

RESEARCH ARTICLE | APRIL 19 2024

The impacts of the project runway reality television series on Muslim fashion consumers **FREE**

M. Z. M. Zain ✉; H. Hassan; N. H. Z. Amri; M. H. Drahman; S. W. Hasbullah; N. Sulaiman; N. S. A. Jamaludin; R. M. Zain; A. Ramli



AIP Conf. Proc. 2799, 020054 (2024)

<https://doi.org/10.1063/5.0183189>



View Online



Export Citation

22 April 2024 01:58:42

Boost Your Optics and Photonics Measurements

Lock-in Amplifier

Zurich Instruments

Find out more

Boxcar Averager

The Impacts of The Project Runway Reality Television Series on Muslim Fashion Consumers

M Z M Zain^{1,a)}, H Hassan,^{1,b)} N H Z Amri^{1, c)}, M H Drahman^{1,d)}, S W Hasbullah^{1,e)},
N Sulaiman^{1,f)}, N S A Jamaludin^{1,g)}, R M Zain^{2,h)} and A Ramli^{2,i)}

¹*Faculty of Creative Technology and Heritage, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Bachok Campus, 16300 Bachok, Kelantan, Malaysia.*

²*Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, City Campus, 16100 Pengkalan Chepa, Kelantan, Malaysia.*

^{a)}Corresponding author: zaimmudin@umk.edu.my

^{b)} hanisa@umk.edu.my

^{c)} hazlin.za@umk.edu.my

^{d)} hafiz.d@umk.edu.my

^{e)} sarahwahida@umk.edu.my

^{f)} nurulahda.s@umk.edu.my

^{g)} sofiatul@umk.edu.my

^{h)} rosmaizura.mz@umk.edu.my

ⁱ⁾ ainon@umk.edu.my

Abstract. The fashion industry is growing, regardless of its approach to influencing trends and styles. Consumers are able to look for new fashion trends and fashion inspirations via different platforms and sources, including by watching the Project Runway reality television series on websites, Netflix, or YouTube. However, most of the fashion styles displayed are based on Western styles; this may tarnish the show's image for Muslim consumers due to the clash between Western and Islamic styles. Thus, this study is among the earliest to explore the impacts of the Project Runway series on Muslim fashion consumers using a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with seventeen respondents. The outcomes show that this reality television series has a positive impact on Muslim consumers, regardless of the clashing ideas of fashion. Results show that Project Runway is one source Muslim viewers use to upgrade their fashion knowledge and styles. Moreover, this study also indicates that Muslim consumers' fashion is evolving as they accept the clashing ideas of Western and Islamic styles, and finally, that Project Runway is a good promotional platform to showcase modest wear to the world.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is an Islamic country; most of the population embraces Islam as their belief system [1]. Hence, they must prioritise modesty in their life. This applies to choosing their attire, where Muslim males or females have different restrictions. With modesty as a benchmark, they look for appropriate fashion inspiration and related fashion information to enhance their appearance via varied platforms.

Today, with social media and the internet, fashion information and inspiration have no boundaries. For example, consumers can watch fashion reality television series such as America's Next Top Model, Fashion Police, Next in Fashion, What Not to Wear, Stylista and Project Runway, to name a few. However, Project Runway is one of the longest-airing fashion programs on television (2004 to the present), and it has been nominated for and won many more awards as compared to the others. Therefore, Project Runway has been validated as one of the leading and most popular reality television series for fashion. Project Runway can be seen via various websites and social media platforms such as Netflix and YouTube. As access can be obtained globally, Muslims are not excluded; they can also watch this reality television series, regardless of the restrictions to which they must adhere. However, we may ask

how Muslims are able to watch this reality television series. Will it mislead them to choose inappropriate apparel? This study explores the impacts of Project Runway on Muslim fashion consumers by analysing the semi-structured interview data from seventeen respondents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashion is something that we deal with every day [2]. People are keen to look for and follow different fashion trends. This is mainly true of the younger generations, who are also looking for something different or for fashionable attire [3]. The effects of fashion are significant, and many take advantage of the popularity of this business, including the reality television series Project Runway. Project Runway is a reality television series based on a fashion design competition, in which contestants are eliminated based on a weekly challenge, and the winner receives USD 100,000–250,000 and is given the opportunity to open their own fashion line. Contestants are not allowed to watch television or surf the internet during the filming of the season, to ensure that they use their imagination to create the design [4].

Being nominated for and having won many awards, Project Runway has proven to be one of the most well-known reality television series [5]. Indeed, this reality television series has won millions of fans all over the world [6]. With 12 to 15 contestants each season, the total number of contestants has exceeded 200 to date. So far, there have been 18 seasons and 251 episodes that involve a variety of countries, such as the United States, Belgium, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Finland, France, Greece, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, to name a few, and judged by prestigious and famous fashion icons and designers such as Heidi Klum, Nina Garcia, Michael Kors, Zac Posen and many more. The show has expanded to other regions, including the Muslim countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Syria, to compete in Project Runway Middle East with Ellie Saab as one of the judges [7]. Another Islamic country that has run this reality TV show is Malaysia. Project Runway Malaysia took place in 2007, bringing fifteen fresh, young local fashion designers from different backgrounds (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) to compete in a country where most of the population is Muslim. However, some feared that the impact of Project Runway could lead Muslim viewers or to go against their religion or culture, because the fashion shown has no semblance of modesty and breaks the restrictions practiced by Muslim fashion consumers.

Fashion is linked to an individual's identity or social class [8]. Previously, fashion was associated with females, as they were considered to have more interest in fashion than males [9]. However, today, fashion is also connected to males [10]. Therefore, fashion brands now focus on fulfilling diverse demands, including those of Muslim fashion consumers. Nevertheless, Muslim consumers have to follow restrictions when it comes to choosing fashion products. For example, males must choose clothing that covers certain body parts, specifically from the belly to the knees. Hence, they cannot appear in public wearing shorts or underwear (for example, in beach areas). Meanwhile, females must cover their whole body, except for their faces and the palms of their hands; hence they cannot simply choose any attire that they desire. Regarding materials, they are prohibited from using certain types, such as those made from pigskin. Therefore, Muslim consumers need to be careful in choosing fashion products, especially from Western countries, due to the clash of ideas and restrictions.

However, the internet and social media now allows users to connect with the outside world, for example, by watching Project Runway. With such access, they can watch not only Project Runway Malaysia, but also versions of the show from other countries, such as the United States, New Zealand, Australia and many more. Moreover, users can repeat or play videos whenever they want to. This situation has exposed them to different styles and fashion ideas, mainly from Western countries, that may influence their youthful desire to look different and try new things. Moreover, today's young Muslim fashion consumers take care of their appearance and follow fashion trends [3]. Hence, Project Runway is one television series that they watch to get ideas for fashion inspiration. Nevertheless, studies on Project Runway mostly focus on the Western context; thus far, no research has been done on the impacts of this reality television series on Muslim countries, which have different backgrounds of religion and culture. This is the gap that this study will address.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore the impacts of the Project Runway reality television show on Muslim fashion consumers. To realize this goal, the researcher had to obtain insights from the individuals involved in the activity of interest, in this case those who watch this television series. A qualitative approach fits studies of human behaviour and of people's reactions to situations by collecting their opinions, impressions, feelings, beliefs, and experiences regarding the topic [11]. Hence, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study. To obtain rich data and insights, semi-structured

interviews were used with seventeen respondents. As the researchers knew the target characteristics of the respondents, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling allows researchers to choose respondents based on certain qualities and criteria that match the topic, and on their ability to provide relevant information [12]. The respondents for this study met the following criteria: Muslims, fashion students, and viewers of the Project Runway reality television series. The interviews took place between July and September 2020, and lasted between 25 to 40 minutes each. Finally, the data was analysed using coding and template analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Template analysis was conducted according to the suggestions of [13] where coding was used to identify the main themes and subthemes. The results revealed three main themes and four subthemes, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Summary of results

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1. The upgrade of fashion knowledge and styles	1.1 Fashion ideas 1.2 Fashion advice
2. The evolution of Muslims' cultural context	2.1 The acceptance of the fashion clash
3. The elevation of Muslims' fashion promotion platform	3.1 The expansion of modest wear and current Muslims' fashion

1. The upgrade of fashion knowledge and styles

The current study shows that Muslim fashion consumers watch Project Runway for fashion ideas to upgrade their fashion knowledge, styles or skills after watching this reality television series. Simultaneously, they prefer to watch how the judges give advice and comments on the designs created, a different approach from what they learn in Malaysia, mainly to listen to overseas fashion expertise.

1.1 Fashion ideas

The findings show that current Muslim fashion consumers follow the Project Runway television series to generate ideas for their fashion trends, and at the same time to learn new knowledge from different (Western) perspectives. Aligning with the findings of [3], as young Muslims, they tend to follow fashion trends, and has become a popular subject or field to be discussed [14]. Simultaneously, members of the younger generation are more exposed to the latest fashion trends [15]. Hence, they are driven to search for fashion ideas, and watching Project Runway is one of their options. Despite the fact that it may go against their religion (for different types of styles), respondents still watch this reality television series to get ideas on how to update their fashion knowledge and ideas in a way that fits their image of modern Muslims. For example, Respondent 3 and 7 pointed out:

Respondent 3: "I mean...obviously, their style is different (not based on modesty). But it does not mean that I cannot watch it or apply it in life. As a fashion design student, I deserve to learn any silhouette, whether Islamic or Western. Or at least, I can apply what I have watched from this show to upgrade my fashion style."

Respondent 7: "This is one of my favourite shows of all time. Why...? Because it is a combination of fun and creativity and contains fashion lessons to watch. I think watching this show helps me a lot to improve my fashion ideas, and at the same time, I know my limitations as a Muslim. So, I will keep watching it no matter what."

1.2 Fashion advice

Respondents also indicated that their reasons for watching Project Runway are not limited to fashion ideas, but that they are also amazed by the judges' critiques. They enjoy watching this section of Project Runway, as it enhances or improves their fashion knowledge. This concurs with [16], who argued that the more enjoyable the television series, the more viewers it will get. Whether the comments are harsh or not, the respondents appreciate the knowledge shared by the judges with the contestants, and they learn from it. For example, respondents 1 and 10 expressed:

Respondent 1: "It makes me nervous every time the judges give their criticism (in the show), I feel like I am in the class waiting for my assessments. However, I think I learn so much from it to improve my knowledge and skills in fashion. As the judges give critiques from head to toe, it is a complete look for me, and this is a free lesson that I learn by watching Project Runway."

Respondent 10: “I like to watch this series as it gives me additional knowledge – the critiques of the judges. Sometimes when I choose my attire, I don't know how to pair it with other accessories. But with watching Project Runway, I think I have improved a lot, especially when I follow the comments from the judges.”

2. The evolution of Muslims' cultural context

The findings show that respondents have become alert to the clash between Islamic and Western ideas of dressing by watching Project Runway. However, despite the cultural clash, this show is still accepted and watched by Muslim consumers in order to fulfil their desires as young Muslim consumers, supporting a study by [17] which argued that Muslims can balance faith and fashion when it comes to style.

2.1 The acceptance of the fashion clash

As the respondents are Muslims, they still emphasise modesty when they choose fashion products. However, being young Muslims influenced by foreign cultural contexts [18] they are driven to look for new styles or inspiration, for example by watching Project Runway. This may lead to both positive and negative impacts; however, they indicate that they know what they are doing. Positively, they embrace the Western styles shown on Project Runway by applying them to their own styles, that is, by mixing Western styles with modest wear. For example, Respondents 6 and 12 opined:

Respondent 6: “As a Muslim, sometimes I am worried about watching Project Runway, because I am very easy to influence. However, I think I know my responsibility as a Muslim. Being a member of the younger generation, new knowledge is a must; we have to learn new things and try to adapt them (Western styles) to how we live. If I don't to that, I will be left behind.”

Respondent 12: “Sometimes we need to be brave to try something new – there is nothing wrong with that, but we still need to take care of the boundaries, which I refer to as a Muslim. I admit that sometimes I feel like I am going against the religion if I support the Western trends, but at the same time, I need to know what is happening in the current fashion industry. Regardless of the different ideas of fashion (Islamic and Western), as a young person, I feel like it is a blessing to watch Project Runway at our age.”

3. The elevation of Muslims' fashion promotion platform

Findings from this study also indicate that Project Runway is a good role model and promotion platform for broadcasting fashion to the world. Hence, the show can be an inspiration for showcasing modest wear as well. As modest wear is increasing globally, there is an opportunity to make it one of the most demanded fashion categories in the industry.

3.1 The expansion of modest wear and current Muslims' fashion

It is worth noting the respondents' suggestion to diversify the Project Runway platform to introduce our modest wear, as choosing the correct platform is very important in creating fashion consciousness [19]. Therefore, the show is a good example for boosting the fashion industry and encouraging more people to create modest wear, as this style has become mainstream in the fashion industry. For example, respondents 9, and 14 expressed:

Respondent 9: “Instead of fully following their trends, why don't we introduce our trends to the world? I think this is the perfect time to showcase our fashion styles to the rest!”

Respondent 14: “I don't think that everything has to be sexy (the competition), but we also have our own style as well (modesty). It is important to educate other people that fashion is subjective, and modesty can make you look great as well.”

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the different fashion ideas, Project Runway is still relevant for Muslim fashion consumers. However, Muslim consumers emphasise modesty while enhancing their style with modern elements, so that they try to balance between fashion and faith in their daily lives. Hence, watching this reality television series is not prohibited.

The current study extends the literature on the impact of Project Runway by showing that this reality television series has impacted Muslim fashion consumers as a source to upgrade their fashion knowledge and styles. They also consider Project Runway as a platform to look for fashion advice due to the judges' critiques of the designers' creations. This study also extends the study of the clash of Western and Islamic fashion by illustrating that Muslim consumers accept this conflict and try to balance it with modesty. Finally, this study also demonstrates that Project Runway is a good role model for showcasing fashion, and that it can help boost modest wear by running the same program and

emphasising modest styles. In conclusion, Project Runway has positive impacts and is relevant for Muslim consumers to watch or follow.

Nevertheless, this study has a limitation in that the scope of sampling is limited to fashion students. Hence, the results cannot be generalised to all Muslim populations in Malaysia. Future studies need to be extended to a broader scope of the population, such as Muslims in urban or rural areas, to explore their opinions regarding this topic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express gratitude to University of Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) for providing the financial support for this study. The authors also would like to those who have contributed directly or indirectly in materialising this article. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Information on <https://www.statista.com/statistics/953765/malaysia-perceived-and-actual-share-of-muslim-population/>>.
2. C. Buckley & H. Clark. Bloomsbury Publishing (2017)
3. H. Hassan, B.A. Zaman and I. Santosa, *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 5(5), 454 (2015).
4. Information on <https://www.insider.com/cool-things-you-probably-didnt-know-about-project-runway-fun-facts>>.
5. Information on <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/fashion/project-runway-gets-more-emmy-awards-nominations-than-ever.html>>
6. M. S. Machacek. *Chap. L. Rev.*, 14, 165 (2010)
7. Information on <https://english.alarabiya.net/media/television-and-radio/2016/04/15/Famed-designer-Elie-Saab-partners-with-MBC-to-produce-Project-Runway-Middle-East->>
8. F. Davis. University of Chicago Press (2013)
9. J. E. Workman and C. M. Studak. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(1), 75-84 (2006).
10. A. P. C. de Miranda, E. J. C. Maciel, O. M. C. Pepece and N. D. D. e Comunicaçao, *N.D.D. International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 8(6), 97-104 (2016).
11. D. Maison. Routledge (2018).
12. I. Etikan, I., S. A. Musa and R. S. Alkassim, *R.S. American journal of theoretical and applied statistics*, 5(1), 1-4 (2016).
13. J. Brooks, S. McCluskey, E. Turley, and N. King. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 12(2), 202-222 (2015).
14. M. Z. M. Zain, R. M. Zain, R. M., H. Hassan, N. H. Z. Amri, M. H. Drahman, S. W. Hasbullah and A. Ramli. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, 18(6), 110-125 (2021).
15. C. Mafini, M. Dhurup and L. Mandhlazi. *Acta Commercii*, 14(1), 1-11 (2014).
16. M. Tsay-Vogel and K. M. Krakowiak. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 6(4), 348 (2017).
17. R. Lewis. *Fashion Theory* (19)2, 243-269 (2015).
18. D. I. Sompotan, F. G. Worang and E. Gunawan. *Jurnal EMBA: Jurnal Riset Ekonomi, Manajemen, Bisnis dan Akuntansi*, 8(4) (2020).
19. C. Sherman, and D. Arthur. *ACR North American Advances*, 40, 526-531 (2012).