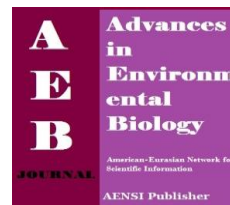




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# A Conceptual Framework on the Study of Trends of Islamic Fashion and Clothing Practices Amongst Young Muslim Female in Bangladesh.

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### ABSTRACT

Clothing is a basic human need, which the marketers try to satisfy according to the desire of respective target markets. Islamic clothing is an emerging market positioned with a special marketing strategy. This paper focuses on the trends of wearing Islamic dresses where the chosen market segment is a Muslim major country. Islam addresses specific dress code mostly for female. The young generation, being fashion conscious, struggle between the Islamic values and their desire for fashion. Recently there is an increasing number of sales of 'Burqa and Hijab' (Islamic dress for female) in Bangladesh. The study has focused on pertinent literature and qualitative studies to assess the rational of wearing Hijab amongst young Muslim females and has a future intention to investigate empirically whether the young generation is taking it for modesty or fashion. Latest marketing theory suggests for not only satisfying the physical need of human being, but also try to fulfill the spiritual need. This study explores the fact that it's possible for Muslim women to be fashion conscious within the Shariah boundaries.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islam is one of the largest growing religions and potential market segment in the world. One of the appealing factors of this segment is the attire worn by Muslim Women. Various styles of Islamic clothing now exists which depend largely on the culture and preference of the individual wearing them, yet the basic underlying belief structures are similar across all Islamic cultures.

The purpose of Islamic clothing is to provide adequate covering of the body as well as to make sure that one's appearance does not pose an eyesore for another. The most important aspect of Islamic clothing is that it does not enable arrogance, self-indulgence and exhibitionism. As mentioned in Al- Qur'an: "O Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover yourselves (screen your private parts, etc.) and as an adornment, and the raiment of righteousness, that is better. Such are among the Ayat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) of Allah, that they may remember (i.e. leave falsehood and follow truth)." (7:26) Dress should be for modesty and increase the beauty and modesty of oneself. But this have been recently misused by a sector of people who are engaged in showbiz especially the non-believing marketers and also the ignorant Muslim marketers and consumers as well. According to Sula and Kartajaya [15], Islamic Marketers must be able to include the spirit of Islam in all aspects of marketing activities, which ought to follow the teachings of Al-Qur'an and Sunnah (Muslim's holy scripts).

#### Problem Statement:

As Muslim consumers do not consume products for mere worldly satisfaction, their ultimate aim is to satisfy their creator Allah (sw). This study attempts to explore that it is not impossible for Muslim women to be fashion conscious within the boundary of Shariah. The paper focuses on the following Research Questions:

- What is the trend of following Islamic dress code amongst the Young Female Muslims?
- Does Young Female Muslims wear Hijab for modesty or is it a fashion?

Limited research has been done regarding the fashion marketing under Islamic paradigm. Only few studies were done in America, Iran, Newzeland, Afganistan and Australia. Alireza, Samira, Marjan & Fereste, [1] in

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their study 'A New Scenario of Fashion Marketing in Islamic World- A Case a study of Iranian Women', found that, religion is the vital attribute in Fashion Marketing in the Islamic World, particularly Iran. John Potts, [8] in his PhD dissertation 'Lifting the Veil on Fashion, Filling the Gaps between Modesty & Fashion Apparels', explored that there are huge potential for modest apparel market in US. According to an American community survey, the market value for modest clothing is over \$14 billion per year in US alone. The study also tried to find out what attributes of clothing are most appealing for modest and fashionable clothing line. Shakira Hussein [14] in her paper, 'The Limits of Force/ Choice Discourses in Discussing Muslim women's Dress Codes' focused on hijab as oppression or symbol of cultural loyalty.

To fill in the gap, the author tried to develop a concept considering few factors (i.e. generation, gender & religion) from amongst the various other factors explored in earlier studies, i.e. age/ generation, gender, occupation, economic circumstances, social class, religion [4]. In this paper, the study area has been chosen from Bangladeshi Young Muslim females. Under this backdrop this paper attempted to: unfold the fashion and clothing practices of young Muslim female in recent days, to understand whether *Hijab* is considered as fashion of clothing or granted for modesty and to explore their reason for being attracted towards the fashion and clothing that they comply with.

#### *Literature Review:*

The world of Islamic clothing and fashion has started to blossom globally, offering women a vast array of products with Islamic principles [12]. There is some products that are recreational in nature, such as "Bodykini" and "Burquini" swimwear, which are added to this product line. Usually, *Burqa / Hijab* is a common term for Muslim out-fit which is seen recently increased in the number. According to Cedimir [5], Hijab is a modest covering of the head and the body of a woman following the principles:

- Loose clothing (the clothing must be loose enough so as not to describe the shape of a body).
- Thick material (the garment must be thick enough to hide the shape of the body and the colour of the skin).
- Modesty (the dress should not be ragged or fancy, it should be clean and dignified looking).
- Suitability (hijab is for women only).

In a seminar on the occasion of International Hijab Day, observed on 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2004, at press club, the speakers urged: In Bangladesh, any woman can wear Hijab without any restriction. The number of Women wearing Hijab is increasing over the last 10- 15 years. In this observance of International Hijab Solidarity Day, held on 2004, the scholars also added Hijab not only as a religious right, but they also mentioned that denial of following this right (by imposing any law) as violence of human right. (<http://www.shahfoundationbd.org/hannan/article7.html>).

#### *The fashion and clothing practices of young Muslim female:*

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: **Fashion** is a general term for a currently popular style or practice, especially in clothing, foot wear or accessories. Fashion references to anything that is the current trend in look and dress up of a person. The more technical term, costume, has become so linked in the public eye with the term "fashion" that the more general term "costume" has in popular use mostly been transferred to special senses like fancy dress, while the term "fashion" means clothing generally, and the study of it, while Cedimir [5] considers 'Fashion as the decisive element because of the abundance of new fabrics, design, colours which makes it more fashionable to wear.'

Islam is the latest version of all religion as mentioned in Qur'an and so address all guidelines of life including the dress code. It has minimum standards for personal modesty, which are reflected in the various styles of clothing worn among Muslims. While such standards may seem out-dated or conservative to some people, Muslims view these values of public decency as obligatory. It has a set clear rule of what to wear and not to wear for those who claim themselves as Muslim. In Qur'an, Allah says:

*"O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."* (33:59)

While Islam outlines a code of modesty, it does not command a certain style, color, or fabric. The range of clothing found among Muslims is a sign of the great diversity among the Muslim community. Many Muslims choose to dress in conservative colors such as green, blue, gray, as well as the usual black and white. Beyond this, there are no specific meanings behind the choice of color. Some colors or clothing styles are more common in certain parts of the world, based on local traditions. Different words are often used to describe the various styles and types of clothing worn by Muslims throughout the world. Often, the same type of clothing has many different names depending on regional language or terminology. The *Hijab* literally means "separation" or "veil" and it is designed to separate women from men for their own protection by covering their heads--it is the head cover. This also indicates the separation of work place of male and female from each other. Also indicated in Qur'an the limit of exposing ones beauty,

*"It is no sin on them (the Prophet's wives, if they appear unveiled) before their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or the sons of their sisters, or their own (believing) women, or their (female) slaves, and keeps your duty to Allah. Verily, Allah is ever All-Witness over everything."(33:55)*

The traditional form of the *Hijab* is the *abaya* (commonly known as *burqa* in Bangladesh) which is the full body over-garment. These *burqa* come in many different colors and style, the traditional color is black. Jilbabs, caftans, Shalwar kamiz, maxi dresses and long skirt lists amongst the common chosen out-fits by the young Muslim females. Whatever the dress is, to them, the common word is modesty. Irrespective of culture, geographical location, humid summer, chilly winter, the Islamic attire remains almost the same. For Muslims the main objective of Islamic dress code is in focus. In Qur'an, Allah says, "O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: but waste not by excess for Allah loveth not the wasters" (Quran 7:31).

#### *Recent trend towards Islamic fashion and clothing:*

Mark Easey mentioned fashion as one of "large global business sector going through a period of great change" which needs marketing for managing its growth and change [6]. As Muslims represent about one-fifth of mankind, shows an attractive segmentation in this competitive global market [1]. It is the demand of the era that aligned Islamic clothing to modern fashion. These are no more restricted to few designs, rather the sequined Abayas, gorgeously embroidered Jilbabs are now available in a variety of shades and designs. The changes have been observed in the Hijab style also and the typical shawl and *Hijab* pins and other accessories added a whole new item in the product line. The classy comfortable design of recently developed Islamic out-fit successfully attract young generations. This very trend suggests that now-a-days, girls of all age and religion are considering the modest dress as their prime choice.

Nineteenth century can be mentioned as the beginning of fashion design. During this time, "designs were the product of the dresses worn in the royal courts." [2]. This is the time of emerging the design houses in Paris which apply artists to paint on cloths (Retrieved from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/>), and Bangladesh is also no exception. For centuries, individuals or societies have used clothes and other body adornment as a form of nonverbal communication.(Retrieved from: [http://www/fashionera.com/sociology\\_semiotics](http://www/fashionera.com/sociology_semiotics)).

#### *Considering Hijab as fashion of clothing is contradictory with Shariah or not:*

Faithfull women are not supposed to draw attention; they are supposed to avoid the male gaze. By putting on head-coverings portray her as a role model for other Muslim women and be respected by the society [5]. The basic *Shariah* ruling is neither too rigid, nor too relaxed; rather it is something that is practiced within the boundaries of *halal* and *haram*. Amongst the four characteristics of Islamic Marketing: Spiritualistic, Ethical, Realistic, and Humanistic [15]; fashion prone of young generation is something that is realistic and cannot be avoided. *Shariah* marketing is flexible as long as it complies with Islamic law. Our prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also advised not to make Islamic rules hard for mass people, make it simple.

Whether Islamic clothing is too conservative or not is still a very debatable issue in both Eastern and Western world. A section of people typically feels that *Abayas*, *hijabs* and many of these kinds represent the cultural heritage of the wearers and a means of expressing ethnic and religious identity. While other group argues that even modern Islamic clothing stand for a way of life and is certainly not compatible with some of the tenets of the changing tradition. Despite of these arguments, it is evident that more and more people are discovering the beauty of the women Islamic clothing.

There is a contradiction between fashion and modesty. A Muslim woman is expected to wear any dress that covers all over the body and should not reveal her figure. This is in sharp contrast with the Western fashions which concentrates on exposing the body [5]. The question of Islamic dress, particularly the distinctive styles that Muslim women sometimes wear, has long been the subject of controversy. In recent years, several issues have been raised about the legality or advisability of wearing distinctive clothing in certain situations or places. The laws of Islam prohibit women from exposing any part of their body other than the hands and the face. The fabric women wear must be modest and made of thick material that cannot be seen through. A Muslim Women's clothing must adhere to seven conditions which include covering the entire body save the hands and face, hiding the form of the feminine body and not having bold designs or adornment. The reason for these laws is to safeguard women from men by reducing the temptation.

#### *Methodology:*

Qualitative research method has been used to develop the study. As descriptive studies are undertaken by investigation and discover answers to the questions: who, what when, where and how [9]; a semi-structured questionnaire was used for conducting In-depth interview for identifying the trend of Islamic Fashion Market and other study objectives. To investigate closely the underlying causes behind preferring their out-fits, the interview was conducted face to face. The targeted study group was graduating and the graduated Muslim

females (whose age is between 20-35). 50 interviewees were selected randomly for the study and various literatures were consulted for constructing a conceptual framework.

#### Findings:

A pilot study was done through an in-depth interview with 50 randomly selected University graduates and graduating students. Almost all of them are from a middle class family with moderately practicing Islamic culture and religion. The response to the questions “Does your mother wear *Hijab*?” and “Are you following Islamic dress code?” would clearly indicate the trend which the researcher wants to dig out from the following research question:

**Table 1:** Percentage of Young Female Muslims following Islamic dress code.

Features analyzed	Yes	percentage	No	percentage
Young generation following Islamic dress code	28	56%	22	44%
Corresponding Mothers' wearing Hijab	35	70%	15	30%

Source: Primary data through face-t-face interview.

From the above figure, Mothers' are still more in number (70%) wearing Hijab, than their young generations, which is 56%. So the theory of increasing trend is still far reaching. The responds to the Query “Do you think recent trend of wearing *Hijab* (or any other Muslim out-fit) of young- Muslims are more to fashion than that of modesty?” and “Does different situations, such as weddings, travelling etc. effects your dress-up?” would reveal the next research question-

**Table 2:** Number of Young Female Muslims wearing *Hijab* either for modesty or for fashion.

Features analyzed	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Hijab worn are more for fashion than that of modesty	30	60%	20	40%
Occasional dress-up	MM-11	(22%)	LM-22	(44%)
			RS-17	(34%)

Note: MM- More modest; LM-Less modest; RS-Remained same.

The percentage of response in favor of modesty is less (40%) than that of fashion (60%). Another Important fact that has been found is the factors that Influences to dress modestly. Three alternate factors for this are: Style, Fit and Price; where customers mostly prefer Price, then Style and then fit while purchasing their out-fit.

#### Recommendations:

Since Islam is a complete code of life as it has guidelines for all aspects of human living and clothing is one of the basic needs to be fulfilled. There are many marketers who are ready to address this segment as there is an increasing demand to meet the offer. *Hijab* is now designed with the standards of international fashion and well accepted as an out-fit by the young generation.

*Hijab* is usually identified as the symbol of Muslim identity. A woman who covers her head is making a statement that she is a member of the Muslim community and follows particular code of moral conduct [5]. Thus, *Hijab* may be considered as an Islamic trademark of dress and so marketers may develop this as brands [12] for targeting a specific segment of the market.

#### Limitations and Future Propositions:

The survey area was very limited and cannot be general conclusion on the findings. It could be done in broader area to come to a more logical conclusion about the topic. An attempt could be taken in future to further investigate and find out the perception of the young females whether *Hijab* increases their identity or not.

#### Conclusion:

In an article of Harvard magazine, The Study of Fashion, Suk urged, “fashion is the exemplar of dissemination,” she also added, “because it is so much about trends. Fashion is not just a trivial interest, but a real indicator of where a culture is going. Like theater, film, art, or music, it has become one of the cultural vectors that give us a sense of what is going on in our society.”(Jan2013) From the perspective of Bangladesh, previously it was found that mostly women in the rural area used to wear *hizab* and very few urban women were found to wear *hijab*. There are no laws which require women to cover their heads, and it is not encouraged by the government. Any women can wear the hijab without any restrictions applied. Previously, it was mostly worn by women in rural areas, and a few in urban areas. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). But now, from the various study and observations, it is evident that the trend has really shifted. The young-generation, especially in the educated sector, female are being increasingly attracted to the Islamic dressing, posing a potential market for the Fashion marketers of *hijab*.

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