a symbol of Islamic identity, and Muslim women have the right to wear niqab.

Interview participants revealed that, Islamic face covering according to their practices, beliefs, culture, and societies requirement. Stephanie, (2014) on his research stated that, in Muslim society niqab is modest dress and certainly it varied from country to country class to class, context to context. They prefer to wear niqab as a family tradition and their communities requirement. According to Hossain, (2015) on his research shown, this practices (wearing niqab) is like their social habit and tradition they cannot come out without that. Muslim niqab wearing women cannot defy communities requirement and niqab is not limiting to free movement and interacting with other members in the society or participating in the communities social work. Every woman who wears a niqab is a unique individual, and it is unfair and inaccurate to make a comprehensive judgement about all niqab wearing women based on their Islamic attire and a piece of cloth that make as their face covering (Hossain, 2015). In this research Participants no. 13 & 7 who are very dedicated in Islam and said as:

The strength of Iman is manifested in the degree and quality of our obedience and submission in Allah's (s.w.t) orders. It is again not a culture. Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w) said in a *Hadith*, "Hayaa (modesty) is a branch of Iman". Thus according to the statement from Nabi (s.a.w) Hayaa is very important and significant quality of Iman. (Participant 13)

"In my country, once a girl when 12 or 13 years old that time she also started to wear niqab as follow her family culture. Nobody

will force her. In western country they create lot of controversy about niqab. If we go to outside of Arab country, then the teenager open their face covering because they wants to avoid the problem. For this reason some Muslim and non-Muslim people think that they forced her to wear niqab, but no, because we following our countries culture". (Participant 7)

Based on figure 3 wearing niqab is women's freedom of choice and Muslim women should be the right to wear niqab. According to interview participants view, that it is ridiculous for some countries like France and other western region's ban niqab in public places. Women who wear niqab they don't like to remove the niqab because they feel, wearing niqab is her personal choice they really like to wear it. Their feeling is not comfortable to showing their faces in the presence of people, due to their religious obligation. Some Muslim and none-Muslim people think niqab wearing women are oppressed by the religion. According to niqab wearing women it's not true. They think that their believes should be respected, and that they should be given the freedom to wear it. Participants, 28 said about Western media as:

Probably I deny the niqab women are terrorist, they have wrong understanding about Jihad but in the end I think goes back through the American or European nations and media are trying to Islam discredit (participants, 28)

In figure 3 some participants said about Islamic fashion and tradition. Nowadays Islamic dresses are becoming popular as a fashion. Some women wear niqab as very social or modern types. But most of the participants adopt this stance, fashionable niqab with deep makeup it's not criterion of modesty. Participants no. 1 & 14 are religious they also agree with that. Shirazi, (2016) on his research shown, the world tendency to combine ethics and fashion, the shari'i norms and modern trends to show the style. The Russian Mufti (2013) encourage the Muslim women attendance at the Islamic fashion show. It's up to women's personality but she have to think about the word "modesty". Participants 1& 14 both are married respectively said as:

"May Allah guide them. They don't know the real meaning of niqab." (Participant 14)

"Nowadays lot of Islamic fashion show, modern Islamic dress, it is not a Muslim religious culture." (Participant 1)

In Malaysian perspective some interview participants suggested that, Malaysia is multi-cultural and very peaceful but sometimes they feel uncomfortable because if they go any restaurant they feel uneasy. For them sometimes difficult to get better place, where niqab wearing women easily can sit and take their meal. Two (2) participants from other country;

said, in Muslim society some Muslim people also don't accept niqab and sometimes criticize niqab but they are very courageous, they wear niqab as a challenge.

Findings in the current study showed that, Niqab is a Islamic religious dress. Some women wear *niqab* as a tradition or their countries' cultural requirement, as shown in figure 3 Some participants wear *niqab* for religious obligation and follow the Prophet (s.a.w) *sunnah*, they think niqab means modest dress and every Muslim women should follow the criterion of modesty. It is not obligatory to wear but if any women wear niqab it is extra piety and feel very close to Allah (s.w.t) and she will be rewarded. Wearing niqab is Arabian culture or custom and some Muslim women hold the belief that no longer relevant and necessary as it is not the custom in the society. Cultures are only perceptions of patterns and characteristics behaviour and social habits defined and influenced by men and women in the society. Participant no. 5 is married and very courageous said as:

"For me, wearing niqab is not obligatory but my own choice and I am not following any culture. It is order of Allah (s.w.t) for Muslim women. As a Muslim women, it is important for me to follow the command of *Allah* (s.w.t) and follow the way of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). (Participant 5)"

Nine (9) participants from the in-depth interview of 33 niqab wearing women from Arabic countries reported that, for them niqab wearing is a culture; since childhood they were raised with niqab and without it they felt uncomfortable. If any women didn't wear niqab other people look at them strangely; so, they had to follow their culture and communities instruction.

A further issue raised by women, wearing niqab is their personal choice and empowerment, not by any bodies' force, or culture but only a religious view. As a Muslim women should follow their culture and their society's requirement. Most of the women wear niqab out of religious obligation or as an expression of Muslim identity. Niqab wearing women should be treated with respect when asked to remove at airport immigration for security reason, government office, health service and teaching. Ruby (2006) in her research shown, in traditional Islamic countries the status of a woman's body is a sign of the moral status of the nation, and women's are apparent to the cultural carriers of their society.

8. Validation

During focus group discussion on validation with nine of twelve participants also agreed, every religious people should follow their religion and culture. Six (6) non-Muslim participants said, niqabi women are following their culture with their faith in one God so,

they cannot change or remove the face cover as they adopted the culture. For them culture compliment their religious beliefs and something like it will show how religion grown up develop their view so we could not say anything about their tradition it's up to women's choice. Their opinion is not necessary to wear niqab because of hot weather.

In focus group discussion, three (3) non-niqab wearing Malaysian Muslim women who are very pious said, niqab wearing women is following their tradition and religion. Everybody should follow their culture and religion as we are Malaysian people we had our special dress so, we have to follow our countries dress code. Even though niqab wearing women's dress up is loose fitting and cover their whole body, only two eyes visible. Niqab protect women from strange people because it is very modest but their opinion is Malaysian perspective not necessary to wear niqab

Another niqab wearing participant who are from non-Muslim country she said, Their countries government is against niqab. They don't have any freedom of choice sometimes they are forced to remove.

9. Conclusion

This study is an effort to present the information and living experiences of Muslim *niqab* wearing women who are the subject matter in this phenomenological research. The researcher has reflected upon the ways in which the experiences, beliefs, and personal perspectives of the participants contributed to their Islamic culture. The results illustrated that Muslim *niqab* wearing women's understanding with Islam and Islamic culture.

Family is very important aspect in human life. As a Muslim, women should follow family's tradition and religious belief. *Niqab* is a piece of fabric but powerful Islamic artifact; it does communicate to the whole world as Islamic religious dress. Wearing *niqab* indicates one's expression of Islamic identity and women's empowerment. When a woman wears *niqab* she feels her freedom of choice and liberty. Unfortunately nowadays *niqab* wearing has been subjected to criticism by certain sections of society and made it a controversial issue due to misunderstanding among Muslims and non-Muslims community and due to this women feel discriminated culturally and politically.

Wearing *niqab* is not anti-social or anti-women movement and it's not a barrier for women for development and prosperity. It should not be perceived as a security risk. Some non-educated and misguided people wear *niqab* and get involved in many kind of crimes and portrays a bad image of Islam as a religion. Consequently *niqab* wearing women are becoming victims for their heinous crimes. Respondents also believe that some bias reports by the media portrayed bad image of Islam and as a result *niqab* wearing women become subjected to discriminations and victimized in some cases.

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