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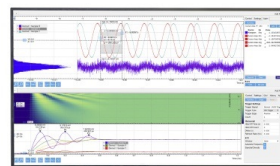
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Western and Islamic Wear: How Fashion Bloggers Influence the Malay Fashion Consumers' Purchasing Decision in Reconciling the Collision

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Abstract. Malay consumers need to obey the restrictions outlined by religion and culture when it comes to fashion. However, this situation does not stop them from being fashionable. In contrast, they are always looking for alternatives to look stylish or stay in trend while also obeying religious values and cultural context, mainly young consumers. With more choices available in the market, this situation has given them more opportunities to create a distinctive style (mix and match). For instance, they can combine Islamic and Western trends with satisfying the restrictions and desires of modern Malay women as displayed by fashion bloggers, who are able to affect their purchasing decision. This study aims to analyse Malay fashion bloggers' influence on Malay fashion consumers' purchasing decisions, who face the restrictions and challenges of fashion due to religious values and cultural context. In other words, they have to follow the restrictions outlined by religion, for instance, by choosing the apparel that does not resemble their body figures and cover their hair and body, which can avoid them from provoking society. This research underwent a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 respondents to analyse how Malay female fashion consumers are influenced by Malay fashion bloggers, who guide them on choosing fashion products that satisfy all parties. This study is among the first to study Malay fashion bloggers who have different religions and cultures. Findings also extend studies of fashion bloggers' roles and Muslim fashion consumers.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion blogs are usually written by fashion bloggers, also known for a medium to spread fashion information and provide information for fashion styles [1]. Fashion bloggers share their personal style or life journey on fashion blogs or other social media. Famous or influential fashion bloggers can connect fashion fans globally on social media, and at the same time, they can influence the consumer's purchasing decision [2]. However, consumer behavior is complex, in which fashion consumption can be formed or shaped by religion, culture, and age, to name a few. Almila [3] states that culture can affect the choices of apparel in a Muslim society. Additionally, Muslims have restrictions on fashion consumption, for example, based on the limitations outlined by the religion [4], for instance, to emphasise modesty. Modest wear is booming in Malaysia nowadays [5]; offering a variety of modest wear such as hijabs, loose tops and bottoms, dresses, and many more. For example, Hana Tajima collaborates with Uniqlo to produce modest wear. Other brands also introduce their modest wear line such as Dolce and Gabbana, Nike and Burberry. Young Malay generation

(Muslims) in this country may have different preferences in fashion compared to older generations. They are exposed more to social media, which helps them reach more information, adding more desires to try new things, aligned with the introduction of Western styles in Malaysia market. However, they must follow the restrictions and balance with their fashion desires. Hence, these young fashion consumers are looking for trusted sources to show the correct way to satisfy all parties such as celebrities or fashion bloggers who display the combination of Islamic and Western style. Despite knowing the important roles of fashion bloggers in the fashion industry, studies on fashion bloggers are mostly conducted in Western context; only few have been done in Islamic context. Therefore, more research need to be done on Malay or Muslim fashion bloggers for having different background of religion and culture, that affect the way how they dress, different perspectives the roles of fashion bloggers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet and social media have become a new avenue for marketing [6]. Whiting et al. [7] stated that social media platform provides users with the convenience of time, place, and accessibility. Therefore, fashion items are also promoted via this platform to reach more consumers [8] and become one of the most popular platforms to discuss fashion products [9]. Moreover, fashion engagement and fashion information are spread rapidly via social media platforms [10].

One of the main features offered by social media is to exchange or share content [11]. Users can easily interact with each other, share the information, or leave comments on this platform. Therefore, bidirectional interaction can also happen on social media, where consumers have opportunities to communicate with retailers or brands [12]. Hence, this has also given retailers or brands a chance to learn about consumer behavior based on their interactions; for example, by viewing or analysing the consumers' comments, reviews, or expression on fashion products via social media left by fashion consumers.

Fashion consumers may choose fashion products based on demographics, such as religion and culture. For example, Malay women, who carry responsibilities as Muslim [13] may choose different fashion styles compared to Western consumers because of the restrictions that they have to follow which highlight the modesty; such as covering their head, loose silhouette and avoid materials made from pig products, to name a few. However, studies on this topic have received less attention. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted to understand deeper on Malay fashion consumers. As modern Malay, especially youngsters, who are exposed to social media and fashion trends; they may have desires to try new trends (Western), but at the same time, they have to obey the restrictions in the religion, which is to remain modest in dressing. Therefore, they may adopt both modest and modern fashion products that combine Islamic and Western fashion. Hence, this situation has driven them to look for valid sources, as the clash between Islamic and Western-style may expose them to social risk; the sources that can provide them the correct way to dress which balance between the restrictions and fashion trends, for instance, the fashion bloggers.

Fashion bloggers started their journey by sharing their life stories, personal styles, or latest fashion trends via online diary [14]. They develop from being active on fashion blogs to other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat to reach a much bigger audience or fashion consumers [15]. Moreover, they are also known as one of the key players in fashion industries and become one of the valid sources for fashion information [16]. However, not all fashion bloggers can become famous or influential [2]. In order to become famous or influential, they have to own credibility, such as becoming opinion leaders. Fashion opinion leaders are known for their active participation in fashion-related activities, leading to new fashion trends, followed by others [17]. Additionally, they are also considered as fashion expertise [18], where they become one of the premier sources for fashion styles and have in-depth knowledge in fashion background). Furthermore, influential fashion bloggers always update their blogs or social media accounts frequently, providing their followers with fashion issues and topics [19]. Besides, their credibility is also measured through their engagement with followers [20]. The number of followers also represents their credibility, where the higher number of followers they have, the more famous and influential they become [21]. Besides, due to their popularity, many fashion brands have recruited these bloggers to endorse their products, such as Nicole Warne from Australia has endorsed numerous fashion brands such as Dior, Piaget, Giorgio Armani, Chanel and many more. Man Repeller from the U.S is also recruited by Manolo Blahnik, Michael Kors and Stuart Weitzman, to name a few, as the endorser. Nevertheless, studies on the influential fashion bloggers are mostly focusing on Western context; therefore, there are massive gaps in studying Malay fashion bloggers who have different types of dressing that satisfy religious values, cultural context and fashion trends, or in other words, who can reconcile the clash between Islamic and Western fashion styles.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, a qualitative approach was taken as it is relevant for studying consumer behaviour [22]. Hence, semi-structured interview was used to collect data for this research. The qualitative technique allows the respondents to share their stories, opinions, views or experience freely while for the researchers, semi-structured interview helps them to obtain rich data and new insights from the respondents [23].

16 respondents had gone through the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in December 2019 – February 2020. The interviews were conducted Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kuantan, and Selangor. To recruit the respondents, snowball sampling was used by asking the previous respondents involved in the pilot study if they had friends or family members who fulfilled the criteria. The criteria are; i) Women/ Malay; ii) Age range of 25 to 39 years old (Generation Y); and iii) Follow fashion bloggers. For this research, women were chosen because they involve more in fashion compared to men [24]. Additionally, women show more tendency and positive behaviour in purchasing fashion products than men [25-26]. Meanwhile, Generation Y was selected because they are technology savvy, highly sociable, and highly involved with online shopping [27]. Therefore, generation Y members are highly familiar with social media platforms. Finally, to complete the data analysis process, coding and template analysis were used, based on [28]. The data was analysed manually, coded into categories which led to themes and subthemes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Coding and template analysis were used to analyse the data. As a result, three principles themes and six subthemes have emerged, as shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Summary of Data Analysis.

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1. The Influence of Malay Fashion Bloggers	1.1 Islamic Fashion Inspiration 1.2 Fashion Reconciliation 1.3 Fashion Purchasing Decision
2. Flexibility in Fashion	2.1 The Combination of Fashion Products 2.2 The Development of Work wear
3. Social Risk Avoidance	3.1 The Acceptance of the Fashion Clash between Islamic and Western Style

The Influence of Malay Fashion Bloggers

Fashion bloggers have a big influence on consumers' purchasing decisions [8, 29]. Nevertheless, most respondents preferred to refer to local fashion bloggers (Malay) due to how they dress.

Islamic Fashion Inspiration

Findings showed that local fashion bloggers became valid fashion sources, confirming previous studies on Western fashion bloggers [14]. The creativity of local fashion bloggers in displaying the alternatives to combine modest and modern instead of modesty alone has balanced religious values and cultural context, and the respondents are triggered to adopt the same styles. Therefore, these fashion bloggers are considered as Muslim fashion inspiration and followed by modern Malay women in Malaysia. Respondents stated:

K: I feel so lucky to be born as one of the Generation Y members. I grow up using social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat and via this platform I search for fashion products and follow fashion bloggers. My idols and fashion inspiration.....of course the local fashion bloggers such as Vivy Yusof, Fatin Suhana and Sabby Prue. I follow them because of their styles which I think suitable for current Malay females in this country; 'mix and match' concept. Personally, I think this has encouraged young people to choose the appropriate fashion style and represent themselves as modern Malay females".

D: "I think everyone is doing what I do every day, using social media 24/7. I prefer to search for fashion products via this platform as it is fast and offers a variety of choices, especially via local fashion bloggers' Instagram accounts. Vivy Yusof for example, I love her style. She knows how to do 'mix and match,' but at the same time, she does not tarnish the religious values. As a young Malay female myself, I sincerely thankful to have her as my fashion inspiration, and not only me, I believe that her fashion styles has inspired thousands of youngsters in Malaysia and encouraged them to become a modern and fashionable Malay female."

Fashion Reconciliation

Local fashion bloggers create new fashion trends, the combination of Islamic and Western-style. They are considered a fashion trendsetter, where they try the trends first and then followed by others. Findings showed that most respondents accepted styles shown by local fashion bloggers and adopted the same styles. Moreover, respondents believed that local fashion bloggers have the power to change the fashion among Malay females, for their influence and bravery to step up in creating new styles, and at the same time, they can voice out what modern Malay women want to wear at the current time. Respondents expressed:

C: There is one fashion bloggers who did not put hijab and wearing sexy outfits, but finally decided to wear hijab and change her style to the combination of modesty and modern. This is so inspiring to me, watching the development of fashion in Malaysia, that fashion is growing! To the best of my knowledge, Malay women were afraid to be fashionable before, and they just stressed modesty. Nevertheless, nowadays, fashion bloggers have shown a different side of fashion style, that they are brave to break the barrier. I can say that she becomes a trendsetter to the new generation and represent the modern Malay women in Malaysia”.

G: They (fashion bloggers) are the trendsetters! I love the way how they dress, combining modest and modern outfit (Islamic and Western). I don't think that I will be able to dress this way or have the courage without the guidance of these fashion bloggers. They are one of my biggest fashion inspirations, and thanks a lot for bringing the fresh for young Malay female like me”.

Fashion Purchasing Decision

The findings revealed that fashion bloggers can influence fashion consumers' purchasing decisions, concurs with previous studies on Western fashion bloggers [e.g. 2, 29]. The styles displayed by these bloggers are able to attract others and adopt the same styles, and consumers are curious to know where the bloggers get the outfits. In addition, the findings also showed that fashion bloggers who share the links or information regarding the fashion products displayed have facilitated searching. This has shown that fashion bloggers have helped them with their purchasing decisions, particularly in the information search stage. Respondents stated:

I: “First of all, the way how they dress attracts me. Besides, they are very helpful; the information given by these bloggers has helped me to save my time. I can skip the information searching stage as I can easily click on the links provided, and it will direct me to the same websites to purchase the same products used by these bloggers”.

M: “I do believe 100 percent in fashion bloggers, what they wear, how they wear, they inspire me a lot. Sometimes I ask myself, where did they get these beautiful outfits? Because I want them too! Luckily, with the hashtags (#) provided by these fashion bloggers, it helps me a lot to search for the same products, which I do not need to search from other websites, easier for the process of purchasing”.

Flexibility in Fashion

This study confirms that the style by fashion bloggers create flexibility to be followed by Malay fashion consumers. Aligned with young Malay female fashion consumers have desires to look good and, at the same time, earn respect from society. Therefore, fashion bloggers have changed the dimension of fashion among Malay fashion consumers.

The Combination of Fashion Products

Regardless of the restrictions outlined by religious values, findings demonstrated that respondents accepted the combination of fashion styles displayed by local fashion bloggers (Islamic and Western). This proposes that the younger Malay female fashion consumers have changed their taste in fashion, from pure modesty to a mixture of modesty and fashion-consciousness, to enhance their style. It is worth noting here that Islam does not forbid Muslims from pursuing or trying other trends, as long as they are to balance them with modesty. However, this study also revealed that consumers also accept the combination of Islamic and luxury products. Respondents expressed:

E: “To me, fashion bloggers are very creative in fashion styling. The idea of ‘mix and match’ is very genius and up to date to be worn by Malay women. For example, they combine Islamic and Western-style; top and bottom, palazzo or long cardigan, look very elegant. Moreover, I have never thought that the addition of LV heels or handbags completes the look! This has inspired me a lot as a young generation, who always has desires to try something new. I think this is one of the advantages of being modern Malay women nowadays; we experience the flexibility in choosing fashion products”.

G: "Following the fashion styles by local fashion bloggers is a must for me, as my fashion inspiration. The best thing about following them is that I am amazed that the way they combine modest and modern is very interesting and acceptable. For example, matching the Birkin handbag, Chanel jacket and Valentino shoes with hijab and abaya; has created an elegant look on our local fashion bloggers and encouraged others to wear the same!".

The Development of Work Wear

Findings also revealed the development of work wear among young Malay woman, that they also emphasise their fashion styles while doing their work. The combination of Islamic and Western displayed by fashion bloggers has encouraged them not only to be fashionable in daily wear but also work wear. Interestingly, they make their day and boost their confidence to work and deal with their job. Respondents point out:

A: "I am a manager in one of the prestigious companies in this country, do you think I don't care about my appearance? Haha (laughing). Of course, the way how I look, I need to shine and impress others, mainly when I want to meet my clients. I have my biggest inspirations, Vivy Yusof, who brings the essence of fashion (mix and match between Islamic and Western styles) for a woman with a career like me. By wearing this, it improves my confidence level, and I am proud to say that "I dress to impress", but in the context of a Malay women".

E: "Living in the hustle and bustle of the city, I am a woman who emphasises how I dress. My job requires me to dress well as I need to meet my clients almost every day. Therefore, fashion is 'essential' in my life. Taking inspiration from local fashion bloggers, I always combine my blazer with hijab, palazzo, heels, handbags, watches, pants, and so on. The only thing that I always get from my clients 'you look really good and I like the way you dress'. Therefore, I feel motivated to do my job when people appreciate the way I dress".

Social Risk Avoidance

This study also confirms that fashion bloggers are able to avoid social risk. This theme is important because it emphasises how the creativity of fashion bloggers in displaying their style to earn acceptance by society, and at the same time, to avoid social risk.

The Acceptance of The Fashion Clash Between Islamic And Western Styles

Findings showed the acceptance from consumers towards the styles displayed by fashion bloggers, regardless of the clash of fashion between Islamic and Western styles. Consumers follow the style as they believe that these fashion bloggers provide a trustworthy fashion source and safe to wear (accordingly to religious values and cultural context). Hence, they feel confident to dress similarly to fashion bloggers, that they will not encounter any problem, mainly with the society for wearing the appropriate outfits as a young and modern Malay female. Respondents point out:

B: "I love the way how our fashion bloggers (local) dress. For example, the way how Vivy Yusof stylises her hijab with branded jacket, shoes and watches for example, has inspired me. I think, by referring to this blogger, I feel safe and confident to follow as others accept their styles...."

D: "When I choose outfits, I want to make sure to earn acceptance by society. Hence, I refer to fashion bloggers (Vivy Yusof and Fatin Suhana). So far, I haven't heard or view any negative comments regarding her styles, and to me this means they earn acceptance from our society, therefore it is safe for me to follow".

H: "The real satisfaction for me when it comes to fashion is I can be fashionable, but at the same time, I obey the religious values and cultural context. To perform this, I need a valid reference; certainly the local fashion bloggers such as Vivy Yusof, Fatin Suhana and Sabrina Tajuddin. They are my true inspiration and the reason for being brave to 'mix and match' my outfits and confident they are accepted by society".

CONCLUSIONS

Malay fashion bloggers have different roles than Westerners due to their restrictions on choosing the appropriate apparel. This situation has inspired the modern Malay women fashion consumers in their navigation of the fashion-faith landscape. Current fashion styles among young Malay women fashion consumers shift from pure modesty to the combination of Islamic and Western styles to enhance their beauty and appearance. However, these combination features Islamic and Western's clash ideas on how a Malay female should wear. Therefore, these consumers are

looking for valid fashion sources or fashion inspiration to satisfy all parties, including religious values, cultural context, and current fashion trends.

The study is among the first to study Malay fashion bloggers and consumers. It extends the developing literature on the influence of fashion bloggers as valid fashion sources [e.g. 16, 20, 29]. It explains that fashion bloggers are the valid fashion sources for the latest modern Malay women and act as intermediaries to reconcile the clash between Islamic and Western styles. This leads the consumers in their faith/fashion landscape and, at the same time, influences their purchasing decision. Additionally, this study contributes to the evolving literature on the modest blogosphere by revealing that the Malay female consumers want to balance between modesty and fashion desire by wearing the combination of Islamic and Western-style. Being young, they are exposed to current fashion trends, led by local fashion bloggers. They have broken the tradition to a certain extent, by shifting their fashion styles from pure modesty to combining Islamic with Western styling for all sorts of occasions. Regardless of the clash ideas on Islamic and Western styles, they acculturate with the latest styles and obey the religion and culture norms.

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