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A COMPARISON FRAMEWORK ON ISLAMIC DRESS CODE AND
MODEST FASHION IN THE MALAYSIAN FASHION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The influence of social media trends in the current world has significantly impacted the fashion industry. Hence, the rise of the Islamic fashion culture has expanded to Western countries, which no longer consider Islamic fashion to be dull and boring. Islamic fashion was also constantly misjudged, even by Muslims, as the idea of covering the body and head with a veil or hijab and wearing body-hugging clothes with a bit of exposed hair is accepted as Islamic wear. This indicated a shift of perspective from a conservative to modern culture in Islamic attire, with a lack of understanding of the difference between the two concepts. Therefore, this study identifies the comparison between the Islamic dress code and modest fashion. The analysis performed used the literature review of previous studies over five years, between 2015 and 2020, using databases from Google Scholar and Scopus. However, only 15 articles were discussed in this study. The review of past literature was based on the crucial keywords related to this study. Modest fashion, the Islamic dress code, and Islamic fashion in Malaysia was the focus of the keywords research. The study revealed an understanding of the Islamic dress code among past researchers, as Muslims acknowledged the concept of *aurah* in dressing. Modest fashion, on the other hand, was seen as another fashion movement referring to Muslims, with a combination of religious symbols and modern trends in mainstream clothing brands, together with the marketing strategies of local brand development focusing on the Muslim demographics. The extent to which a dressing style follows the laws of Syariah, or fits the modern culture, or a combination of both, depending on the individual. As such, this study intends to clarify both the concepts for a better understanding of Islamic wear and modest fashion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE definition of the Islamic dress code is commonly known as observing modest or Islamic dressing, according to the Al-Quran and Al-Sunnah, without drawing unnecessary attention from other people (Ahmad, 2017). Nonetheless, the perception of non-Muslims on the Islamic dress code has always been linked to religious oppression, particularly with regards to women. In reality, the wearing of a hijab or niqab by Muslim women is a symbol of submission to God, Allah SWT.

According to the laws of Syariah in Islam, modest fashion does not adhere to the specified attire for Muslim women. Therefore, modest fashion is usually mistaken as Islamic wear, particularly in the Malaysian fashion industry. This study generated fresh insights into the context of clothing to understand the trends in the fashion industry, and the comparison between Islamic wear and modest fashion among the Malaysian fashion industry players.

Modest fashion became popular over the past decade among Muslim women of all age groups, who have regarded dressing styles as a fashion statement rather than a religious one (Zabeen et al., 2017). Although modest fashion does not specifically refer to any of the religions in the world, the concept is synonymous with the Muslim way of dressing (Menon et al., 2020). However, there is limited literature on the question of modest fashion as an exclusive concept for Muslims. The reformation in modest fashion is currently accepted as a fashion statement, particularly in the Malaysian fashion industry. Although a stylish hijab or veil and modest clothing can cover the hair and other body parts, this style of dressing does not meet the overall requirement of Islamic wear (Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2019).

II. MODEST FASHION

Although modest fashion is not a new phenomenon, this style of dressing has only recently gained notice and acknowledgement from the fashion industry. Despite the existing misconception of modest fashion in the West, the fashion industry has accepted the emergence of Muslim fashion icons and lured non-Muslim fashion designers to become involved in modest fashion designs. The combination of religious faith and fashion trends have resulted in the popularity of modest fashion among young women. Followers of modest fashion can be dressed in hijabs and burqas, together with tops, trousers, jackets, or dresses featuring a modest style (Independent, 2019).

The acceptance of Halima Aden, for example, as the first hijab-wearing fashion model managed by IMG Models which is the international talent and model management, to walk on the runways in the New York and Milan Fashion Week, was quoted in the Business of Fashion podcast (Fashion, 2020). Therefore, examples referring to the collaboration between Hana Tajima and Uniqlo, and the introduction of Halima Aden as the first Muslim model to walk in a runway in the International Fashion Week, allowed Muslims from around the Islamic world to expand the knowledge in fashion trends and styles.

Modest fashion also experienced a shift in the fashion landscape, specifically from religious clothing to high-end fashion. Luxury brand names, such as

DKNY, Dolce & Gabbana, Max Mara, and Alberta Ferretti are among the brands that understood the significance of the Muslim market trade in modest fashion. The growth in the modest fashion market is expected to reach US\$361 billion by 2023, as Muslims' expenditure on fashion reached US\$270 billion in 2017, according to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2018/19 (Standard & Reuters, 2018).

The leading European e-commerce business, Modanisa.com, stated in a research in 2019 that although the modest fashion business is expanding, this concept is not without any challenges. For example, there is a lack of consumer choice in modest fashion, specifically with regards to innovation, trends, and functionality in local productions, thus limiting market penetration and growth globally. Thus, Modanisa.com is currently expanding businesses in South East Asia with a focus on three significant countries with a large Muslim population, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. As such, in aligning with the global market, e-commerce would enable modest fashion to become significant in the fashion industry (Putri, 2019).

III. METHODS

The study analysis used the literature review of previous research between 2015 and 2020. A review of the past literature was based on the crucial keywords in this study. Modest fashion, the Islamic dress code, and Islamic fashion in Malaysia was the focus of the keywords research. The instrument of this study was developed based on the modification of items from previous literature on Islamic dress code and modest fashion studies.

The Systematic literature review (SLR) approach was adopted to determine the factors related to modest fashion in the fashion industry. According to Xiao & Watson (2019), literature reviews should be valid, reliable, and repeatable in following scientific inquiries. This paper used archival data from Google Scholar and Scopus to study the literature review from past research within a five-year period (2015-2020). A total of 54 articles were identified and retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus, which are two frequently used databases, using the related keywords across inter-disciplines. Previous studies were used based on the selection criteria for comparing the Islamic dress code and modest fashion. However, only 15 articles were discussed in this study. The screening process removed 39 articles based on the string searches in the study.

Based on the research process, this study utilised The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) as a systematic review for research clarification (adapted from www.prisma-statement.org), as seen in Fig. 1. The PRISMA is a reporting guideline developed to optimise the reporting of systematic reviews from four primary sources (Adiyarta et al., 2020), which are: 1) Identification using keywords in the database; 2) Records-screening by eliminating non-relevant articles; 3) Eligibility of the articles; 4) Selection of data items related to the study.

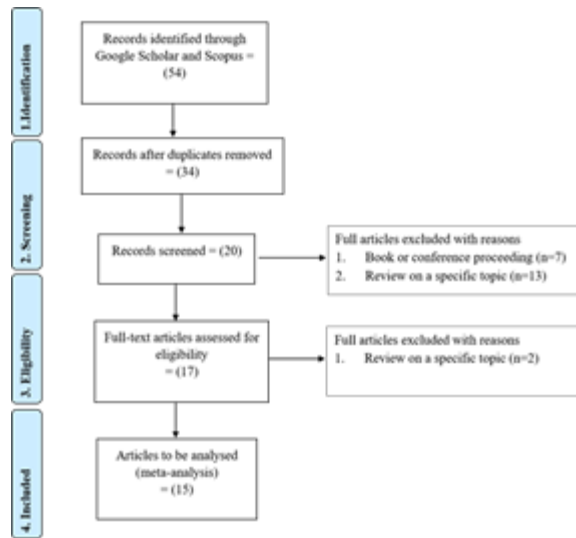


Fig. 1 PRISMA diagram phases adapted from www.prisma-statement.org

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As an Islamic country, Malaysia has strong beliefs in the practices of Islam. Interestingly, the appearance and fashion styles among Malaysian Muslims have evolved from the Islamic dress code to modest fashion, as seen in Table 1.

TABLE I
FINDINGS FROM THE RELATED KEYWORDS

Finding from the related keywords		
References	Islamic dress code	Modest fashion
Memon et al. (2020)	The dressing must meet the Syariah compliance	Modern couture style enhance the acceptance by the Gen Y female in Malaysia
Ahmad Tajudin et al. (2019)	Definition of Islamic clothing	Muslim women experimenting with modesty and personal style into their appearances
Kusumawati et al. (2019)	In line with the goal of Syariah	Fashion knowledge gives a vital message in fashion styling without abandoning the religiosity.
Hecker (2018)	Refers to signify an Islamic way of life.	Modest fashion is seen as a new ideology that challenges the traditional ways of Islamic life according to Turkish Islamism
F. Hassan et al. (2018)	A symbol of Muslim women	Modest fashion is developing a fashion-conscious society.
Zabeen et al. (2017)	Related to religious duty, beauty	There is a positive relationship with the growing popularity of Muslim attire.
Mustafa et al. (2018)	Understand the concept of Aurah	Blending with the local cultures
S. H. Hassan & Harun (2016)	The hijab is a symbol of Muslim women	Refers to dressing style, fashion motivation, fashion managers
Almila (2016)	Understand the religious knowledge in dressing	It is connected to the social class, which refers to the veil or unveiling in wearing clothing.
Rosenberg (2015)	Performing faith	Modest fashion as a feminist strategy
Barylo (2016)	Portray the cool image of Islam	A combination of the religious symbol with modern trends which mainstream clothing brand developed marketing strategies focused on Muslim consumers
Kusumawati et al. (2020)	Related to religiosity in many aspects of life	Customer satisfaction support the consumers' intention for buying Muslim fashion products
Sari et al. (2018)	There is a challenge to produce Muslim fashion that is not contradictory to Islamic rules	There is no direct effect between religiosity and fashion involvement on customer satisfaction in buying fashion products
Kavakci & Kraepfle (2017)	Strong critiques from the public regarding the hijabis who wore non-loose clothing with make-ups	Influenced by the western secular norms that reflect Muslim women dressing as part of showing the emotion by following the fashion trends.
Ajala (2017)	Islamic dress is seen as a cultural threat to some of the western countries	Rising from the supremacy of Hijabists influencers which it also has growing for non-Muslim consumers

A. Results

The findings of this study could be attributed to the knowledge acquired for the understanding of modest fashion. This study provided new insights into the understanding of modest fashion in the Malaysian fashion industry. Based on Table 1, the different contexts of Islamic dress code and modest fashion were highlighted and indicated that the Islamic dress code, according to Islam, is a guideline that should be adopted in modest fashion styles, in line with modernisation.

The study also revealed an understanding of the Islamic dress code among past researchers. Muslims understood the concept of *aurah* in dressing, following the statements supported by Menon et al. (2020), Ahmad Tajudin et al. (2019), Mustafa et al. (2018), Zabeen et al. (2017), and Almila (2016). The Islamic dress code for both Muslim women and men should meet Syariah compliance and is a guideline that must be obeyed in line with Islamic practices. The study also found that the hijab played a significant role in the representation of women as Muslims and separated them from non-Muslim women (S. H. Hassan & Harun, 2016; F. Hassan et al., 2018). Although the result showed an understanding of the Islamic dress code, there were opposing views from past research. This contradiction was derived from negative perceptions of the Islamic dress code (Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017; Ajala, 2017; Sari et al., 2018).

Modest fashion, on the other hand, was seen as another fashion movement referring to Muslims. (Barylo, 2016; Sari et al., 2018; Kusumawati et al., 2019; Kusumawati et al., 2020). The involvement of modest fashion implied that there is a relationship between the keywords that influenced modest fashion among Muslims and non-Muslims (Mustafa et al., 2018; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017; Ajala, 2017). Based on the findings, the acceptance of fashion-consciousness towards Islam is significant to the Malaysian fashion industry (S. H. Hassan & Harun, 2016; F. Hassan et al., 2018; Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2019).

B. Discussions

The framework in this study, as seen in Fig. 2, provides clarification for the Malaysian fashion industry to better understand the Islamic dress code and modest fashion.

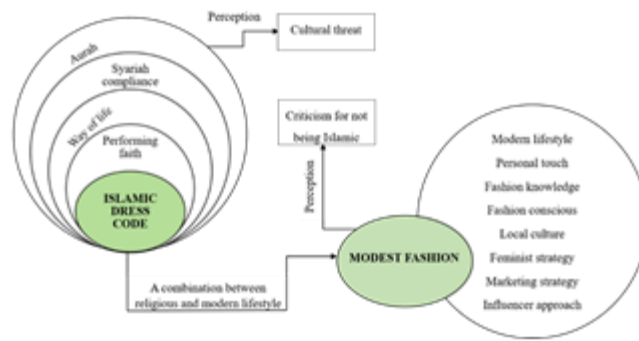


Fig. 2 Comparison of Islamic dress code and modest fashion

C. Comparison between Islamic dress code and modest fashion

The relationship between Islam and fashion is complex. For example, individuals who are highly fashion-conscious need to manage issues of style and appearance, whereas pious individuals are required to negotiate a path between religion and fashion trends (Almila, 2016). Figure 2 outlines a comparison between the Islamic dress code and modest fashion. Although Islamic wear and the concept of *aurah* resembles the practices of the Islamic faith as a way of life among Muslims, modest fashion gives a different interpretation to others.

Recent trends in modest fashion have led to a proliferation of studies reporting that the dressing styles of Muslim women dealt predominantly with the relationship between society, religion, culture, human behaviour, the changes in dressing styles based on the current trend, and the considerations of space and time (Radwan et al., 2019). It was previously observed that modest fashion is the idea of representing Islam in fashion. For instance, modest fashion in Turkey has been a trend signifying Islam, as the country is situated between Europe and Asia. Thus, it was significant to dress modestly rather than wearing revealing clothes (Hecker, 2018). The concept of modesty in appearance for Malaysian Muslims is well-adapted and relates to the modern lifestyle of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Modern Muslims gained awareness of fashion-consciousness through knowledge acquisition from various fashion sources, such as magazines, fashion trend reports, and social media.

Previous research has shown increasing popularity of the Muslim attire in all age groups of women, not only as a part of religion but as a fashion statement for the past decade. Additionally, Muslim women are now exploring colours, silhouettes, and wearing accessories to complete the look of the chosen outfit (Zabeen et al., 2017). The growth of the hijab fashion has given the fashion industry a chance to redefine the Islamic symbol for Muslim women. Current fashion trends provide a stimulating modern stylishness and vivacity, thus creating a new fashion statement for Muslim women who intersperse fashion with the Islamic faith. (S. H. Hassan & Harun, 2016).

Although the understanding of modest fashion was derived from various factors, Rosenberg (2019) stated that modest fashion was mainly observed as a

feminist strategy that is acknowledged and recognised by society, specifically in The USA and European countries. This is similar to other bills advocating for equal human rights, and there should be no offence taken towards an individual wearing clothing that represented Islam. Nonetheless, there are no constraints on Muslim women wearing a hijab and niqab in Malaysia, with the well-established practice of cultural assimilation. Therefore, the decision to wear modestly could be due to religious or cultural reasons.

Modest fashion is related to hijab styling in completing the attire for Muslim women. Although modest fashion referred to Muslim women attired in modest clothing, the concept of modesty has become an exclusive and high-end fashion that is costly (Prahastuti, Zahro, Kusumawardani, Hasanah, & Hamar, 2020). According to N. Ahmad (2017), modesty must be adhered to by Muslims as a form of Syariah compliance in dressing. The concept underlying the Islamic dress code is the most significant aspect currently discussed in modest fashion.

D. Perception of Islamic dress code and modest fashion

Based on the study, the findings reported that modesty in clothing among Muslims is an essential aspect of the modern lifestyle. The adoption of a religious symbol in giving a personal touch to appearances proved the acceptance of modest fashion in Muslim clothing.

From the perspective of Western countries, the Islamic dress code could be interpreted as a cultural threat (Ajala, 2017). The form of clothing worn by Muslims often labelled these individuals as terrorists or religiously oppressed. Muslims have also been labelled as extremists in some European countries. The idea of Muslims as terrorists started with a Western movie, according to Ramji (2015).

The new draft for a ban on Muslim beliefs by some Western politicians could also be seen as a limitation on human rights for Muslims (Rosenberg, 2019). For instance, France has banned Muslim women from wearing a niqab or face cover and burqini (swimwear for Muslim women) in public areas, including schools and universities (Hasan, 2018). This worldwide misconception has resulted in a negative impact on Muslims. However, there is no restriction in wearing the hijab in school, universities, and public areas or adorning Islamic wear under the laws of Syariah, and women wearing the hijab is a common occurrence for others, especially the non-Muslims.

As such, there is a misconception by particular societies on modesty. From the perceptive of these societies, the wearing of appropriate clothing by Muslims, according to Syariah practices, is an obligation that symbolises the practice of Islamic faith (Rosenberg, 2019). There are strong critiques and debates concerning the wearing of body-hugging clothes with make-up by hijabis (Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017), as these hijabis were portrayed to be disobeying Islam. Nevertheless, based on inspirations by social media influencers, the idea of fusing religious and fashion trends seemed to be more acceptable among the hijabis.

A similar situation was observed in Malaysia, where Muslim women are not afraid to express feelings on clothing and appearances. The combination of

modern clothing and hijab is becoming more common and acceptable in society. The hijab is no longer seen as a sign of religious devotion but has evolved into a fashion statement (Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2019). However, the debates on modesty and fashion trends continue without an end in sight (Hecker, 2018). Notwithstanding, from the Malaysian perspective, fashion companies continue to launch new collections of modest fashion labels to meet local consumers' demands, as modesty in appearance is no longer seen as a dull concept.

Despite some negative perceptions of the Islamic dress code and modest fashion, the number of people who embraced Islam as a new way of life continues to grow, as much as the idea of Muslims as terrorists decreases. However, with regards to the Islamic code dress or modest fashion, both the concepts are to be recognised as clothing without any prejudice. As such, these results provided important insights into the comparison between the Islamic dress code and modest fashion.

V. CONCLUSION

By understanding the similarities and differences between the Islamic dress code and modest fashion, the understanding and knowledge of both these concepts can be developed. In general, modest fashion has already gained acceptance in Malaysia, regardless of religion, gender, and race. In this context, however, the differences between modest fashion and Islamic wear must be acknowledged to prevent misleading information.

The understanding of modest fashion has gained more significance as a fashion statement for fashion-conscious Muslim and non-Muslim followers (Ahmad Tajudin et al., 2019). Besides, fashion knowledge conveyed an important message to modern Muslims on fashion styles and developing a fashion-conscious society, as it was revealed that the young Muslim generation aspired to be fashionable without compromising the Islamic faith (F. Hassan et al., 2018).

Although modest fashion is acknowledged among Muslims and meets the Syariah compliance in terms of women's appearance, the hijab is not compulsory among Malaysian Muslim women despite being an obligation in Islamic law (Abdul Halim, 2018). As such, this study intended to provide clarification on both the concepts for a better understanding of Islamic wear and modest fashion.

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