

Cross-Cultural Difference between Female Young Adults in Korea and Indonesia in Perceiving Hijabis in the Media

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Abstract

The Muslim population is growing significantly in Asian countries. By conducting an experiment, this study examines the cultural differences between South Korean and Indonesian female, young adults, and their perception of hijabis who are represented in the media. The main goal of this study is to compare the perception towards hijabis in a homogenous country new to Muslims against a Muslim-majority country. Results showed that non-hijabis were deemed more physically attractive, empathetic, and enjoyable among Koreans when compared to Indonesians. Through this study, we provide a theoretical explanation using cultivation theory and (parasocial) contact hypothesis to clarify the differences between South Korea and Indonesia. This study provides a baseline of understanding to determine where both cultures are at in perceiving hijabis. Our results suggest that it will be compelling to correct media representation in order to reduce stereotypes and lead to a successful understanding of both cultures.

Keywords : *Cultivation Theory, Contact Hypothesis, Hijabis, Cross-Cultural Research*

1. Introduction

South Korea has been heading towards a multicultural society since the implementation of the Employment Permit System in 2004 and the increase of international marriage [1]. Aligned with this change, South Korea became the first country to enact the Refugee act in the Asian region. Despite the act, South Korea's refugee acceptance rate remains unchanged. In 2018, following a civil war in Yemen, 484 Yemeni refugees sought asylum yet, only two asylum seekers were granted refugee status. The discrepancy between such policies and the glaring reality symbolically shows that there is an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim backlash stemming from the vigilance of a homogenous society [2].

While national culture is distinctly shared within national lines across the world, South Korea is still considered as an ethnically and culturally homogenous society. Historically, South Korea has preserved its tradition of "pure blood" nationalism, whereby there is a shared ethnicity, language, history, and culture [3].

However, as the influx of foreigners in South Korea continues to steadily increase [1], problems such as the isolation of multicultural families and discrimination among workplaces and schools are rising; mainly due to a lack of cultural understanding [4]. Evident from the meager number of Yemeni asylum seekers who were granted refugee status, Islamophobia still hinders the coexistence of different cultures in South Korea [5], despite the gradual increase of the Muslim population [6]. Thus, finding a means to understand Islamic culture better is one of the tasks that South Korea must resolve in order to usher in a multicultural society fully.

To date, research on the perception of Muslims has been primarily conducted in the United States [7], whereas only a few studies have been carried out in Asia. Besides, while studies from the U.S. employ various study methods that show how Muslim identity is commonly linked with Islamophobia [8, 9], studies in Asia focus on analyzing negative media portrayals of the Islamic faith [4, 10, 11]. Hence, in this study, we specifically investigate perceptions towards hijabis (Muslim women wearing a hijab) across South Korea and Indonesia.

The hijab, along with other forms of Islamic veiling, not only serves as a religious meaning but also makes hijabis more discernible. Thus, the main goal of this study is to provide a baseline on how Koreans perceive hijabis, who are the most detectable practitioners of Islam in real life. Noting the negative representation of Muslims in Korean media, we draw from the cultivation theory and parasocial contact theory to point out the effect of media representation in constructing the perception of hijabis.

Meanwhile, following the growing trend of choosing not to veil [12], this study inspects the perception of Indonesian women to investigate how hijabis are perceived by women themselves in a Muslim-majority country. We especially look into the perceived physical attractiveness of hijabis in four dimensions: (1a), social attractiveness (1b), empathy (1c), emotional reactions (1d), and enjoyment (1e). Islamic veiling not only shows one's cultural identity and piety, but also performs to limit their physical attractiveness in public from any male outside of the family [13]. Along with the antiveiling discourse promulgated by Islamic feminists [14], various responses will be examined such as some hijabis actively choosing to wear the hijab as a form of resistance against anti-Muslim racism or to consciously seclude themselves by showing their pride in their identity [15]. We will also consider how hijabis are perceived by women in an attempt to show the change in the meaning of traditional veiling.

Lastly, we compare the perception of hijabis between South Korea and Indonesia. Through this comparison, we expect to see how hijabis are perceived in a homogenous society where there has been limited to nearly no contact with Muslims, as well as how hijabis are perceived in a Muslim-majority country where the meaning of veiling is changing. Moreover, a comparison between the two distinct cultures will show the effects of cultivation theory and parasocial contact theory.

2. Literature Review

The hijab is a loose piece of clothing covering the head, neck, and parts of women's bodies. The hijab holds various connotations: the wearer's faith [16], a symbol of identity among social groups [17], piety, and sometimes a fashion style. Women who wear the hijab are referred to as hijabis, whereas women who do not wear the hijab are called non-hijabis. Perceptions of hijabis may vary across different dimensions. In this study, we focus on physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, empathy felt towards hijabis and enjoyment from watching video clips showing hijabis.

2.1 Media Framing on Islamic Culture

Media framing refers to the act of the media selecting and emphasizing a particular facet of a society by showing and constructing a mediated reality [18, 19]. Framing is important because the media can build a

message according to a selected frame, causing viewers only to receive a specific message through a particular frame. As information and communication technology (ICT) has permeated our daily lives, social and political issues are shared and learned through various SNS platforms [20], which also plays a crucial role in framing [21]. Especially in cases where their conveyed message is related to one's safety, the mediated message on related issues has a significant effect on forming one's perception and attitude [22].

For example, the media often uses the word "terrorist" synonymously with Muslims or Islamic culture, implying that they pose a threat to democracy [23]. Consequently, this kind of media attention raises intolerance and instills negative prejudices towards Muslims [24]. Also, it has been shown Muslims receive less-than-favorable coverage within mainstream media [25] in cultures with lesser or no contact with Muslims because they are hardly represented in the media at all, and/or because the few times that they are showcased in the media, they are portrayed stereotypically.

Consistent with these studies, South Korean studies found that news coverage about Muslims or Arab countries is negative [26, 27]. Notably, Koreans (83% of the respondents) perceived that the news coverage on Muslims or Arab countries is overwhelmingly unfavorable [27]. Moreover, Islamic countries and Islam were named as the top three most related to the word "extremist" whereas hatred was shown as a relative emotion when a big data analysis was done on the internet and social media sites that South Koreans frequently use [4]. These studies not only demonstrate that Muslims are portrayed in a negative manner in South Korea but also that South Koreans tend to harbor a more negative image of them [26]. In other words, the media is the primary source and influencer of stereotyping, especially regarding minority groups that South Koreans lack social interaction with [28, 29].

The practice of adorning the hijab is a target of these negative stereotypes of Islam in cultures and is most notably amplified in communities where Muslims are a minority [30]. Muslim-American women reported experiencing societal and institutional discrimination, especially when wearing the hijab, such as being reported as suspicious or being discriminated against at the airport [7]. Also, hijabis are perceived as less intelligent or attractive [31] and discriminated against when job searching [32].

Meanwhile, in Indonesia and other Muslim countries, some momentous changes surrounding the hijab have been made. First, controversy within and around Muslims on whether the hijab is a form of oppression, specifically a tool of misogyny, is allowing Muslims to make a choice on whether to veil themselves or not. Second, the portrayal of the hijab in the media has been changing. Starting with the social media-led hijab revolution, even among hijabis, the meaning of the hijab is changing from a strict religious tradition to a more approachable, everyday celebration of faith and self-identity within the Muslim community [33]. Following this trend, Indonesian fashion designers are attempting to modify the hijab to be more fashionable so that it can capture the youthfulness of hijabis in order to minimize negative stereotypes [34]; these new changes are in turn, reflected in the media as well.

2.2 Cultivation Theory and the Contact Hypothesis

The cultivation theory posits that exposure to media gradually cultivates a particular attitude or perception towards reality [35]. The original work of the cultivation theory primarily focuses on the effect of audio-visual media content, such as television programs. The cultivation theory can be explained by the concept of mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming means developing a uniform image through the media on a particular issue. Moreover, resonance refers to a situation where the cultivation effect becomes more prominent as an individual goes through a similar experience seen from the media message.

In modern society, mobile devices and social media platforms allow for increased access to an unlimited source of information. This means that anyone has access to global events anytime and anywhere. As news

coverage in Asian countries towards Muslims is mainly negative [10], searching for information or re-watching news coverage on Muslims is only bound to reinforce the cultivated perceptions.

The contact hypothesis states that under certain circumstances, interacting with an individual from a disliked group can effectively reduce prejudice among the majority group [36]. Furthermore, being in an equal group status in a situation, having a common goal, cooperating between groups, and having a common support for law or customs can help one reduce prejudice against the other [36]. This can be explained by the fact that the amount of contact can increase empathy while simultaneously reducing anxiety [37]. To elaborate further, a study proved that positive contact with a Muslim led to lower levels of prejudice and negative perceptions [38]. A more recent study revealed that contact had a meaningful impact on generating a more positive outlook towards a stereotyped minority group [37].

Stemming from the contact hypothesis, the parasocial contact hypothesis posits that the media provides an opportunity to learn and understand the unliked group without having any physical contact [39]. The effect and mechanism of the parasocial contact hypothesis are known to be similar to the original by the contact hypothesis. For example, frequently viewing a show with gay men being the lead character and keeping parasocial interaction has shown correlations with decreased levels of sexual prejudice [40].

Prior research has confirmed that exposure to negative media representation of Muslims leads to personal anti-Muslim prejudice [41]. The cultivation theory and parasocial contact hypothesis emphasize the importance of Muslim media representation [37, 42]. While the cultivation theory provides a theoretical explanation on how media framing works where Muslims are underrepresented and often misrepresented, the contact hypothesis successfully supports the possible differences in perception between a community with nearly no contact with Muslims and a Muslim-majority community.

2.3 Perceptions of Hijabis

Islamic veiling initially functioned to limit the physical attractiveness of hijabis. Yet, with a diverse discussion on the meaning of the hijab, a more different take on the hijab is being shown, especially among the younger generation, and unveiling is carefully being considered as an option. Accordingly, the perception of hijabis can be considered as a multifaceted concept comprising physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, and empathy. In addition, as we try to see the effect of media portrayal, enjoyment of the video with hijabis is also measured.

2.3.1 Physical Attractiveness of Hijabis. Physical attractiveness is an essential factor in how individuals form perceptions or impressions. Prior findings showed that non-hijabis are more sexually desirable [43]. Other studies have also found that non-hijabis were perceived to be more physically attractive than hijabis [31]. In light of the results of previous studies, in which hijabis were perceived as less attractive than non-hijabis, the first hypothesis stated is as follows:

H1: Non-hijabis will be seen as more physically attractive than hijabis.

2.3.2 Social Attractiveness of Hijabis. Former studies have established social attractiveness as the perception of friendliness and whether an individual fits into a circle of friends [44]. Having many friends could be a sign of having a positive connection with social perception and social attractiveness [45].

Several other cues may be indicators of social attractiveness. Prior research identified the possible factor of perceived popularity and likability in social attractiveness. For example, having a negative evaluation of SNS indicated that those people are seen as less socially attractive due to the lack of “popularity” [46]. Meanwhile,

young Muslim women were viewed as having an allegiance to their own community and a path set aside from secular values [47]. Here, the second hypothesis is provided:

H2: Non-hijabis will be seen as more socially attractive than hijabis.

2.3.3 Empathy for Hijabis. Empathy has been designated as imagining and experiencing the mental states of others [48, 49]. Empathy is often seen as social intelligence [50] or emotional intelligence [51]. Within the media, empathy is created when advocating for a character in the drama or story. Evidence shows that characters can evoke empathy from individuals by possessing likability [52].

As empathy is evoked through likability, individuals with high physical and social attractiveness should arouse more empathy. Following the hypothesis set above, the hypothesis of empathy is set as follows:

H3: Non-hijabis will evoke more empathy than hijabis.

2.3.4 Enjoyment through videos with hijabis. According to prior research, enjoyment occurs because individuals are well-liked with excellent moral characteristics [53]. Since the hijab contains complex, multi-layered meanings to mute all sources of sexual desire and feelings of enjoyment [54], the last hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Non-hijabis will evoke more enjoyment than hijabis.

Indonesians are exposed to Islamic culture more frequently as 87.1% of the country is Muslim [55], whereas South Koreans are not, with the total Muslim population hovering around 0.4% [56]. Therefore, any interaction between two cultures may show different perceptions of the hijab. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

Is there a cultural difference between South Korean (community with no contact with Muslim) and Indonesian (Muslim-majority community) culture on hijabis in terms of physical attractiveness (RQ1a), social attractiveness (RQ1b), empathy (RQ1c), and enjoyment (RQ1d)?

3. Method

3.1 Design, Media Stimuli, and Procedure

The factorial design used in this study consisted of two factors with two levels: culture (South Korea vs Indonesia) and video type (hijabis vs. non-hajabis). All of the independent variables were manipulated between subjects to examine the hypotheses and research question. The participants were randomly assigned to watch one of two video clips of wedding videos as a stimulus. We specifically used wedding videos for three reasons. First, as this is cross-cultural research, we predicted that wedding videos, which do not have much dialogue, would work for both cultures without encountering a language barrier. Second, we expected that wedding videos have a common storyline shared across cultures, which could reduce story bias. Third, previous studies have mostly used pictures to measure perception. However, cultivation theory points out that the use of audio-visual media messages and contact hypothesis highlights the importance of positive (parasocial) contact in reducing stereotypes. In order to avoid strengthening any pre-existing stereotypes towards hijabis, we chose wedding videos as the research stimuli.

After watching the stimulus, participants were asked to fill out a survey measuring the main female character's physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, empathy, and enjoyment. The participants completed the questionnaires in their native languages; either Indonesian or Korean. As the survey should be equivalent in transferring the meanings of questionnaires, the original English questionnaire was translated into Indonesian and Korean by those who were not involved in this research. Then, the authors fluent in English and Indonesian/Korean carefully assessed each version.

3.2 Participants

116 South Korean females (from the age 19 to 30, $M_{age}=22.2$, $SD=0.77$) who are ethnically South Koreans were recruited through Embrain, an online survey company in Korea. 166 Indonesian females (from the age 19 to 30, $M_{age}=24.3$, $SD=0.57$) who are ethnically Indonesians were recruited through the Katadata Insight Center, an online survey company in Indonesia. To capture the shift in perception of hijabis among Muslims along with the hijab revolution, young female adults were selected as the appropriate participants, from both countries. Also, young adults use of ICT through the computer or mobile phones to deal with their day-to-day activities from online banking [57] to cope with stress by playing online games [58]. Hence, young adults were selected as they can best show the effect of cultivation theory and (parasocial) contact hypothesis in both cultures. As following prior research that showed female preference for melodramatic and romantic genres [59], stimulus used in this study better fit the participants. Data was collected between 6 March 2019 and 18 March 2019.

The Indonesian participant sample was homogeneous in terms of religion, with the majority being Muslim (91%), followed by Christian (6 %), Catholic (2.4 %), and Buddhist (0.6 %). The religion of South Korean participants was Christian (17.2 %), Buddhist (15.5 %), Catholic (5.2 %), and others (62.1 %).

3.3 Measures

All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”).

3.3.1 Physical Attractiveness. The degree of physical attractiveness was measured by 5 items adapted from McCroskey and McCain [44]. An example item of physical attractiveness was “I think that the main female character is quite pretty.” The reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) score was 0.73 for Indonesians and 0.87 for Koreans.

3.3.2 Social Attractiveness. The degree of social attractiveness was measured by 5 items adapted from McCroskey and McCain [44]. An example item of social attractiveness was “I would like to have a friendly chat with the main female character.” The reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) score was 0.65 for Indonesians and 0.79 for Koreans.

3.3.3 Empathy. The degree of empathy was measured by 4 items adapted and revised from Harris et al. [60], and Oliver, Sargent, and III Weaver [61]. An example item of empathy was “I really get involved with the main female character’s feelings in this video.” The reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) score was 0.88 for Indonesians and 0.90 for Koreans.

3.3.4 Enjoyment. The degree of enjoyment was measured by 5 items adapted and revised from Hall and Zwarun [62]. An example item of enjoyment was “It was fun for me to watch the main female character in the video.” The reliabilities (Cronbach’s α) score was 0.79 for Indonesians and 0.87 for Koreans.

4. Results

To test the hypotheses and answer the research question, an ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of culture (South Koreans vs. Indonesians) and video type (hijabis vs. non-hijabis) on physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, empathy, and enjoyment. The results showed a significant main effect of culture, $F(1, 278) = 48.15$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.15$, and a significant main effect of video types, $F(1, 278) = 13.64$, $p < 0.001$,

$\eta^2 = 0.05$. Overall, hijabis ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.90$, 95% CI [3.61, 3.77]) was perceived less physically attractive than non-hijabis ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.70$, 95% CI [3.89, 4.05]). Therefore, the data were consistent with H1. However, this is due to Koreans.

RQ1a questioned the interaction effect between culture and video type regarding physical attractiveness. The interaction term of culture and video type was significant, $F(1, 278) = 16.37$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$. Among Indonesians, hijabis ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.83$, 95% CI [3.97, 4.23]) were not significantly different in physical attractiveness from non-hijabis ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.71$, 95% CI [3.96, 4.18]), however non-hijabis ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.64$, 95% CI [3.7, 3.94]) were significantly higher in physical attractiveness than hijabis ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.66$, 95% CI [3.02, 3.26]) in Korea.

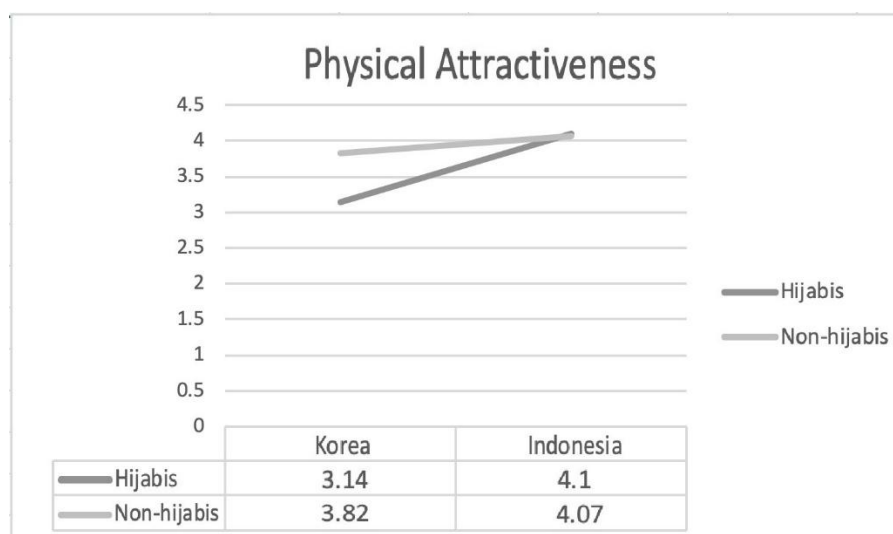


Figure 1. Interaction effect between culture and video types on physical attractiveness

H2 predicted that non-hijabis would be perceived as more socially attractive than hijabis. The result showed no main effect of cultures, $F(1, 278) = 1.83$, $p = 0.177$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. There was a significant main effect of the video type, $F(1, 278) = 15.81$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Overall, hijabis ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.81$, 95% CI [2.85, 3.03]) were perceived more socially attractive than non-hijabis ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.82$, 95% CI [2.43, 2.63]). Thus, H2 was supported.

RQ1b questioned the interaction effect between culture and video type regarding social attractiveness. The interaction term of culture and video type was not significant, $F(1, 278) = 0.10$, $p = 0.753$, $\eta^2 = 0.00$. Indonesians (hijabis: $M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.81$, 95% CI [2.77, 3.01] vs. non-hijabis: $M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.86$, 95% CI [2.34, 2.6]) and Koreans (hijabis: $M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.81$, 95% CI [2.84, 3.14] vs. non-hijabis: $M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.76$, 95% CI [2.49, 2.77]) reported similar social attractiveness.

H3 predicted that non-hijabis would evoke more empathy than hijabis. The main effect of culture was significant, $F(1, 278) = 65.19$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.19$. The main effect of video type was also significant, $F(1, 278) = 6.48$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. Overall, non-hijabis ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.92$, 95% CI [3.46, 3.68]) led to more empathy than hijabis ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.05$, 95% CI [3.23, 3.47]). Thus, H3 was supported. However, this is again due to Koreans.

RQ1c questioned the interaction effect between culture and video type regarding empathy. The interaction term of culture and video type was significant, $F(1, 278) = 13.38$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Among Indonesians, hijabis ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.84$, 95% CI [3.74, 4]) were not significantly different in feeling empathy for non-hijabis ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.88$, 95% CI [3.63, 3.89]), however non-hijabis ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.93$, 95% CI [3.09,

3.43]) were significantly higher in feeling empathy for, than hijabis (M =2.63, SD = 0.86, 95% CI [2.47, 2.79]) in Korea.

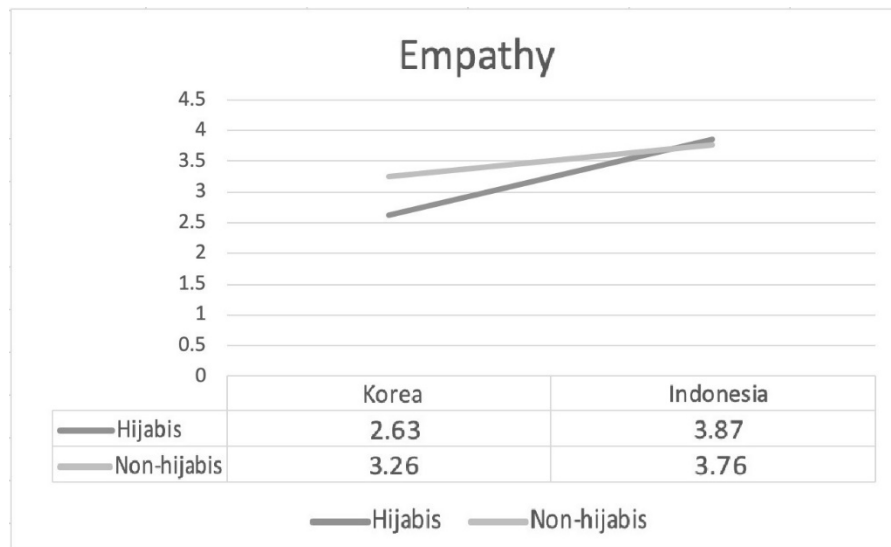


Figure 2. Interaction effect between culture and video types on empathy

Lastly, H4 was set with the prediction that non-hijabis would create more enjoyment than hijabis across cultures. The result showed a significant main effect for culture, $F(1, 278) = 141.83, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.34$. The main effect of video type was also significant, $F(1, 278) = 9.93, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.03$. Non-hijabis (M =3.52, SD = 0.78, 95% CI [3.43, 3.61]) led to more enjoyment than hijabis (M = 3.29, SD = 1.13, 95% CI [3.16, 3.42]). Thus, H4 was supported. However, this is again due to Koreans.

RQ1d questioned the interaction effect between culture and video type regarding enjoyment. The interaction term of culture and video type was significant, $F(1, 278) = 27.85, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.09$. Among Indonesians, hijabis (M =3.97, SD = 0.82, 95% CI [3.85, 4.1]) were not significantly different in enjoyment from non-hijabis (M =3.77, SD = 0.77, 95% CI [3.65, 3.89]), however non-hijabis (M =3.15, SD = 0.66, 95% CI [3.03,3.27]) were significantly higher in enjoyment than hijabis (M =2.37, SD = 0.80, 95% CI [2.22, 2.52]) in Korea.

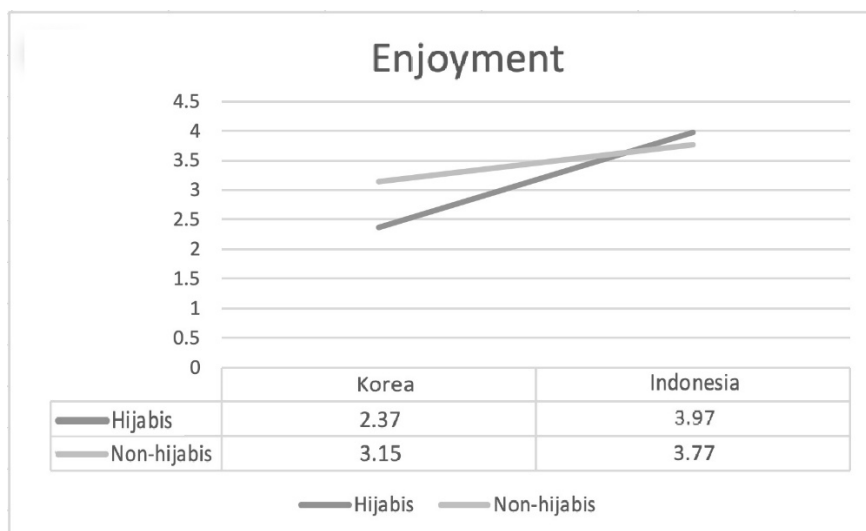


Figure 3. Interaction effect between culture and video types on enjoyment

In sum, all of the hypotheses (H1 ~ H4) were supported. Regarding the research questions, the interaction effect between cultures and video types regarding physical attractiveness(RQ1), empathy(RQ3), and enjoyment(RQ4) were significant, with Koreans showing a stronger preference for non-hijabis over hijabis. However, interaction terms of culture and video type were not significant in determining social attractiveness (RQ2).

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we presented the differences in perception of hijabis portrayed in the media within and between cultures. Although this study only observed the perception among females and used wedding video bearing the possibility of hindering the measure of empathy and enjoyment, the results demonstrate that there is a clear difference in perception towards hijabis versus non-hijabis consistent with previous research that Asian cultures perceived non-hijabis as more physically attractive. Using the contact hypothesis, we suggest that personal contact, level of knowledge, and even media coverage of Muslims can change one's perception. Notably, cultural differences of the preference of non-hijabis prove the contact hypothesis, given that South Korea is a homogenous community and Indonesia is a Muslim-majority community

Although our study showed some changes in perception towards hijabis, the hijab remains a widespread practice of Islamic veiling in Muslim-majority communities. Despite this, media images continue to portray Muslims negatively using the hijab as a signifier to separate Muslim and non-Muslim societies. As seen from the results of this study, underrepresentation or misrepresentation leads to an increased effect of parasocial contact theory. Furthermore, continual exposure to negative portrayals of hijabis and Muslim culture may cultivate and reinforce the already negative baseline of perception as shown in our research. In conclusion, it is crucial to correct media representation in order to reduce stereotypes and to facilitate successful integration of both cultures within South Korea and Indonesia.

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