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BEEBZ: AN AMERICAN HIJABI'S SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Shopping as a hijabi can prove to be a difficult and daunting task, especially for those with time constraints or a particular fashion sense. For example, not only does a girl have to imagine what every sleeveless dress or short-sleeved shirt would look like with an extra, longer layer underneath or on top, but also if she can even find said extra layer to match at all. She also has to consider her collection of scarves, being constrained to only what is available to her in terms of color and texture.

With this thesis, I will be explaining who hijabis are, their needs as well as their developing image and overall narrative in the U.S. Then, as a response to the growing Muslim population within the country's borders, I will present a business plan and its accompanying branding geared towards facilitating the hijabi shopping experience. While similar entrepreneurial endeavors have already been launched in various locations around the world, I am interested in make this project unique with not just its products (being up to date with contemporary trends, affordable, and easily accessible) and convenient location (geared towards a target audience within the U.S. borders), but also with its site layout and marketing strategy.

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Chapter 1

Fashion: A History & Psychology

“Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than to merely keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world’s view of us.”

- Virginia Woolf

While we are told from a young age to “never judge a book by its cover,” we are, as a society, conditioned to believe that one’s outward appearance can be a summary of their personality and associated social behavior. It is common conduct to make connections between what we see and any preconceived notions we have – a trait that has scientific and historical backings to support it. Our stylistic choices do tend to reflect social and personal conditions to a certain extent – during times of hardship, for instance, one notices a shift from more flirtatious clothing selections to increasingly modest picks. This reliance on fashion for self expression and nonverbal communication is a fairly recent phenomenon within humanity that began to sprout and take form when the purpose of clothing shifted from being a survival necessity to being more so a social marker that “helps us to be seen in the light that we wish to be, and also exudes our personalities and social status.”¹ Additional psychological research and studies reveal bizarre relations between individuals’ fashion selections and their emotional and mental wellbeing, some even going so far as to create explicit, mostly stereotypical categories for every person and their outfit tendencies (the Conventional Dresser, the Grunge Look, the Casual Chic Dresser, the

¹ Waude, Adam. “Fashion Psychology: What Clothes Say About You.” Psychologist World, 19 February 2016, <https://www.psychologistworld.com/body-language/psychology-of-clothing-dating-dress>. Accessed 13 March 2017.

Designer, the Athletic Dresser, and the Goth). Fashion Psychology as a field of study is also gaining momentum as we move forward, further strengthening the relationship between the two mediums, incorporating science and mental/emotional health with fashion.

It is noticeable, when examining fashion tendencies through history, that certain trends ebb in and out through the years. For instance, just in the years 2015-2017, the United States relived the 70's all the way through the 90's, with teenagers reverting back to bellbottoms before quickly adapting "mom jeans" and crop tops afterwards. As mentioned briefly before, fashion trends tend to heavily depend on social, economic, and political circumstances in any given environment. One extreme example is the veil enforcement on women in Iran – just a few decades ago, women in the country wore short skirts and wore their hair to parallel the latest international fads. With shifts in political establishments and rulings, women became obligated to wear headscarves when venturing out in public. However, recently and continuing on today, there is a noticeable resistance that is gaining momentum within the Iranian female population, and the veils have become looser, less prominent, and slowly making their way to being nonexistent. Another less severe instance in the Middle East has been the head covering trend in Egypt. Approximately forty to fifty years ago, women wearing headscarves were typically older and would not adopt the look until after marriage. It eventually became a widespread trend, however, over the years, with the majority of Egyptian women covering their hair. While political happenings may have had a part in this societal shift, it was more of a social construct that caught on as more families became more religiously conscious and others felt the need to comply with societal standards as it increasingly became the norm. The United States has

experienced a similar occurrence in regards to Islamic fashion, though for arguably different reasons.

Chapter 2

The Hijabista Phenomenon

In late 2014, early 2015, a video titled, “Somewhere in America #Mipsterz” was released in cooperation with a number of influential and recognizable Muslim American figures, and set to Jay Z’s “Somewhere in America.”² The short film portrayed a variety of Muslim, hijabi women being themselves – students, athletes, fashion enthusiasts, and more. The production was intended to provide insight to Muslim American communities, combatting stereotypes of oppression amongst Muslim women and associated austere or overly demure personalities. At the time, it received a wide array of responses, mostly either extremely supportive or very critical of the proposed message and intention. Some believed that it was a step in the right direction by showing lighthearted Muslims in their element, as well the diversity within the population itself. Others believed it was unnecessarily overreaching to prove what should be obvious, and that it limited perception of Muslim communities to being empty-minded and superficial. Regardless of which opinion is more valid, one thing was for sure: it started a conversation. It also made it clear that being covered does not necessarily parallel being unfashionable.

“Hijabi” is a word for women who choose to observe hijab and cover their hair using scarves or different wraps. While “hijab” translates to the physical scarf, it is also representational of a certain set of values regarding one’s modesty – not just physically, but characteristically as well. It is a very flexible concept and is interpreted differently across various

² Bake, Sheikh. “Somewhere in America #MIPSTERZ.” Online video clip. Youtube. 20 November 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68sMkDKMias>. 2 April 2017.

cultures and upbringings. Certain hijabis are sure to only reveal their faces and hands, but are okay with wearing form-fitting outfits. Others prefer to wear more baggy outfits, not showing off their figure at all. Some hijabis prefer to wrap their scarves from the back, in a turban, with their necks exposed, while others believe their chests and necks must be completely hidden. There are women who wrap their scarves tightly, some who keep them loose, and others who simply drape them lightly over their heads. There is such great diversity within the hijabi community itself that variety in dress and principles is naturally to be expected.

“Hijabista” is a fairly new term used to describe hijabis who put emphasis on their physical features and choices as being important facets of their self expression and social identity. Youtube makeup vloggers, fashion designers, and artists have all contributed their talents to this development. These women naturally feel the need to represent their communities, to create role models for generations to come and to provide a solid base for cultural development moving forward. Younger Muslims girls growing up in the United States now have figures they can relate to and try to mimic as they develop into their own personas. A main goal for hijabistas is to combat stereotypes while maintaining a trueness to themselves and their ideals. As Islam becomes more of a predominant political topic on a national scale, news regarding hijabistas also becomes more prominent. In the past year alone (paralleling political events regarding the religion), there have been multiple fashion displays that emphasized the prevalence of hijab in the fashion world, highlighted by fashion designer Anniesa Hasibuan’s hijabi and immigrant-only collections and shows during New York Fashion Week (one of which was a direct response to politicians’ anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric). Hijabis in fashion have attracted the spotlight in different ways, such as vlogger Nura Afia’s becoming CoverGirl’s first Muslim ambassador, and Halima Aiden becoming the first hijabi to compete for

Miss Minnesota and to attend a swimsuit competition while wearing a burkini. Women, specifically hijabi women, are using fashion and their physical appearance as a tool to make themselves heard in today's America.

Hijabis are becoming more prominent in America, and more Muslim American women are gravitating towards the hijabista movement. However, fashion resources for hijabis are still scarce and seem to be maintaining their stagnant status. American hijabis have to depend heavily on their creative and problem solving skills when shopping, more so than the average American woman, simply due to limitations in terms of what's available on the market.

Chapter 3

Feasibility Study

Opportunity & Need

“Islamic fashion,” and modest clothing in general has experienced an increase in demand especially over the last few years. However, there proves to be an imbalance of supply and demand in the hijabi industry, with only a handful of prominent online venues and styles available for Muslim fashion, mostly based in Europe and Asia. There is not, up to date, a source of modern fashion complying with hijabi restrictions available to the general public on a regular basis, especially within the United States. It is only appropriate to take this time to learn more about the current hijabi fashion market, target audience, and devise an online venue layout concurrent with those findings. “Beebz” is a brand name conjured for this venture, derived from the Arabic word “habib,” meaning “loved ones” or “friends.”

According to the 2015-2016 State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, Muslim consumers spend an estimated \$230 billion on clothing, a number that is estimated to grow to \$327 billion by 2019 (which, for comparison, stands larger than the current combined clothing markets of the United Kingdom (\$107 billion), Germany (\$99 billion), India (\$96 billion), and the estimated United States market (\$218 billion). The hijabista revolution, encouraging female Muslim millennials to express their personalities via their outer appearance has certainly boosted the Muslim fashion field. It is considered a major factor in the aforementioned statistics concerning revenue spent by Muslim shoppers.

A majority of the few hijabi-friendly stores currently existing, however, fall short in terms of cost (being too pricey), quality, variety, and, location. What this venture would aim to do is provide hijabis, particularly those residing in the United States with a convenient online shopping experience that accompanies reasonable prices, ensured quality and customer service, and, most importantly, a variety of styles that are not restrictive or overly traditional.

Multiple entrepreneurs have recently participated in groundbreaking Muslim fashion businesses, and the hijab itself is becoming increasingly relevant within U.S. culture. Just in the recent month of September, an entire fashion line was presented with models wearing hijab for the first time in New York City's Fashion Week by Indonesian Muslim designer, Anniesa Hasibuan. Last year, Dolce and Gabbana, as well as other renowned lines released products relating to the head covering and modest culture. There are 3.3 million Muslims living in the U.S. and it is projected that the population will continue to increase to about 8.1 million by the year 2050. With an already growing trend and an increase in American Muslim populations, an increase in Muslim fashion is expected as well.

Products & Service

My service and product would be a convenient online shopping venue with reasonably priced products and reliable customer service. The goal is to simplify the shopping experience for primarily average-to-high-income hijabis living in the United States.

In terms of performance, the service and its products will greatly rely on its user interface and total branding. The overall look of the brand would encompass a near-Bohemian theme,

reflecting the primary goal of the venture: providing comfortable and fashionable hijabi clothes that are not overly constricting or traditional. The site's layout will be clean and modern, and will utilize simple navigation with very little distractions from the products and related information. Any modeled photography and associated imagery will be as high-end as possible, as the site will act as an art form to draw customers in before they can even begin to consider the products offered. The site will also present customers with matched outfits, with links to outside sources for products that are not provided by my business. This will facilitate mixing and matching entire sets without having to fret about unsuitable fabrics or colors.

The venue itself will be located online, and therefore available to everyone with Internet access. When first starting, I may limit the shipping availabilities to U.S. territories, as sending packages overseas would entail a more timely and arduous process. Also, returns and exchanges significantly influence shoppers' tendencies to place orders. Therefore, the site will allow customers 30 business days to return or exchange products if they are not to their liking, as to encourage them to follow through with their purchases. When orders are placed, shoppers will be able to select their measurements to ensure the best fit if they choose, and consequently the best quality from the brand. However, custom-sized creations will not be liable for returns, as such products will be made based on the customer's specifications and therefore will unlikely suit the needs of other customers (creating a loss for the company). As customer satisfaction is what would be driving this business either to success or into the ground, another feature offered would be fabric samples for different products mailed to customers' homes on demand. This allows women to not only see how an article of clothing looks on a model, but also how it feels in terms of texture and quality.

Based on readings and reports by individuals who have dabbled in the fashion industry, it can be difficult to supply reasonably priced products without outsourcing the production line. As the option of outsourcing the products is neither an entirely financially or ethically feasible one, Beebz will heavily depend on two independent contractors earning approximately 25% of the total gross profit. However, the first line launched, of three to six articles of clothing, will be made in-house, as to get a feel for what consumers are most attracted to, as well as to gather feedback and information regarding whether or not the venture can and should be developed further. Shipping costs would depend on shoppers' locations, and would be their responsibility, along with any shipping related costs regarding returns or exchanges.

Something that sets multiple non-hijabi businesses (including H&M, Toms, and Forever21) apart from competitors is their charity aspect. No current hijabi fashion businesses have taken advantage of this feel-good method of consumerism, which leaves shoppers with a sense of satisfaction not only for purchasing quality clothing, but also simultaneously giving back to the world in some way, shape, or form. This would be a great addition to this venture, as it would serve to not only benefit humanitarian causes, but also set the brand apart from other hijabi fashion industries. Beebz will accept donations in the form of old clothes from customers, and will be using a certain percentage of every annual profit to refurbish the donations into new and wearable outfits. These articles of clothing will then be offered to those in need, ranging from refugees and the homeless. This feature would, of course, increase garment prices to a certain extent as well.

Customer Pains

Customer pains include inconveniently huge chunks of time dedicated to finding non-hijabi clothing that suits modest needs, unreliable existing hijabi brands, and the whole limitation in hijabi fashion choices. Sometimes the pains are so severe that women resort to planning their shopping expeditions around their travel schedules (for those who do travel, and to largely Muslim urban areas and/or abroad), limiting their time spent searching for clothing down to a few hours a year.

Hijabis, as mentioned before, often having trouble in this day and age finding clothing that both meets their needs stylistically as well as in terms of practicality and modesty. Younger generations particularly find it difficult to do so, with current fashion trends popularizing features like long skirt slits, sheer material, and sleeveless tops. It is especially hard to find a maxi dress with sleeves that isn't only appropriate for destinations like the beach. Teenage to early 30-year olds often resort to clothing that does not reflect their personal taste due to inadequate options, resulting in a sense of discomfort with their physical appearance. While taking up sewing is always an option for those looking for unique clothing, not everyone has the time to dedicate to such a cause. Meanwhile, existing hijabi brands currently have either limited selections or extremely unreliable service and quality. Modanisa, the largest of the current hijabi brands, is known for its lacking customer service and, more often than not, its low quality fabrics and stitching. This ordeal quickly becomes frustrating, especially for those seeking particular outfits for upcoming events.

Customer Gains

With Beebz, women wearing the headscarf and adhering to more modest fashion choices will have a wider selection of clothing to choose from (in terms of style, material, color and cut) as well as reliable customer service. With the entire business branded as a hijabi store, women won't have to worry about the modesty of the products they order, as they would be ensured to meet hijabi requirements. In terms of guaranteed value, the fabric descriptions on the site near the product image and physical samples give customers contentment fully knowing what to expect before placing an order. This feature of Beebz not only ensures quality products, but also engages the shopper on a more sophisticated level that is otherwise unavailable in the online shopping sphere. As mentioned before, customer service plays a huge role in this business's success. Therefore, time will be of the essence at all times. The venture will value the customers' time as much as its own, building a reputation for timely order and sample deliveries. All of the features mentioned here will supply the American hijabi community with a reliable, flexible fashion producer that ensures not only product quality, but also peace of mind from start to finish with every order. And most importantly, customers will live feeling confident in how they physically look, knowing that they not only chose an outfit that suits their personality, but also contributed to a good cause through their shopping experience due to Beebz' charitable aspect.

Beebz helps hijabis (as well as other women interested in modest fashion) feel confident by supplying outfits that suit their physical needs without their having to forfeit time, quality, or personal aesthetic.

Target Market

While the target market can be very limited (that is, to say that American female Muslims are the only ones Beebz is geared toward), it certainly can be expanded to serve others as well. After all, Muslims are not the only people who rely on modest fashion. Likewise, there are also variations within the hijabi community itself. Hijabi clothing restrictions basically require a modest theme, covering the entire body excluding the face, hands (wrists down), and feet. Of course, this set “code of conduct” is greatly influenced by personal preference, and therefore it is also acceptable by the majority of hijabis to sport turban hair coverings that expose some of the neck (though these are typically accompanied by a second scarf or high neckline shirts), as well as three-quarter sleeves that may reveal parts of the arm. This arts venture will aim to produce flexible garment styles that can appeal to a wide variety of modesty preferences as opposed to one set of ideologies.

Another one of the primary goals of Beebz is to produce affordable, yet high-end clothing. This will in turn encourage customers ranging from college students and those of equal financial standing to middle/upper class women to utilize the service and its products, while not limiting itself to just that age group. The venture will appeal to, roughly, women in their late teens to those in their late thirties, with no limitations in terms of education, occupation, or profession. It will focus on attracting individuals with an interest in presenting themselves in modern, comfortable clothing, and, for hijabi customers, the belief that hijab doesn’t limit outer self-expression nor appearance.

The target market views products/services currently in the marketplace as convenient mostly in terms of availability, though they do not believe they are entirely dependable in terms

of sizing and quality. There is general contentedness with the availability of scarves, but there is a noticeable shortage when it comes to items of clothing. The variety presented is limited, and lines that do provide a wide array of choices tend to be beyond consumers' price ranges (especially when considering the younger majority of the target market) or simply do not use quality material. Beebz will combat both of these issues. Hijabi consumers are constantly on the lookout for convenient shopping venues and would certainly be intrigued by an affordable shop that custom caters to their needs.

Buying decisions are made based on the consumer's taste and fashion preference, while also keeping their financial capabilities in mind. Decisions are primarily made centrally, unless the consumer is dependent on a financial provider (parents, significant others, etc). The ultimate responsibility for approving expenditures is a solely personal responsibility for the client(s). The charity aspect of the venture may act as a form of incentive, acting as another positive factor resulting from their shopping.

Primarily, hijabi online shoppers base their opinions of different brands based on the price and quality of the products they intend to buy. Price and quality tend to have a positive correlation, in which the decrease of price mirrors a decrease in quality, leaving consumers wary of cheap garments. Therefore, the venture's primary concern when producing said garments is to be as efficient as possible without abandoning the high quality results consumers expect. Secondly, customer service and the related payment methods can make or break a fashion business's reputation. Modanisa, the world's first and largest hijabi online clothing store located in Turkey, has a reputation amongst its market for poor customer service and mishandling of information. In turn, the company has experienced a backlash in reviews and decrease in public

opinion. This online venture will utilize pre-existing payment methods (such as), as well as a contact page with ensured reply to consumers' concerns within five business days.

Starting up, my target market would heavily depend on those closest to me, of course, from family to friends and colleagues. As an active member of Penn State's Muslim community, I have spoken to many fellow hijabis who would be interested in supporting this cause and providing feedback. I would be depending on them as well as others outside of State College to spread the word and publicize the brand.

Pain Relievers & Gain Creators

My company reduces the amount of time spent on shopping for suitable products. It is a reliable, feel-good method for women to find what they need clothing-wise. Most people don't hesitate when buying certain products online, like electronics off of Amazon.com or the online Apple store. The main reason for that is that those brands have established a reputation for following through with their promises in terms of product excellence and time efficiency. Customers know what to expect at their doorstep and approximately when to expect it by. Beebz aims to do the same over time by keeping up with its customer service and updating its clothing selection with the same level of fervor often enough to not lose initial supporters.

With the fabric sample feature, as well as available returns and exchanges, consumers are ensured to get what they pay for with little to no surprises. Custom sizing will also play into that role – products can be made to suit customers' specified needs versus their relying on general measurements and hoping for the best. Combined, these two features (fabric samples and custom

sizing) inform clients of the color, texture, fit, and overall comfort of every product they order before making any long-term commitments. The whole venture eliminates frustration often associated with online venues and, of course, those linked to limited hijabi options in the market.

Unique Benefits

My company provides an option for shoppers to pinpoint their desired sizing customizations per order. By making such an option available, the business would be providing an extra step towards guaranteed customer satisfaction, going beyond standard sizing charts to ensure that products are to consumers' likings. From a shopper's perspective, such an option infers a product's legitimacy and is considered to be more likely to fit properly.

In terms of convenience, having an online clothing store within the United States saves customers a great deal of money due to shipping costs that, when considering the current market, tend to include overseas shipping and handling charges. While shipping costs will still be included within the final product price (adding up to about \$10 if shipped from one end of the country to another), it will be significantly more cost effective than ordering from, for example, Turkey or the United Kingdom (which would cost at least \$18).

Branding and styling also stand as unique attributes to my business, as the majority of existing hijabi clothing lines share similar appearances and products. Most garments currently on the market resemble abayas, which are traditional, loose, and typically black dresses that are worn over another outfit. Abayas originate from places like Saudi Arabia, where women often don't go out wearing body-forming clothing and prefer to wear an extra layer on top. The dresses

have a signature style, with squared shoulders and a slit in the front and/or sides for comfort and movement. The design in general has been adapted to modern apparel in terms of color and embellishments, but maintained its formal and traditional signature. My venture will be one of the first businesses to offer hijabis casualwear very similar to what one may find in a local Pennsylvanian mall, but with longer sleeves, higher necklines, and sometimes extra material in the front and back as to cover over tighter or more revealing skirts and pants. The brand will focus on providing every American hijabi and/or woman with more modest preferences a comfortable, elegant, modern, and hijab-friendly wardrobe.

Competitive Advantage

Being a hijabi myself, I have firsthand familiarity dealing with existing shops and the frustrations that may arise throughout a shopping expedition. I also am surrounded by hijabis who are in constant correspondence about their likes and dislikes with what is made available to them within the fashion industry. Therefore, I am familiar with the hijabi mindset and expectations whilst visiting online clothing stores that offer hijab-friendly solutions to women. My business venture will have a solid base built on personal experience as well as that of many others I have spoken to and come to know, and will therefore be able to cater to the needs of all hijabis in the United States.

Another advantage benefiting this venture is my personal connections to acclaimed figures within the Muslim community such as Yasmin Mogahed and Tahera Ahmed, whom I interacted with as an MSA board member for various events. These personal ties can act as an advertising network to spread the word to various communities around the country about my

business and brand. Women like Tahera are especially valuable due to her interest in the fashion world as well as her position as North Western chaplain. Her role within her own community undoubtedly has a holds great meaning, and she is able to massively influence and engage her peers, social group, and students. With her backing, my target market is easily accessible and publicizing the brand comes naturally.

As an online business, I will utilize sources of social media including Facebook and Instagram to publicize my service and products. In addition, all packages, webpages, and documents will sport the business's branding logo as well as tagline and theme.

My business's attributes include high quality branding and products, ease of access, valued customer service and satisfaction, customizable sizes, and the perk of having pre-matched outfits viewable and available for purchase on demand. However, not all aspects of starting this company are optimistic, as there are multiple barriers to entry that I must face when entering my target market. With the hijabi fashion industry rapidly gaining energy and popularity, the chances of having competition with similar styles and beliefs are very probable.

In order to combat such barriers, legally obtaining ownership of my brand and overall identity as a clothing line would be vital. According to multiple sources, trademarking a brand is more feasible, less costly, and easier to obtain than a patent or the like, which is a reasonable methodology. I will also have to work to maintain customer loyalty by continuing to provide excellent customer service and produce quality garments at an affordable rate. Strategically partnering with parent fabric producers would greatly aid my cause, as going through a third party store, such as JoAnn's, tends to cost more for supplies, consequently increasing my business's prices as well.

Competition

Based on the current market, my top two competitors would be Modanisa and Haute Hijab – both online-based hijabi stores. My venture's main company attributes that, if perfected, would surpass these two brands include site layout, design and branding, marketing strategy and social media exposure, style variety, and customer service.

Online shopping sites have limited space to utilize and are reduced to flat, 2-dimensional platforms to present their products. It is an example of how a means of delivering a good becomes part of the good itself, making it extremely vital to focus on the user interface and usability of the entire site. Modanisa and Haute Hijab present two various solutions to this challenge. Modanisa has a more cluttered, yet organized layout. Their site, as their business is based in Turkey, also initially appears in Turkish before translating to the appropriate language for a particular consumer, which can deter shoppers from wanting to explore the site further. Meanwhile, Haute Hijab utilizes a modern, clean-cut platform. Beebz will be following a line similar to Haute Hijab, keeping the main focus on the brand and products in order to avoid distracting visitors. The homepage, especially, will have a main image as the focus, with an overhead dropdown menu and more information in the subhead. Full-page popups and advertisements upon arrival at the homepage will be avoided at all costs, as they can easily fluster audiences – something that has been used on both sites owned by Modanisa and Haute Hijab. Beebz's branding will follow suit with the site layout and overall feel, using a modern sans serif font and delicate splashes of color to break up the monotony and structure of the site, and to add visual appeal.

In terms of my venture's marketing strategy and media exposure in comparison to my

two main competitors, I will follow their suit, as both brands have strong qualities in that regard. Twitter, Facebook, and especially Instagram will be essential in popularizing my brand and capturing shoppers' attention. An aspect of Haute Hijab's social media that may be imitated is the humanizing addition of live videos and posting images from fans and consumers. A bonus method of marketing that neither brands has breached yet is utilizing figures around the nation to act as spokespeople. Making personal connections with influential Muslims around the world can heavily impact a hijabi clothing line's success, which will be a main component of Beebz's marketing strategy.

Regarding style variety, Modanisa offers a wide variety of clothing options. However, this particular attribute of their brand greatly overlaps with their reputation for lacking reliable customer service. Customers often complain about the material used in their purchases and the chore of having to deal with the brand's fickle return and exchange policy that is not adhered to at all times by the company. Haute Hijab, on the other hand, has great reviews by its customers, but presents its consumers with only about ten of the same selections without much variation over time (their main focus happens to be on manufacturing scarves as opposed to full garments). Beebz aims to strike a winning balance of both having a vast selection available for shoppers as well as providing them with exemplary customer service when needed. Allowing consumers to be engaged in their shopping experience through sample ordering, ensured measurements, and easy ordering will facilitate doing so.

Risks

As mentioned before, with the hijabi fashion industry rapidly gaining energy, a major risk

for my arts venture is having another business “beat me to the race,” and offer the same or extremely close services and products. At the moment, there are no online clothing stores that offer what I am proposing, but that can change given the rate at which the industry is booming. A majority of hijabi brands emerged within the United States a mere six years ago, and just in 2016 alone, the U.S. has witnessed its first hijabi fashion show in New York. There is no telling how quickly the competitive market will change in the near future.

I will also have a pre-launch to establish a ground network of customers interested in the brand before hoping to grow on a national scale. Other risks I face are associated with starting any business venture, including funding and partnerships. In order to succeed on a larger scale, the business will have to evolve to involve talented workers with a knack for design and sewing craftsmanship. This, however, will be made possible after the initial prelaunch.

S.W.O.T. Analysis

An internal weakness that would have to be immediately dealt with for the venture’s success is my limited experience in designing clothing. While I have created outfits in the past, they have been heavily dependent on premade patterns and instructions. However, this disadvantage can be easily flipped to serve a vital purpose: forcing me to reach out to experts in the field and thereby forming personal connects an networking within the sewing/fashion industry. This may also serve me well in the long run, when the business requires independent contractors to help facilitate production. Also, to combat this weakness are several internal strengths, including my design, branding and coding experience (for the logo as well as website) as well as my being a hijabi and therefor having first hand experience in what consumers would

be looking for in my products.

An external threat to my company is the steadily growing competition, especially given the growing Muslim population and national voice within the United States. Just a few years ago, a hijabi clothing store was unheard of. Today, there are a number of small businesses scattered around the world aiming to make it into the mainstream fashion industry. There are even non-Muslim brands producing hijab-friendly products, such as Dolce and Gabbana with their abaya collection. However, I can use the rise of hijabi-friendly clothing stores as an opportunity to learn from other businesses' mistakes, what to do and what not to do. I can also continue reaching out to various brands in hopes of collaboration – though that has proven to be unsuccessful till now, there is always hope that a brand may be interested in lending a helping hand. A related external opportunity to the growing competition is the growing market – a rise in the Muslim American population not only means more competition but also more consumers, which is very important for Beebz, as that is where the majority of its shoppers will be coming from.

Profitability

Assumed that in the month of January, yards of fabric are at the average price of \$8/yard, and shipping costs are the customers' responsibility. Models representing the brand will be volunteers from the immediate community, and therefore not included in the income summary. Trademark fees are not included in this statement, as it is considered a startup fee (payable every 10 years for renewal). There is no desired minimum income, as this is intended to initially test the waters.

Table 1. Product Expenses

Garment	Amount Fabric	Resulting Product Expense
Pants, full length	3-1/4 yards	\$26.00
Skirt, straight	2 yards	\$16.00
Skirt, A-line	2-1/4 yards	\$18.00
Skirt, softly gathered	2-1/4 yards	\$18.00
Shirt/Blouse, long sleeves	2-1/2 yards	\$20.00
Dress, long sleeves, straight skirt	5 yards	\$40.00
Scarves	1.5 yards	\$12.00

* Expenses are rough estimates, embellishments would be priced accordingly

Table 2. Profit & Loss

Hijabi Online Clothing Store			
Profit and Loss			
January – December 2017			
Income			
Scarf Sales	480 units @ \$40		\$19,200
Top Sales	350 units @ \$60		\$21,000
Skirt Sales	480 units @ \$75		\$36,000
Dress Sales	480 units @ \$80		\$38,400
Pants Sales	400 units @ \$60		\$24,000
Total Income			\$138,600
Cost of Goods Sold			
Fabric (\$8.00/yard)			
Scarf Sales	480 units @ \$12		\$5,760
Top Sales	350 units @ \$20		\$7,000
Skirt Sales	480 units @ \$18		\$8,640
Dress Sales	480 units @ \$40		\$19,200
Pants Sales	400 units @ \$26		\$10,400
Miscellaneous Sewing Materials	\$100*12		\$1,200
Total cost of goods sold			\$52,200
<i>Gross Profit</i>			<i>\$86,400</i>
Expenses			
Monthly Site Hosting Fee			\$75
Independent Contractors	25% of income*2		\$41,910.79
PayPal Processing Fee	2.9% of income		\$2,503.43
Charity Proceeds	1% of income		\$444.89
<i>Total Expenses</i>			<i>\$44,934.11</i>
Net Income			
Net Profit			\$41,465.89

Conclusion

Based on this analysis, the concept of Beebz as a successful business venture in the long term is certainly feasible. Personal connections and better know-how, as for any business venture, can help develop it into a full-fledged company, but that would require a field test of sorts, which a pre-launched line would greatly benefit. A partnership with a parent fabric provider, or any source that is willing to sell material in bulk for less money would be ideal to help maintain the garments' affordable consumer prices while also increasing my net income. It is also important to keep in mind that an increase in company size beyond the projected sales would entail an increase in overall expenses due to the number of independent contractors utilized. However, the cost of materials and labor required to initiate the project is well within my capabilities and results in a livable wage, which is considered all that is necessary to pursue the endeavor at this point and time.

Chapter 4

Branding

Concept

Any business identity system heavily relies on the brand's target market, their needs, and what draws them in – Beebz is no exception. The goal is to attract consumers with resonating imagery or type while also conveying a sense of coziness and familiarity, staying true to the brand's purpose (providing comfortable, convenient clothing). Therefore, the mark representing the brand would have to emulate these values as well.

The Muslim American population is very distinguished from other Muslim populations in the world, primarily due to America's melting pot origin. It is more common to run into a plethora of nationalities in a mosque in an American city than it is to do so in, for instance, urban Egypt where the majority of the Muslims you meet are Egyptian. However, despite the assortment of cultures and races, American Muslims typically have a basic foundation in the Arabic language due to its regular usage in the religion itself. Utilizing Arabic as well as English to convey the brand's name can be an interesting method of simultaneously delivering a symbol that hasn't been offered by any other similar clothing lines as of yet and tapping into the target audience's comfort zone. The name, "Beebz" already employs Arabic, as mentioned before, acting as a spinoff of the term "habib" or "habibi," which is a term of endearment that Arabic speakers use when referring to friends and loved ones.

The Logo & Variations



Figure 4-1. Black & Textured Marks

The logo is composed of two main parts: an Arabic heading that acts as an image of sorts, and secondary type identifying the brand name. These two portions together communicate an airy, carefree style while also being identifiable and legible. The logo's symbol alone can act as standalone image in certain uses, such as on the back of a business card, a shopping bag, even a storefront. The secondary type is included for other specific applications, ones in which the title of the business is needed.

While making any logo, initially using only black and white helps to ensure legibility and flexibility when it comes to application. Adding color and additional elements is something that is typically done after narrowing down the form of the logo. Beebz' mark is adaptable in multiple image variations, giving the brand a wide range of possibilities when it comes to adapting it to different needs and purposes. Exhibited below are three examples of how the logo can be paired with different imagery relating to different themes.



Figure 4-2. White Texture on Jeans



Figure 4-3. Solid White on Image



Figure 4-4. White Knockout on Floral

Chapter 5

Putting It All Together

The Prototypes

Considering the smaller nature of this startup and the resources available at this time, creating a limited number of prototypes to test the waters and gather public opinion before launching on a wider scale is recommended; the demand for these items is currently unknown, and therefore a large supply may generate a greater loss than is expected. With this in mind, an initial four items were hand manufactured as prototypes for Beebz's first product line. The articles of clothing primarily rely on a red/pink floral pattern set on a black background, though one branches out and employs a different lacy texture of the same color scheme (red, black, white, and pink). Accompanying certain items are a few additional accessories as well, such as shawls, wraps, and scarves.

The first item is a multileveled, layered maxi dress made solely from the aforementioned floral print on chiffon. Its full-length sleeves, lining, and lighter material alleviates the pains of having to layer articles of clothing for full coverage, and its open skirt allows free movement with no physical constraints. It is also, however, loose enough to allow layered apparel if desired. It has a closed neckline, making it easier to experiment with different styles of hijab. The dress is shown here (Figure 5-1), worn with an evergreen viscose woven wrap in addition to a beige leather belt for stylization.



Figure 5-1. Modeled Floral Maxi

The following product is a pink top that has incorporated the floral chiffon on the flared sleeves, with a crochet lace texture at the partition of the fabric. This is accented by a black cotton scarf and an under cap made of the same textured chiffon fabric as the sleeves.



Figure 5-2. Modeled Pink Top

Next amongst the prototypes is a white button-up shirt made of polyester that also incorporates the flower-patterned print along the button line. This particular shirt, in contrast with the one previously shown (Figure 5-2), is intended to be used along with business casual attire. It is paired here with a pink pearl scarf and, as an additional accessory, a white knit shawl.



Figure 5-3. Modeled White Button-Down

The final article of clothing is a long-sleeved shirt that can be worn as either a shirt or dress. Similar to the maxi dress shown before, this shirt has a closed neckline, making it easier to experiment with turban-style head wraps versus the standard wrap-around. It falls around mid-calf, lengthwise. Leggings have been a recent trend amongst both Muslim women and non-Muslims, though a decent number of hijabis don't feel comfortable wearing them without a longer shirt or dress to cover the upper portion of their hips and legs. This shirt is an appropriate length to accommodate to both those who prefer to go out in leggings for comfort as well as those who are generally drawn to longer shirts. Along the side lengths, a pink, lacy mesh is added for a looser form around the hip area to allow easier movement for whoever wears it. The modeled image (Figure 5-4) is shown also wearing a maroon cotton scarf as well as a dusty pink, vintage wrap.



Figure 5-4. Modeled Black Shirt

The Online Application

For ease of access the online shopping venue's layout and overall design is as simple and clean-cut as possible. Navigation should come naturally to users without a lot of trial and error.

A user-friendly homepage is crucial for any site or app, as it is the welcome mat for the rest of the application. The Beebz shopping website opens with a straightforward design: a navigation bar across the top with various designated options, and a grid with images linked to lead consumers to specific pages.

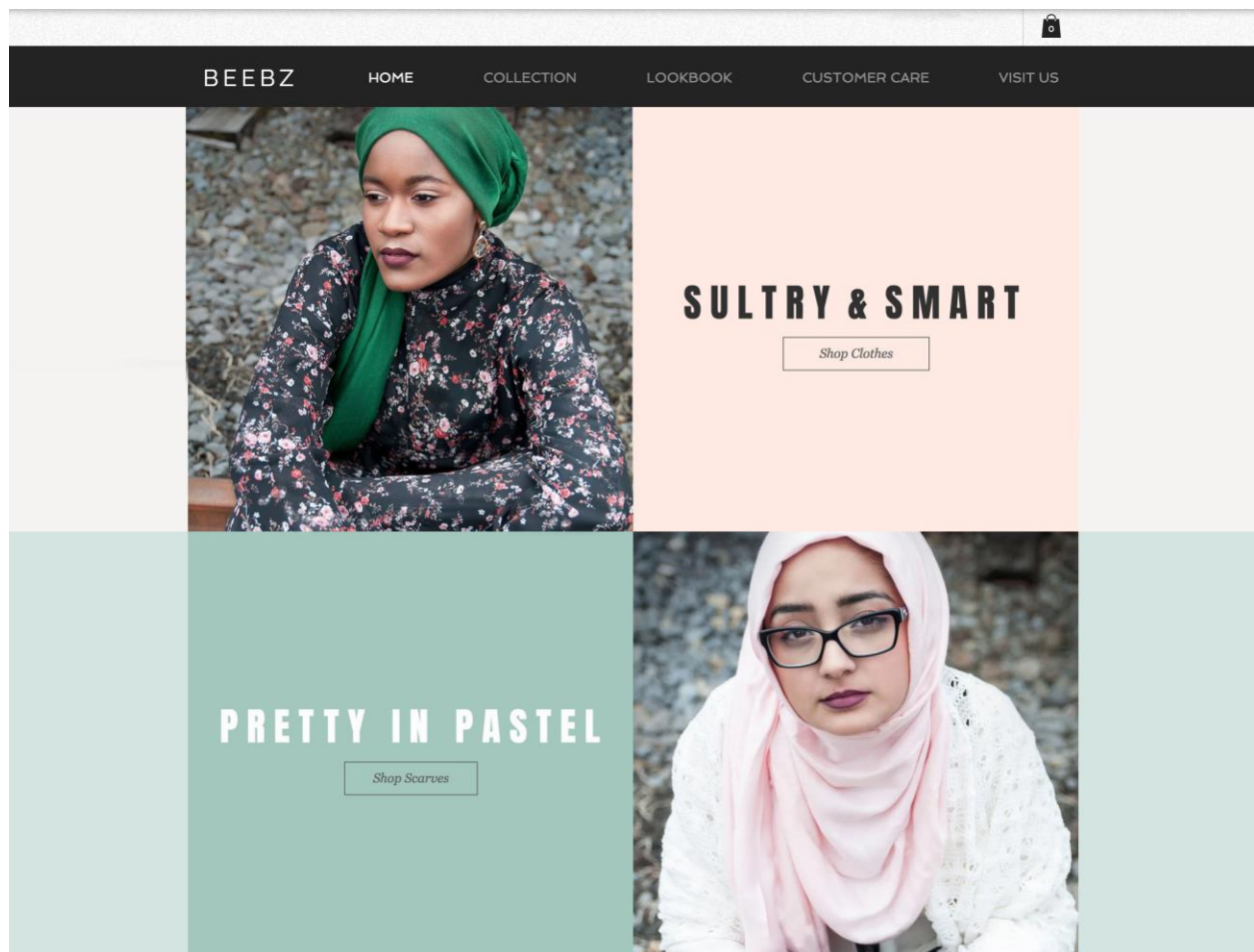


Figure 5-5. Site Homepage

Hovering over the “Collection” header leads to a dropdown menu where shoppers can decide what they would like to explore, whether it is under clothing, scarves and wraps, accessories, or simply just sale items.

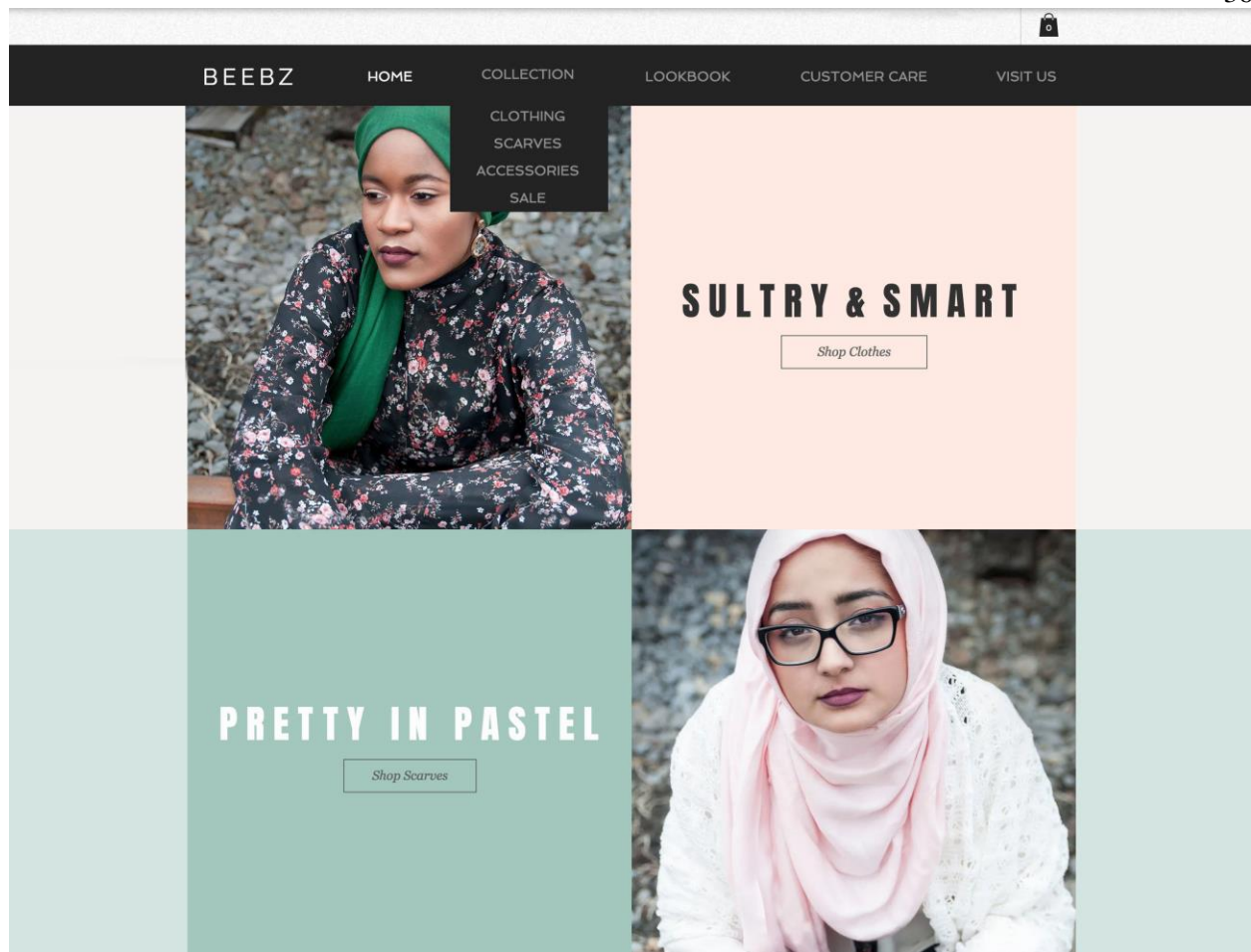


Figure 5-6. Homepage Dropdown Menu

The clothing page leads to a standard list setup of items available at any given time, along with tags signifying new arrivals and sale items as well as the product name and price underneath. Hovering on the image of a product with fade into a more stylized and zoomed out photo of the model, showing the complete ensemble used in the close up of the product.

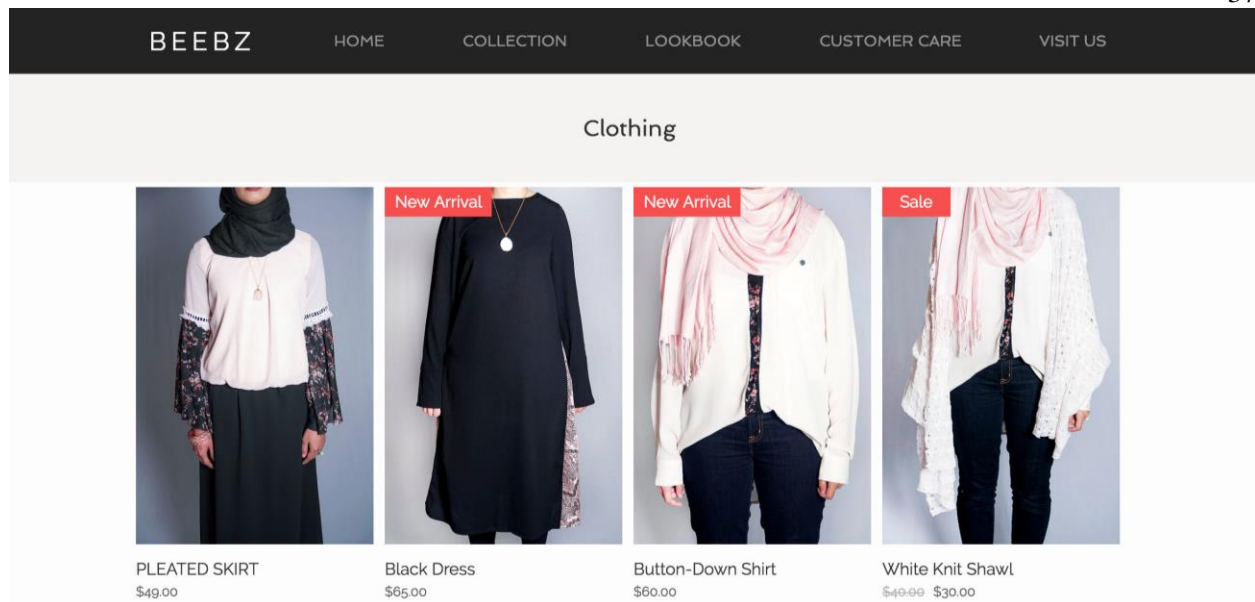


Figure 5-7. Product List

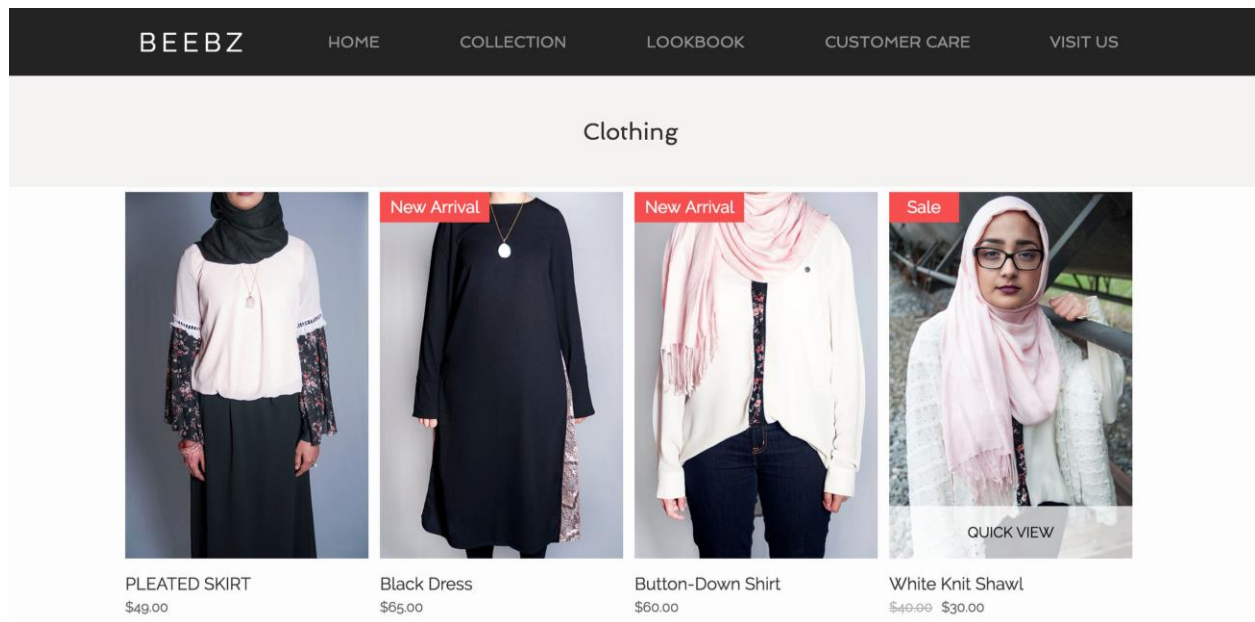


Figure 5-8. Product List with Hover

Clicking on a particular item will lead to a new page dedicated to that product. Here is information pertaining to said item, ranging from price and discounts (if there are any) to other

items that the company itself believes would go well with the product the user is considering.

There are also numerous contact buttons and social media links for anyone who is interested in reaching out to customer service for custom sizes or any other general questions. The customer care tab delves deeper into the qualifications for returns and details pertaining to custom orders.

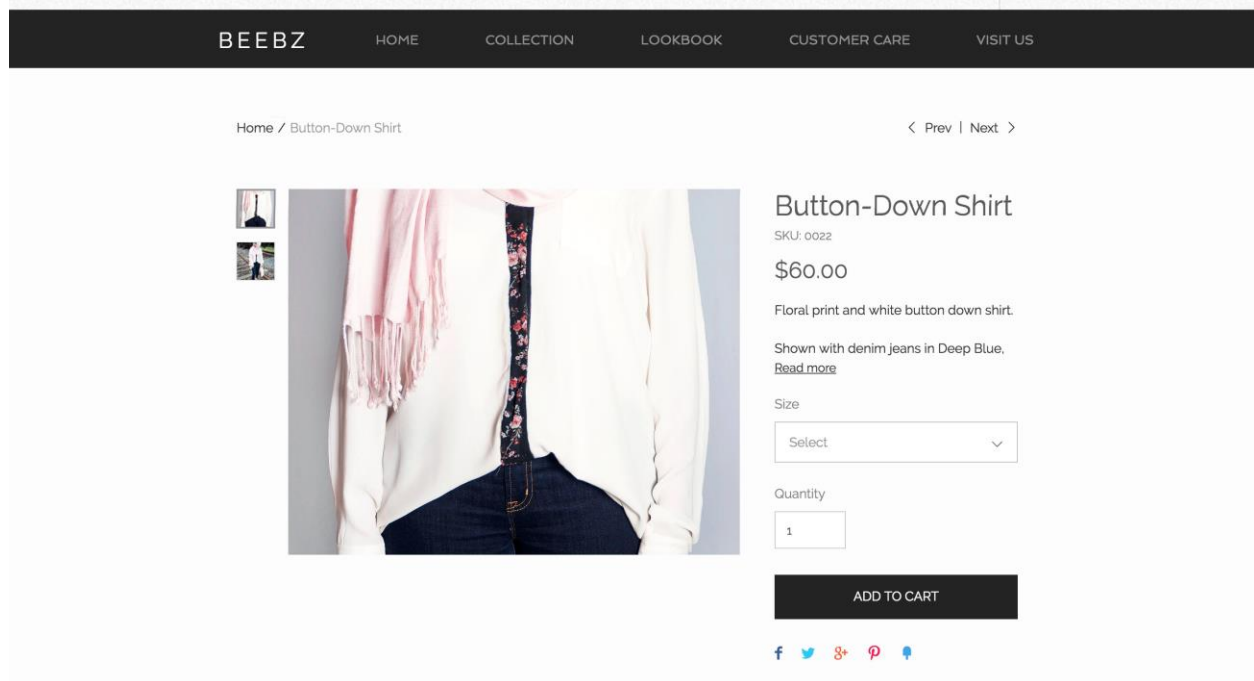


Figure 5-9. Product Info Page

The Packaging and Accessories

A few additional accessories were designed in parallel style to the logo in order to complete a cohesive identity for Beebz as a brand. Since the primary focus of the business venture is to set up an online shopping venue, packaging for shipped products is required. Rather than utilizing a plain, brown UPS container to hold the clothing items on their way to shoppers, it would be interesting to treat them to a more stylized box to match their items. For instance, if

one is to order an item with the chiffon floral pattern, the box should mimic that characteristic as well. A floral print maxi dress order, for example, would arrive in the same flowery print (Figure 5-10).



Figure 5-10. Shipped Floral Packaging

In anticipation of a physical store location, shopping bags were also considered alongside the boxed packaging used for shipments. Two options are made available for this endeavor – the first being a typical paper shopping bag, while the other is a reusable, multipurpose tote bag that visitors can use while shopping in the store and also are allowed to purchase for their own person use.

The paper shopping bag is intended for temporary usage, and is constructed of black recyclable material. Since one of the brand's objectives is to give back to the community in which it's in and focusing on that feel-good shopper experience, staying environmentally friendly plays a role in the shopping bag packaging. The logo is branded on either side to reinforce the company's identity and also to act as a form of marketing the Beebz name when consumers are seen outside of the store's vicinity with the bags.



Figure 5-11. Paper Shopping Bag

Despite it being available for purchase, the main purpose of the tote bag would be to help free shoppers' hands while they are in the physical store. However, it will also be available under the accessories tab on the website for anyone interested in buying one. As of now, the bag references the same floriated pattern used in most of the prototypes and packaging. As the business expands and more deviations are incorporated, a wider variety of bags can be manufactured to reflect the company's stylistic direction and identity.



Figure 5-12. Tote Bag

Supplemental to the brand's packaging and logo designs are a few other key items required for labeling and distribution of Beebz's products. These include (but are not limited to) business cards for distribution and clothing labels and tags.



Figure 5-13. Business Cards

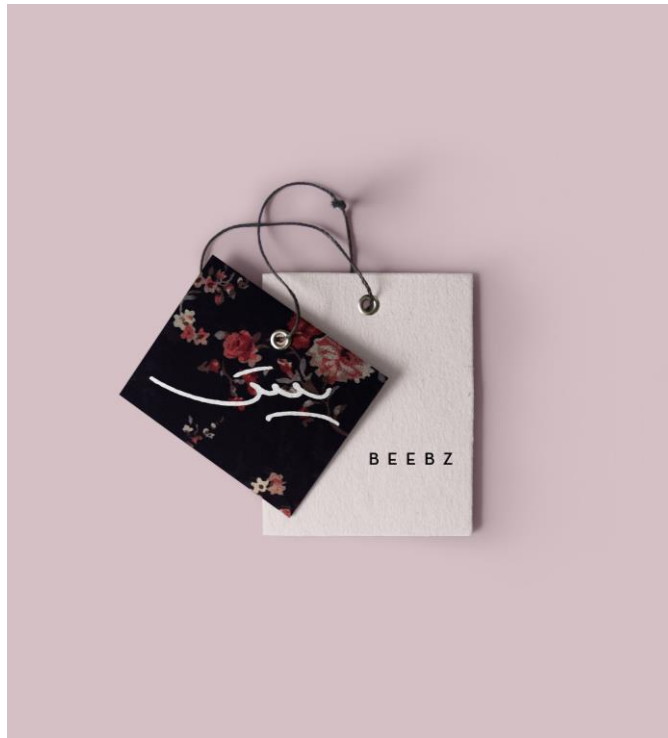


Figure 5-14. Clothing Tags



Figure 5-15. Clothing Label

Chapter 6

Summary

The world is rapidly becoming more hijabi-conscious. Whether it's due to political stirrings, social awareness, or simply an increase in the number of hijabi women nationally and internationally, the modest trend has become more and more noticeable in the fashion industry. Countries abroad have already breached the boundaries of creating modest fashion lines that correlate with contemporary trends without breaking their customers' banks. Yet, the United States' market has been kicking off at a slower rate, limiting their hijabi-conscious options, typically, to online stores that focus on selling scarves and wraps while dismissing the lack of other clothing production. This study and trial provides the necessary groundwork to pursue a valid clothing business geared towards filling the demand gap that we are currently experiencing. The hijabi community is growing to be more prominent and influential within American culture.

The next move from here would be to launch the prototypes to a control group representative of the entire target market to gauge the public's potential response. If there proves to be a high demand for the particular style pinpointed within these prototypes, it would then be possible to start manufacturing larger quantities to sell online on a national scale. If the response is less than what is anticipated, a stylistic change in direction can provide products that cater to hijabi needs more accurately.

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