

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### MUSLIM CELEBRITIES' PREACHING ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG MUSLIM FASHION CONSUMERS

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**Keywords: Muslim Celebrities, Preaching, Social Media, Muslim Mentors, Muslim Fashion**

#### ABSTRACT

Current young Muslims are looking for fashion style ideas, but they need to stick to the restrictions outlined by religion and culture. Nowadays, young Muslims can look for fashion style ideas via social media, for example, by viewing their favourite celebrities' styles on social media accounts. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Muslim celebrities' preaching on social media and its impact on young Muslim fashion consumers by conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents who are young Muslims and follow celebrities on social media. The findings indicate that the current fashion style for young Muslim fashion consumers is evolving. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that social media is one of the most effective ways to spread reminders of the teachings of Islam (da'wah). In addition, this study expands the literature on the role of celebrities, arguing that Muslim celebrities not only act as fashion references for Muslim fashion consumers, but also inspire their spiritual strength, simultaneously becoming Muslim mentors.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion is of great significance for all Muslims, in that it affects every aspect of life (Floren et al., 2019). In today's modern world, Muslims face increasing challenges and tests that may lead them to commit errors and disregard their religious restrictions. In Islam, Muslims are urged to remind each other of the teachings, especially if a family member or friend commits a sin, or simply to earn the pleasure of Allah. This act of preaching has commonly been done offline; however, today it can also be done online, via social media platforms, for example (Azlan et al., 2020).

Currently, social media is one of the most effective avenues to preach (Slama, 2018). In addition, the features offered, such as high-quality images and information sharing capabilities, have encouraged users to utilise social media platforms to look for fashion information (Helal et al., 2019) or religious information, such as that provided by celebrities.

Celebrities are considered fashion references (Barron, 2019), and due to their significant influence, brands recruit them as endorsers to increase sales (Yuan et al., 2019). However, Muslim celebrities today also share religious information, by way of providing a positive image and thus becoming an inspiration for other Muslims, especially the younger generation. Therefore, this is the motivation of this study, which is to explore Muslim celebrities' preaching on social media and its impacts on young Muslim fashion consumers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Islam and preaching in fashion*

Islam is the official religion of Muslims, who believe that there is only one God (Allah the Almighty), and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Al-Quran is the Sharia (guideline) and all Muslims are highly encouraged to preach, as it is their responsibility to carry and deliver the message of Islam (Hurari et al., 2019). Conveying this message is very important to improve the community's life (Dianto, 2018).

The concept of preaching in Islam is broad, encompassing not only teaching people the knowledge of Islam but also inviting them to improve their lives by applying Islam in every aspect (Alimuddin, 2007). In addition, Muslim males and females are reminded to take care of each other, including by spreading the teachings (Ahmed & Hassan, 2012). This means they are strongly encouraged to remind their Muslim brothers and sisters to focus on Allah, and to come back to Allah (Azlan et al., 2020) if they have committed sins, by telling them how beautiful heaven is for the obedient and how dreadful hell is for the disobedient. In Islam, preachers are considered noble individuals, who spread the teachings of Islam (Quran, 41:33). Moreover, Muslims need to keep reminding each other that if one person makes a mistake, it could affect the entire community. Hence, Allah said in Quran (31:11) that individuals need to change their own fates, for Allah will not. The Muslim community needs to cooperate with each other to build a strong community and live

happy, harmonious lives. Furthermore, Muslims are taught to apply modesty in all aspects of their lives, including fashion (Hassan et al., 2015).

Similar to other consumers, many Muslims have a tendency to seek out fashion (Jafari & Sandikci, 2015). However, choosing fashion products in Islam is necessarily based on restrictions and emphasises modesty (Farrag & Hassan, 2015). Therefore, preaching in the context of fashion is important among Muslims, as they must follow restrictions when choosing fashion products to ensure they do not smear their nature as Muslims. In the Quran, Allah reminds people to dress modestly (24:31); hence Muslims need to remind each other not to disobey these guidelines. Today's world is especially challenging; with the exposure to social media, Muslims have been introduced to and influenced by current (Western) fashion trends, increasing their desire to try different styles. Therefore, Muslims need to encourage each other to follow the restrictions, for example, to wear a loose silhouette and non-transparent materials, to emphasise modesty by not exposing the skin, and at the same time to avoid waste. This study illustrates some of the restrictions that Muslims preach to other and how this can now be done not only verbally but online as well, via social media platforms.

### ***Social media as eWOM and a preaching platform***

The methods of preaching vary. Traditionally, a group of people goes from house to house to spread the teachings of Islam, or it can be done from one individual to another, a method known as word of mouth (WOM). However, the development of social media platforms, which have changed the typical manner of communication from offline to online, has affected the method of conveying the teachings as well and networking for Muslims (Halim, 2018; Azlan et al. 2020). This has moved from WOM to eWOM (electronic Word of Mouth), comprising both in-group eWOM (among family members or friends) and out-of-group eWOM (within one's wider family or friend circle) (Luis Abrantes et. al, 2013). There are many types of eWOM forums on social media platforms (Cheung & Thadani, 2012) and social media sites (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram). Social media platforms are a highly effective medium to use eWOM (Nuseir, 2019), as users can either look at or move past the information (Chu & Kim, 2011), making it very suitable for users to spread the teachings to one another (Lengauer, 2018). Moreover, with the menu of tools offered, such as the enhancement of visuals (images or videos) and comment threads, users can attract others to view content on Instagram or YouTube, especially the younger Muslim generation, and convey or look for religious information (Wibowo, 2019).

In addition, eWOM provides various benefits over traditional WOM, such as wider coverage and accessibility, a much faster speed of delivering messages and information, more measurability in terms of information quantity and persistence, and the use of text-based information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012), in contrast to the limited accessibility of verbal information, spread only among the speakers and their friends or (2021), representing more than half the world's population. Hence, social media is an ideal platform to preach and make the information reachable (Omar et al., 2015), especially by the younger

generation, as it can be seen, read and utilised by users more frequently in everyday life (Miller et al. 2016). Additionally, Slama (2018) states that Muslims use social media to look for religious information to improve their faith in Allah. Meanwhile, Halim (2018) demonstrates that social media is used by Muslims to strengthen their bonds with other Muslims and as an avenue for religious information provided by other Muslims' preaching. Therefore, realising the advantages of social media, celebrities worldwide have used this platform to build and maintain audience (Tanupabrungsun & Hemsley, 2018) including Muslim celebrities who also spread the teachings of Islam.

### ***Muslim celebrities on social media***

Celebrities include well-known singers, actors, TV presenters and many more. Famous celebrities with name recognition often become endorsers, as they have large fan bases and a large number of followers (Mena et al., 2020) and also become influencers (Mellado & Hermida, 2021). Celebrities come from many different backgrounds and religions, including Islam.

Muslim celebrities today are known worldwide; big names such as Halima Aden (model), Yuna (singer), Amir Khan (actor) and Mehmet Oz (TV presenter), to name a few, have become inspirations to Muslims all over the world. Malaysia also has famous Muslim celebrities, such as Neelofar, who has gone international after becoming an endorser for Gucci, Chanel and other brands, and is listed as one of the most successful young entrepreneurs by Forbes (The Star, 2017). Heliza Helmi is another Muslim celebrity in Malaysia, who is involved in fashion and TV presenting. Their stories can be followed on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube, which also makes them preachers, either directly or indirectly. Using social media makes it easy to share their stories, and the teachings of Islam can also be spread easily. They can do this directly: these celebrities share their life journeys and their daily practices to maintain their image as Muslims. Moreover, they include prayers (dua) or Quran verses to share with others the purpose of earning the acceptance of Allah.

At the same time, they can preach indirectly. As known fashion icons, these celebrities share their fashion styles. By displaying modesty, they send a message that it is important to maintain their image as modern Muslims who follow the restrictions. This is one of the most notable teachings that they want to share with their fans.

Moreover, today's Muslims, both celebrities and consumers, face many tests and challenges due to modernisation and exposure to other worlds (Siddikoğlu, 2020). Therefore, preaching is very important to remind each other to stay in place. In the context of these challenges, people now have different behaviours, accepting or rejecting various rules. As a result, as stated by El-Bassiouny (2016), Muslim consumers are complicated to study, due to their different religious and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, more studies need to be done regarding Muslim consumers to understand more deeply the

extent to which social media affects fashion consumers that may differ to other consumers, including non-Muslims.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Our intention was to study the impacts on fashion consumers of celebrities preaching on social media. We employed qualitative methods, which offer insight through interaction between respondents and researchers (Mingers, 2001), and at the same time fit research on consumer behaviour (Belk, 2017). At the same time, respondents needed flexibility to answer the questions. Hence, interviews were conducted with 20 respondents to obtain rich data regarding the topic. Interviews allowed respondents to express themselves freely, and they allowed the researchers to explore further while conducting the interviews, by expanding the questions based on the respondents' answers (Longhurst, 2003). During the data analysis process, the saturation level was observed at 18-20 respondents.

We chose respondents who were Muslim, age range of 18-30 and who follow celebrities on social media. Young generation was selected since this group is familiar with technology and social media, which is a focus of this study as a place the teachings are spread. Finally, we chose participants who follow Muslim celebrities on social media, meaning that they receive updates and see posts from their favourite celebrities.

The interviews were conducted by telephone, due to Covid-19 social distancing and lockdown restrictions as well as poor internet connection, in Malay, and then translated and transcribed verbatim. The data then were analysed using coding and thematic analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

To obtain the main themes and subthemes, coding and thematic analysis were conducted according to the suggestions of King et al. (2015). The results revealed three main themes (4.1 Fashion style evolution, 4.2 The role of social media and 4.3 The role of celebrities) and five subthemes (4.1.1 Contemporary Muslim fashion styles, 4.2.1 Avenue for spreading teachings, 4.3.1 Celebrities as fashion references, 4.3.2 Preaching on social media and 4.3.3 Muslim mentors). Explanations of main themes and subthemes are followed:

### ***Fashion style evolution***

The current study indicates that Muslim consumers are undergoing a fashion style evolution, in those styles for young Muslim consumers are changing to combine conservative and contemporary.

### ***Contemporary Muslim fashion styles***

With the increasing demand for modest wear (Entaban. 2020), it is important to understand the meaning of 'modesty' among today's young people. Muslims are experiencing modernisation (Floren et al., 2019), as is their way of dressing. According to respondents, they have proven that modesty can go

far: they can still look good in modest wear, by combining it with contemporary styles, which is important for young people who want to try different trends (Hassan & Harun, 2016). Therefore, modesty is still the benchmark, but these young people enhance their styles with contemporary trends, combining the hijab with blouses, jackets, palazzo pants, or any combination that includes the elements of excitement, sophistication and righteousness. They can choose what they want, as long it does not violate the restrictions outlined by religion. For example, respondents 1, 10 and 17 expressed their fashion choices as modern Muslim fashion consumers:

**Respondent 1:** 'My style as a young Muslim, I emphasise modesty (covering my private parts), because the way we dress speaks for us. I mean, if I dress as a Muslim, I look like a Muslim. For example, I combine hijabs with long blouses and palazzo pants.'

**Respondent 10:** 'If you ask my style, I am more into loose fitting attire. I like pastel colours. Previously I liked to wear pants, shirts and different styles of hijabs. But now I have changed – I like to wear loose fitting attire such as long blouses with jackets and hijabs. Although I choose modesty, it does not mean that I cannot look great.'

**Respondent 17:** 'I prefer to choose bold colours – these help me to look good, better than pastel colours. In terms of cut, I prefer a loose cut, but at the same time I choose tight pants underneath the loose blouses. It is more to mix and match but centred on modesty.'

### *The role of social media*

This study also demonstrates that social media platforms are an effective avenue to spread the teachings of Islam, which concurs with Omar et al. (2015). Additionally, Baulch & Pramiyanti (2018) stated that Muslims are getting familiar with using technology (social media) to look for religious information. Therefore, our study demonstrates that fashion consumers look not only for fashion inspiration, but also for religious information on social media platforms.

### *Avenue for spreading teachings*

Several respondents (including 2, 5 and 14) stated that social media is an ideal avenue to spread teachings, through which they learn knowledge about Islam. They have learned that it is necessary to spread this information to others, as Ahmed and Hassan (2012) states that Muslims are required to take care of each other. By harnessing the features offered by social media platforms such as eWOM, the information can be spread quickly and easily. In addition, platforms such as Instagram utilize visuals that make it easier to read, which concurs with Wibowo (2019), who has argued that high quality images on social media are a way to attract readers and viewers, mainly those in the younger generation. In this context, respondents pointed out the following:

**Respondent 2:** 'Besides looking for fashion information, I also use social media to look for religious information, and I can find both via celebrities' social media accounts.'

**Respondent 5:** 'I think nowadays it is much easier to look for religious content, on social media, for example. Why would I waste my time looking somewhere else if I can obtain the information quickly and easily? Thanks to our celebrities who are willing to share this information on Instagram, for example – it is very helpful to strengthen my faith.'

**Respondents 14:** 'I like to visit our celebrities on Instagram because they share fashion inspiration. Besides, I admire how they take care of their image as Muslim by sharing the religious information that makes me want to practice as well.'

### *The role of celebrities*

Celebrities play important roles in fashion, as they have become references for fashion consumers (Yuan et al., 2019). Muslim celebrities, however, have additional tasks to do, including preaching, by becoming Muslim mentors for other Muslims, including Muslim fashion consumers.

### *Celebrities as fashion references*

This study demonstrates that Muslim celebrities have become part of the mainstream when it comes to fashion, as observed by Djafarova & Rushworth, (2017). However, our findings also show that these celebrities inspire fashion styles that combine conservative and contemporary, a complete bundle that can inspire others in upgrading their fashion styles, and that fits the younger generation's current tastes. In this context, respondents 7, 12 and 17 commented as follows:

**Respondent 7:** 'The main reasons for following these (Muslim) celebrities are their fashion styles – they are fashion endorsers for many brands, local and international. However, they still maintain their image as young Muslim, despite displaying a combination of conservative and contemporary'.

**Respondent 12:** 'Firstly, I follow them because they are my fashion inspiration; they follow Sharia and display modesty. At the same time, they also produce their own fashion products which emphasise modesty but add Western styles. It really attracts me and makes me want to purchase them.'

**Respondent 17:** 'The main reason for following Muslim celebrities is because they are a true inspiration for Muslim. They are not just a model who displays new fashion style for Muslim, but they also have many side jobs. Simultaneously, the emphasises conventional and combines foreign styles; that makes more people like her.'

### *Preaching on social media*

The findings show that celebrities are important 'agents' for spreading Islamic teachings, as they can convey these messages effectively, mainly on social media platforms, concurs with a study by Lengauer (2018). The majority of respondents (e.g., 8, 10 and 19) noticed the preaching on social media, and they were pleased to follow these celebrities in order to improve their internal religious strength, especially through every day practices, such as meditation and prayers, to seek tranquillity and earn the pleasure of Allah. This is required for every Muslim, regardless of how busy their life is; they need to remember the Almighty in any situation, and in return, Allah will remember them, as cited in the Quran (2: 152). These respondents pointed out several things:

**Respondent 8:** 'Celebrities also spread teachings of Islam on social media. For example, they share 'dua' with their followers – many Muslim celebrities do this, so followers can practice the same prayers. So, not only are they fashion inspirations, but also icons for Muslims who spread teachings of Islam via social media.'

**Respondent 10:** 'I believe that they (Muslim celebrities) spread the teachings through social media. For example, via videos, they share what Muslim should practice (to gain the pleasure of Allah) and this has improved my knowledge, and this is why I follow these celebrities.'

**Respondent 19:** 'I think our celebrities always preaches through her Instagram account. For example, she shares advice, and dua or prayers that will light up our lives'

### *Muslim mentors*

Our findings demonstrate that celebrities open up their life stories on social media to be viewed by others. As human beings, we cannot run from problems, challenges, and obstacles, and according to Islam these serve as reminders to remember Allah, as the Almighty says that humans will be tested (Quran, 29:2). Muslim celebrities are good examples to others to prioritise kindness and to help and encourage others; when they go beyond actions and engage in preaching, this is considered a success (Quran, 5:56). Hence, our findings indicate that they have become mentors for other Muslims, who may have problems in their life, but at the same time try to be kind to others and have faith. For example, respondents expressed the following:

**Respondent 7:** 'They (Muslim celebrities) preach via social media. For example, a celebrity may share her daily routine or prayers that she practices, Quran verses that she recites. I think this is very helpful for her followers and at the same time educates us to be pious regardless of the busyness.'

**Respondent 10:** 'Moreover, they (Muslim celebrities) also provide a good example by helping others, for example doing charity. Their message is to encourage others to spread love to everyone, regardless of their different



background. Therefore, I think they have encouraged young people to be kind, follow fashion trends but at the same time maintain the Sharia in their daily life. They also share prayers on their Instagram to spread the teachings.'

**Respondent 13:** 'Yes, she (a Muslim celebrity) also preaches, for example shares dua, or daily prayers, to be closer to Allah. This is very touching because sometimes we forget our responsibility to the Almighty, and she is so kind to remind us that no matter how busy we are, we still need to remember Allah.'

Moreover, the respondents mentioned that Muslim celebrities are being kind to others as well, thus becoming an inspiration and motivation to their followers. For example, some respondents (e.g., 2, 10 and 18) mentioned that Muslim celebrities have set up charities and participated in events to help others (in Syria). When they have shared these events on their social media accounts, it has opened society's eyes to the fact that there are people in the world who are struggling to survive. Setting up charities and helping others are noble deeds that should be practiced by all Muslims. In this context, respondents made several observations:

**Respondent 2:** 'Well, I really like to follow Muslim celebrities' life stories because they are fashionable as a Muslim. Besides, they always motivate their followers with charity work; for example, now they are on a mission to help the needy ones in Syria. Apart from displaying simple modesty in her fashion style, they also encourages us to help each other.'

**Respondent 10:** 'Moreover, they (Muslim celebrities) also make good examples by helping others, for example doing charity. Their message is to encourage others to spread love to everyone, regardless of different background.'

**Respondent 18:** 'I think they also preach by not only spreading the teachings based on her fashion style but also through their kindness such as building a charity. This good deed has encouraged other people, mostly the younger generation to take part in contributing to charity. So, it is not just fashion, but also inviting the youngsters to be kind.'

## CONCLUSION

To obtain the main themes and subthemes, this research explores the impacts of Muslim celebrities' preaching on social media on young Muslim fashion consumers using a qualitative approach. The study, among the earliest to examine this topic, demonstrates that the current dominant style for Muslim fashion consumers, which combines conservative and contemporary, aligns with Jan et al. (2015) who has shown that current Muslims are looking for new fashion trends. Furthermore, this study indicates that social media is an ideal avenue to preach, concurring with Omar et al., (2015); Slama, (2018). Moreover, this study also expands the literature on the roles of celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Yuan et al., 2019), finding that Muslim celebrities have not only become fashion references for Muslim fashion consumers, but also inspire these consumers to focus on their spiritual and

internal strength, by following the teachings conveyed by the celebrities. In this way, Muslim celebrities act as mentors for many Muslims.

The main limitation of the study lies in the sampling, in that respondents come from Malaysia only. Therefore, a generalisation to other Islamic countries may not be possible, as Muslims elsewhere have different cultures and customs that may affect their reactions to celebrities preaching on social media. The next study should include male respondents to explore how this topic influences men. Finally, a future study could also focus on different social media platforms, as each one offers different features, meaning that their impacts on fashion consumers may differ.

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