

Modest wear

The fashion world wakes up to modesty



Modest wear – Fashion wakes up to modesty

According to Pinterest UK, in early 2018, searches for ‘modest fashion’ increased by 500%¹, around the time of London’s first Modest Fashion Week. Modest fashion has gained tremendous public attention. Many popular magazines, such as Vogue and Forbes, have invested in the modest fashion market. According to the Los Angeles Times, the global apparel market is valued at USD3 trillion and according to the report of State of the Global Islamic Economy by Thomson Reuters, Muslim consumers are expected to spend more than USD368 billion on fashion by 2021². How far will the modest wear trend go?

More women are buying clothing that conceals rather than accentuates their bodily shape³. While tastes in fashion vary widely among women, a growing proportion of women want to look stylish and sophisticated while being modest at the same time⁴. Because of this increasing demand for modest clothing, global fashion brands are developing clothing lines dedicated to modest wear⁵.

The Global Islamic fashion market

According to statistics from the Global Islamic Economy report for 2014-2015, Muslims spent USD266 billion on clothing and footwear in 2013⁶. The expenditure on clothing alone increased to USD270 billion in 2017 and is expected to reach USD361 billion by 2023⁷, growing at an average annual growth rate of 5 per cent.

¹ Modest fashion no longer just for Muslims, Gulf News Fashion Sanya Nayeem, 5 April 2018

² Macy’s eyes 230 billion dollars Muslim fashionistas’ opportunity with dedicated fashion range, Fashion United, Angela Gonzalez-Rodriguez, 10 February 2018

³ Why mainstream brands are embracing modest fashion, Independent, Kashmiria Gander, 16 October 2017

⁴ Women, Fashion Has You Covered, The New York Times, 6 April, 2017

⁵ Modest fashion forges ahead with growing global demand, Fashioning World, 12 October 2018

⁶ How the hijab became a global fashion industry, Quartz, Faegheh Shirazi, 10 May, 2017

⁷ An Inclusive Ethical Economy State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2018/19, Salaam Gateway, Thomson Reuters, 28 October 2018

In early 2018, in an interview by BR Research, the Founder and Chairwoman of the Islamic Fashion and Design Council (IFDC) in Dubai opined that the modest fashion industry was worth USD322 billion globally⁸.

What does modest fashion mean?

Modest fashion as a market term came into prevalence in the mid-2000s. Modest fashion essentially relates to having a level of awareness when it comes to covering up body parts and not displaying the body structure⁹.

Modest clothing is a fashion concept for female customers who want to wear clothes with many layers, long dresses, long sleeves and high neck cover. Modest clothing can be sophisticated and trendy but not revealing. Modest attire for Muslim women usually consists of the "Hijab" shawl and "Abaya" long skirt¹⁰.

Growth drivers for modest wear

According to a study published by Thomson Reuters, Muslim consumers spent approximately USD2 trillion across sectors in 2015. This figure is projected to grow to USD3 trillion by 2021¹¹.

🌐 Consumer landscape¹²

With the changing market landscape, more brands have begun to recognize the potential spending power of Muslims in relation to the fashion industry. They have also realized that in order to win share in this market, they will need to pay attention to categories that are considered "modest" or "Islamic", which Muslim consumers are interested in.

⁸ Modest fashion is a \$322 billion industry, Business Recorder Research, 6 April, 2018

⁹ What Does Modest Fashion Really Look Like? Hannah Almassi, 23 February, 2018

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ The new Muslim consumer landscape, J. Walter Thomson Intelligence, Mary Cass, 20 April, 2017

¹² Ibid

The Fashion Industry's Modest Turn

In Indonesia, people prefer colourful clothes, while in the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, darker monotone dresses are favoured.

Modest wear has taken the fashion industry by storm¹³. This translates into different styles in different countries.

In Indonesia, people prefer colourful clothes, while in the Gulf region including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, darker monotone dresses are favoured¹⁴.

Additionally, considering the variables of age, socio-economic status and education, not all Muslim consumers would have the same spending habits or fashion preferences. Brands should also be aware of the regional differences within Muslim-majority countries¹⁵.

From the launch of the Arabic edition of the Vogue fashion magazine in early 2017 to the advancement of fashion giants such as Nike, Mango, DKNY, Dolce & Gabbana, Oscar de la Renta, Uniqlo, Dolce Gabbana, modest fashion has showed its impact across the fashion world¹⁶.

The modest fashion movement has now become a multi-billion-dollar industry that is growing every day and attracting people beyond borders, backgrounds and religious beliefs¹⁷.

Influence of the internet

Consumers are expressing their fashion preferences on social media and the fashion industry is paying attention. Global fashion brands such as

¹³ Is the fashion world having a modest moment - or cashing in on Muslim women? Middle East Eye, Nadda Osman, 28 September 2018

¹⁴ Indonesia Aiming to be the Islamic Fashion Capital by 2020, Global Business Guide Indonesia, 2016

¹⁵ The Muslim Fashion Market Is Not a Monolith, Business of Fashion, Nathaniel S. Palmer, 3 February, 2018

¹⁶ Muslim fashion: The industry finally wakes up, Gulf News, Remona Aly, 11 March 2017

¹⁷ Modest fashion no longer just for Muslims, Gulf News, Sanya Nayeem, April 05, 2018

Nike, Macy's and Uniqlo have introduced hijabs in their product lines and diversified their ad campaigns to reflect that¹⁸.

In early 2017, Nike launched a "Pro-Hijab" marketing campaign to raise awareness of Muslim women athletes, marking Nike's Middle East market expansion thrust. At the end of the same year, it released its first hijab collection¹⁹.

London's first ever Modest Fashion Week was held in February 2018. This, together with the growing popularity of e-commerce selling platforms such as The Modest, drew attention to modest wear around the world²⁰.

Booming markets

According to the State Of The Global Islamic Economy Report published by Reuters, Muslim consumer spending on clothing is set to reach tens of billions by 2021²¹.

India ²²

With a 170 million Muslim population, there is high demand from Indian Muslims for modest wear, and this is set to rise with population growth, urbanization and a younger, more brand-conscious demographic.

In 2015, Indian Muslims spent about USD11 billion on clothing, with the market growing at a rate of 13 per cent annually.

Japan ²³

Japan has a small Muslim community; it is believed that there are only around 70,000 to 150,000 Muslim people in the country. However, many

¹⁸ How the internet has influenced the rise of Modest clothing, CBC, Sayada Nabi, 17 April 2018

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ The Future Of The Modest Fashion Industry, Modisme, 21 November, 2017

²² Islamic modest fashion gaining market share in India's \$110 billion retail apparel industry, Salaam gateway, Haroon Latif and Shafeeq Rahman, 9 January, 2017

²³ Islamic Fashion Flourishes in Muslim-Friendly Japan, About Islam, 27 March 2017

modest fashion clothing exporters have shown interest in exploring this small market.

“Modest” fashion accords well with Japanese traditional culture. The Japan Muslim Fashion Association (JMFA) believes that there is great potential for Muslim fashion exporters in Japan.

Malaysia²⁴

Malaysia, where most of the Muslim women now wear a hijab outdoors, is considered to be a big market for modest clothing.

Naelofar and dUCk Hijab are among the key players who have been leading the "modest wear" charge in Malaysia. In recent years, Malaysia has emerged as one of the global trendsetters in modest wear.

Bangladesh

One of the fastest growing fashion trends in Bangladesh is modest wear. There have been an increasing number of customers who have shown interest in the contemporaneity concept with a touch of modesty to suit their modern lifestyles²⁵.

Dubai Borka, one of the leading Bangladeshi high-end designers, and many other modest fashion suppliers, have been introducing dramatic new styles, all in the effort to fulfil customer demand with colourful and stylish modest fashion products²⁶.

Challenges facing modest fashion²⁷

The modest fashion industry is facing challenges in the competitive market space.

²⁴ Malaysia's big market for modest wear, The Straitstimes, Nadirah H. Rodzi, 6 January, 2018

²⁵ How Styleline Has Built An Everything Modest Lifestyle Marketplace, Future Startup, 18 February 2019

²⁶ The One of the Best Borka Brand of Bangladesh is DUBAI BORKA, Dubai Borka, 30 November 2016

²⁷ Top five challenges faced by modest fashion startups, My salaam, Alicia Buller, 3 October 2016

Persuading Muslims buyers²⁸

Retailers need to stock good quality and fashionable modest wear. There is a huge market for modest wear and not stocking up on quality clothing may create stock-out problems downstream.

Persuading customers that modest wear is essential remains a challenge. The retailer must be able to convince customers that modest clothing is fashionable and also value for money.

Target market

To cater to the women interested in modest clothing, fashion houses need to research and understand their target market. Modest clothing consumers must be seen as individuals to be segmented, and not as generalised blind trend followers. Every consumer has a unique aesthetic sense and designs should be able to cater to their individuality²⁹.

The clothing could be traditional yet elegant with no compromise made on quality, values and faith-related parameters. ³⁰.

Modest fashion advocates stress that it is for all of those women who desire to wear modest clothing for any reason, be it religious or personal. It does not belong to any one particular group of people and is open to everyone³¹.

Awareness

There are still many misconceptions regarding modest wear all over the world. In the past, some fashion collections from designers such as DNKY

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Halima Aden and Mariah Idrissi Discuss the Modest Fashion Movement, Vogue, Alexandria Gouveia, 12 March 2018

and Tommy Hilfiger received unpleasant feedback about the collection not being modest enough³².

This underlines the crucial importance of fashion companies encouraging Muslims and other modest wear consumers to participate in the research, design and marketing of modest fashion products, to be part of the conversation and exchange of ideas.³³

A Culture War?

Critics of modest wear often stereotype modest wear consumers as embodying archaic practices that oppress women, framing the question as one of freedom versus oppression. It is about hijab versus bikini³⁴. However the rise of modest wear as a fashion trend is challenging these stereotypical views.

In Indonesia, Hijabers Community aims to create an image of the modern Muslim woman. It has grown rapidly and germinated official branches in a few major Indonesian cities.³⁵

Future of the modest fashion industry

Modest fashion is growing in fresh and surprising ways. Nike was the first major sports brand to launch a sports hijab in a bid to capture the untapped modest sportswear market³⁶. Many popular and well established brands, such as Dolce & Gabbana, Mango, Tommy Hilfiger and John Lewis to name a few, have invested in the growing modest fashion industry³⁷.

Going forward, the modest fashion movement, to continue its current growth, will have to demonstrate its appeal to women of all faiths and none. It will

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Hijabers of Instagram: the Muslim women challenging stereotypes, The Conversation, Emma Baulch, 13 July 2017

³⁶ Modest fashion 'set to grow by 50% by 2020' says fashion expert, ITV, 22 February 2018

³⁷ Islamic modest sportswear gaining ground in a \$151 bln market, Salaam gateway, Haroon Latif, 21 March 2016

need to show that modest wear is about embracing certain values as a free individual, versus having external values imposed on oneself.³⁸ It will need to define the image of modest wear as being about women not needing or wanting to wear revealing attire to be stylish.³⁹

Looking at the rapid rise of modest wear, it is likely that it is here to stay and will co-exist with other major global fashion categories well into the foreseeable future.

³⁸ 5 Modest Fashion Trends That Are Totally Chic, Entity, Sophia Markosk, 29 June 2018

³⁹ Ibid