

Islamic Dress Standards and Modest Fashion Representation among Malaysian Muslimah Icons and Celebrities

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the representation of Islamic Dress Standards (IDS) in Malaysian modest fashion through the public visibility of Muslimah icons and celebrities. Responding to the growth of modest fashion as part of the Islamic economy and popular culture, the study aims to define IDS conceptually and operationally, analyze how Muslimah celebrities mediate Islamic values, fashion trends, and modern identity, and explain the role of social media and fashion design in shaping modest fashion representation. This study employed a qualitative narrative literature review with a conceptual-descriptive approach. The data were drawn from recent journal articles, industry reports, and publicly available representations of Malaysian Muslimah celebrities, modest fashion brands, and social media practices. The findings show that IDS operates not only as a religious guideline but also as a visual, cultural, and market framework. Malaysian Muslimah celebrities function as mediators between faith, contemporary style, and public identity; social media expands their influence; and designers translate modesty into wearable products that combine coverage, comfort, cultural identity, and fashion relevance. The article contributes to modest fashion studies by clarifying IDS as both a normative standard and a representational practice in Malaysia's Muslimah fashion culture.

Keywords: Islamic Dress Standards, modest fashion, Muslimah celebrities, representation, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION*

Malaysia provides an important context for discussing Islamic Dress Standards (IDS) and modest fashion because it combines a Muslim-majority population, multicultural aesthetics, active digital consumption, and a growing halal lifestyle economy. Modest fashion has moved from a niche religious market into a mainstream creative industry. DinarStandard (2026) reports that global modest fashion spending reached USD 347 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 444 billion by 2029, while Malaysia retained the top

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position in the Global Islamic Economy Indicator. At the national level, the Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA, 2025) describes Malaysia as a leading modest fashion player supported by cultural diversity, craftsmanship, designers, manufacturers, retailers, e-commerce, and social media.

In this context, modest fashion is not limited to clothing coverage but also involves identity, lifestyle, branding, piety, and cultural negotiation. Studies on hijab retailers and Muslim consumers show that modest fashion is shaped by religious values, product attributes, design, comfort, and market communication (Hassan & Ara, 2022; Wan Kamaruddin et al., 2025). Research on Muslimah influencers and micro-celebrities also indicates that public figures can influence how religious appearance, personal branding, and fashion consumption are understood by young Muslim women (Asmawi et al., 2024; Mohamad, 2021; Mohamad & Hassim, 2021).

However, previous discussions often focus separately on consumer intention, hijab retailing, online identity, or celebrity culture. There remains a need for an article that clarifies how Islamic Dress Standards are conceptually and operationally represented through Malaysian Muslimah icons and celebrities. This gap is important because celebrities such as actresses, singers, influencers, and entrepreneur-public figures do not merely wear modest fashion; they translate religious norms into visible cultural styles that circulate through social media, branding, and public appearances.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how Islamic Dress Standards are represented in Malaysian modest fashion through Muslimah icons and celebrities. Specifically, the article seeks to: (1) define IDS conceptually and operationally; (2) examine how Muslimah icons and celebrities mediate Islamic values, fashion trends, and modern identity; (3) explain the role of social media, fashion designers, and the modest fashion industry in shaping this representation; and (4) identify the tensions that emerge when modesty becomes part of popular culture and market branding. The article contributes conceptually by positioning IDS as both a religious standard and a representational framework, and practically by offering a clearer reading of modest fashion as a form of religious, cultural, and popular expression in Malaysia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative narrative literature review with a conceptual-descriptive approach. This method was selected because the article does not test variables statistically or conduct direct field interviews, but instead synthesizes relevant literature and public representations to explain a cultural-fashion phenomenon. The review focused on literature concerning Islamic Dress Standards, Muslimah modest fashion, hijab consumption, celebrity culture, social media influence, and the Malaysian modest fashion industry.

The data sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles published mainly between 2021 and 2025, relevant industry reports, and publicly available examples of Malaysian Muslimah icons, celebrities, brands, and social media practices. The literature was identified through keywords such as Islamic Dress Standards, modest fashion, Muslimah celebrities, hijab consumption, Malaysian fashion, Muslim influencers, and social media modest fashion. Sources were selected when they discussed at least one of four themes: IDS and modesty, Malaysian modest fashion, Muslimah celebrity or influencer practices, or social media and consumer representation.

The analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis. First, the selected sources were read to identify recurring concepts and arguments. Second, the concepts were grouped into four analytical themes: conceptual and operational meanings of IDS, celebrity mediation of modest fashion, social media and branding influence, and tensions between modesty, modernity, and commercialization. Third, the findings were interpreted conceptually to show how IDS operates as a religious norm, a visual grammar, a cultural identity marker, and a market framework. Because the article uses publicly available materials and secondary literature, no private social media data or personal interviews were collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conceptual and Operational Definition of IDS

Conceptually, Islamic Dress Standards refer to principles of modest appearance derived from Islamic teachings on covering the body, maintaining dignity, and avoiding excessive exposure or sexualized display. In Muslim women's dress, this is commonly related to the idea of covering the aurah and wearing clothing that supports modest behavior and public respectability (Ali, 2023). In fashion studies, IDS can also be understood as a moral and visual framework that shapes the acceptable relationship between body coverage, garment silhouette, material transparency, adornment, and social context (Hassan & Ara, 2022; Hew, 2024).

Operationally, IDS in this article is defined through five observable criteria. First, coverage refers to garments that cover the body according to commonly accepted Muslimah modesty expectations. Second, silhouette refers to loose or non-body-emphasizing forms that do not highlight body curves. Third, opacity refers to non-transparent materials and appropriate layering. Fourth, styling refers to the integration of hijab, long sleeves, long hemlines, or layered garments with contemporary design elements. Fifth, context refers to how the outfit is presented in public appearances, brand campaigns, and social media posts. This operational definition allows IDS to be analyzed not only as a religious rule but also as a visible fashion practice.

In the Malaysian context, these criteria are rarely expressed in a purely uniform way. They are negotiated with Malay cultural aesthetics, professional lifestyles, media visibility, and consumer preferences. This explains why modest fashion in Malaysia includes hijab styling, baju kurung-inspired silhouettes, contemporary dresses, sportswear adaptations, and branded fashion collections. Thus, IDS becomes a flexible representational framework: its religious foundation remains important, but its public expression is shaped by culture, media, and design innovation.

Muslimah Icons and Celebrities as Mediators of Faith, Fashion, and Identity

The first major finding is that Malaysian Muslimah icons and celebrities act as mediators between Islamic values, fashion trends, and modern female identity. They make IDS visible in everyday popular culture by wearing modest outfits in entertainment, entrepreneurship, public events, and digital platforms. Their visibility helps shift modest fashion from being perceived only as religious obligation into a broader expression of confidence, professionalism, creativity, and social aspiration.

The literature on hijabi celebrification in Malaysia and Brunei shows that public Muslimah figures shape hijab consumption and modest fashion visibility through celebrity identity, media exposure, and lifestyle branding (Mohamad & Hassim, 2021). Micro-celebrity practices in Muslim-majority Southeast Asian contexts further demonstrate that online visibility allows Muslimah figures to build authority through curated appearance, personal storytelling, and audience engagement (Mohamad, 2021). In Malaysia, figures associated with modest fashion, such as Neelofa, Yuna, and other hijab-wearing public personalities, are frequently read by audiences not merely as entertainers but also as references for how Muslim women may appear modern while maintaining religious identity.

This mediation is significant because it transforms IDS into a public visual language. For example, when a celebrity combines a hijab, loose outerwear, contemporary color palettes, and branded accessories, the outfit communicates more than coverage. It signals piety, taste, social mobility, and participation in modern fashion culture. Studies on Islamic public style and Muslim women's visibility in Malaysia suggest that such appearance is a form of skilled performance in which religious identity is negotiated with professionalism, public expectation, and media circulation (Kloos, 2021). Visual and verbal branding studies of Naelofar also show how modest fashion brands construct identity through product presentation, naming, and visual consistency (Kudus et al., 2024).

Social Media, Branding, and the Expansion of Modest Fashion Influence

The second finding is that social media strengthens the influence of Muslimah celebrities by turning modest fashion into a continuous and interactive form of representation. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and brand websites allow celebrities and influencers to show how IDS can be applied across

daily wear, formal events, travel, business, performance, and lifestyle content. This makes modest fashion more accessible to younger audiences who encounter religious style through images, videos, tutorials, product launches, and personal narratives.

Recent studies show that Muslim influencers affect modest fashion consumers because they provide both fashion inspiration and religiously aligned credibility (Asmawi et al., 2024). This is consistent with Idris et al. (2025), who emphasize that modest fashion acceptance among Muslim women is shaped by the interaction between religious suitability, style preference, and social influence. Research on Muslim women consumers in Malaysia also indicates that influencers can significantly affect purchase intention, while design trends alone may be less persuasive when they are not aligned with modesty values (Wan Kamaruddin et al., 2025). This suggests that the appeal of modest fashion depends not only on visual attractiveness but also on perceived consistency between style, values, and identity.

Analytically, social media does three things. First, it normalizes modest fashion by repeatedly presenting it as stylish, practical, and socially acceptable. Second, it commercializes modesty through brand collaborations, product drops, and influencer marketing. Third, it creates a feedback loop in which followers respond to celebrity styles, and these responses influence future designs and content. As a result, IDS becomes part of a digital fashion culture: it remains connected to religious modesty, but it also circulates through likes, comments, hashtags, online shopping, and celebrity branding.

Designers, Cultural Aesthetics, and the Malaysian Modest Fashion Industry

The third finding is that fashion designers and brands translate IDS into concrete products by combining coverage requirements with contemporary aesthetics and local cultural references. Hijab retailers and Muslim clothing brands do not simply produce covered garments; they negotiate fabric choices, silhouettes, color palettes, comfort, occasion, market segmentation, and cultural symbolism (Hassan & Ara, 2022). This design process makes modest fashion both religiously recognizable and commercially relevant.

Malaysia's modest fashion ecosystem is supported by a broader halal and textile economy. DinarStandard (2026) identifies modest fashion as one of the major sectors in the global Islamic economy, while Malaysian Investment Development Authority (2025) notes that Malaysian modest fashion is strengthened by designers, manufacturers, retailers, e-commerce, and social media. This industrial context helps explain why Muslimah celebrities can become powerful fashion references: their personal appearance is connected to a wider ecosystem of brands, designers, retailers, photographers, stylists, and digital marketers.

Cultural aesthetics also matter. Malaysian modest fashion often incorporates Malay dress forms, batik or songket-inspired motifs, soft tailoring, layered garments, and modern minimalist styling. These elements show that IDS does not erase local culture; instead, it can be expressed through culturally specific design languages. In this sense, modest fashion in Malaysia is a hybrid field where Islamic norms, Malay cultural memory, global fashion trends, and market innovation interact.

Tensions in the Representation of Modesty

The fourth finding is that the public representation of IDS contains several tensions. The first tension concerns modesty and trend adoption. Fashion trends often emphasize body display, novelty, and visual attention, while IDS emphasizes coverage, restraint, and dignity. Malaysian Muslimah celebrities often resolve this tension through loose silhouettes, layered styling, long outerwear, covered activewear, and carefully styled hijab looks. However, the boundary between fashionable visibility and excessive display remains open to interpretation.

The second tension concerns empowerment and commercialization. Modest fashion can empower Muslim women by making religious identity visible, stylish, and professionally acceptable. At the same time, it can also become heavily commercialized when piety is converted into branding, influencer marketing, and consumer aspiration. Comparative work on Muslim women's fashion trends shows that piety and beauty can become intertwined in ways that are empowering but also politically and commercially complex (Maulana, 2025).

The third tension concerns public judgment. Muslim women's appearance in Malaysia can become a site of online debate, especially when choices such as veiling, de-hijabbing, or changing fashion style are interpreted through religious expectations and moral judgment. Studies of online responses to de-hijabbing show that women's dress can attract criticism framed in religious language (Noor & Hamid, 2021). This means that Muslimah celebrities are not only fashion trendsetters but also visible subjects of social evaluation. Their representation of IDS must therefore be understood as a negotiation among faith, public scrutiny, media visibility, and personal agency.

Synthesis of Findings

Based on the analysis, IDS in Malaysian modest fashion operates at four interconnected levels. At the normative level, it provides religious guidance for modest appearance. At the visual level, it shapes garment coverage, opacity, silhouette, and styling. At the cultural level, it allows Muslimah identity to be expressed through Malay and contemporary design aesthetics. At the market level, it becomes a basis for branding, influencer communication, and fashion consumption.

These findings directly answer the purpose of the study. Muslimah icons and celebrities represent IDS by translating religious modesty into visible public styles; social media expands this representation into a participatory digital culture; designers and brands materialize it into products; and the modest fashion industry gives it commercial reach. Therefore, Malaysian modest fashion should be understood not as a simple opposition between religion and modernity, but as a negotiated cultural field where Islamic values, fashion creativity, social media, and identity formation meet. The relationship among these elements is summarized in Figure 1.

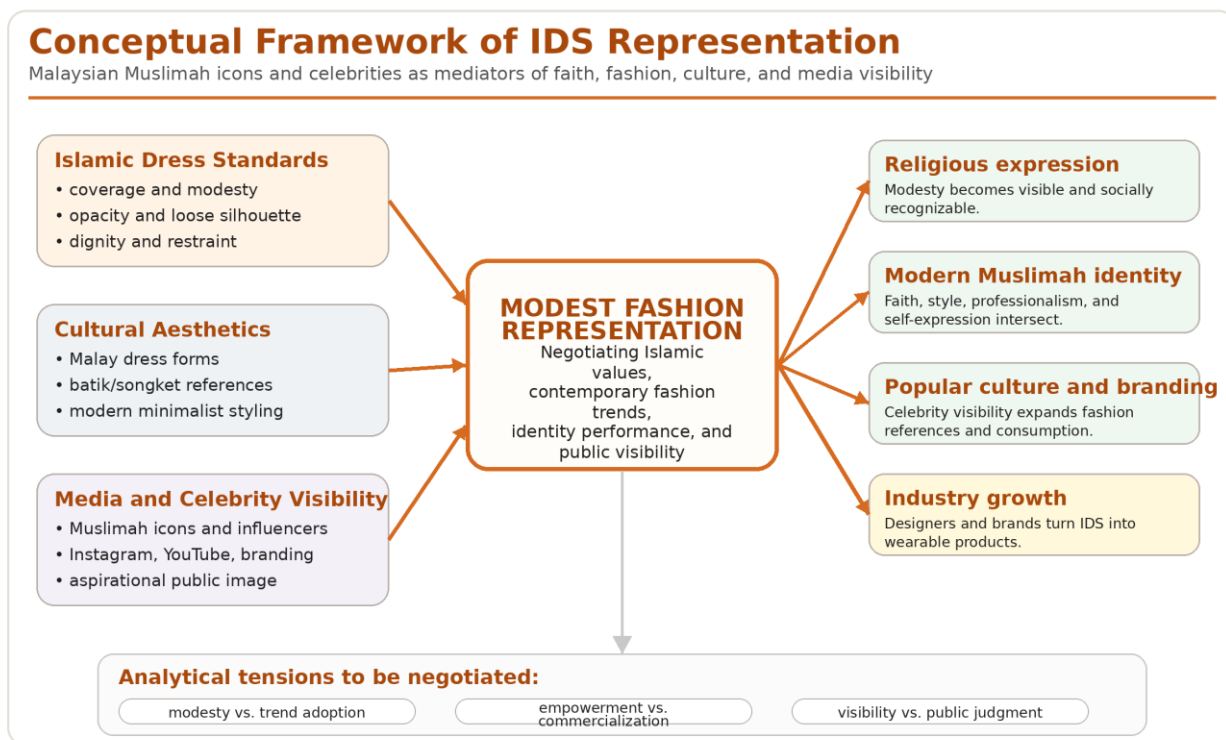


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Islamic Dress Standards representation in Malaysian modest fashion.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to analyze how Islamic Dress Standards are represented in Malaysian modest fashion through Muslimah icons and celebrities. The study concludes that IDS functions not only as a religious guideline for dress but also as a visual and cultural framework that organizes how modesty is displayed, interpreted, and circulated in public life. Conceptually, IDS is rooted in Islamic modesty and body coverage; operationally, it can be observed through coverage, silhouette, opacity, styling, and the context of public representation.

The main finding is that Malaysian Muslimah celebrities act as mediators between Islamic values, contemporary fashion, and modern identity. Through their public appearances, brand collaborations, and social media visibility, they demonstrate that modest fashion can be religiously meaningful, aesthetically current, and culturally recognizable. Social media extends this role by making modest fashion interactive, aspirational, and commercially influential, while designers and brands translate IDS into products that combine religious suitability with comfort, cultural identity, and contemporary trends.

The article also shows that modest fashion is not free from tension. When modesty becomes part of popular culture and branding, it may empower Muslim women but may also expose them to commercialization and public judgment. Therefore, modest fashion representation in Malaysia should be understood as a negotiated space where faith, fashion, identity, media, and market forces interact. Future research may strengthen this conceptual discussion through visual analysis of celebrity social media posts, interviews with Muslimah consumers, or comparative studies between Malaysian modest fashion brands and other Southeast Asian modest fashion markets.

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