

GROWING POPULARITY OF MUSLIM ATTIRE: FAITH OR FASHION? |



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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 5 June 2017

Revised: 4 August 2017

Accepted: 16 August 2017

Published: 22 August 2017

Keywords

Muslim attire
Modest clothing
Women's clothing
Muslim fashion industry
Consumer behavior
Hijab.

JEL Classification

L67, M30.

Muslim attire, also popularly known as “Modest Clothing” is a particular dressing style for the women who adhere to Islamic faith. Traditionally, this attire has been practiced by women as part of obligation to their faith. Interestingly, last decade has seen increasing popularity of the Muslim attire in all age groups of women not only as part of their religion, but also as part of their fashion statement. The prime focus of this paper is to study consumers’ opinion about Muslim attire and the underlying forces boosting its rise in the global market. This paper is both exploratory and descriptive in nature. Sample has been chosen from Bangladeshi women aged 13 to 65 who already dress in Muslim attire. The research conducted a primary in-depth interview on 10 women to gain perspective on the motivating factors behind growing attraction towards Muslim attire. The second phase of the research carried out a survey on 150 women with the help of a structured questionnaire on 14 variables to explore their viewpoint. The results reveal that “religious duty”, “beauty” and “influence of opinion leaders” have positive relationship with the growing popularity of Muslim attire.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literatures pertaining to Islamic clothing for women. Earlier studies acknowledge “religious duty” as primary motivating factor for modest clothing, but this study sheds light on two more factors: “beauty” and “influence of opinion leaders”, which provides new perspective for the fashion industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry by nature is an ever evolving one that continues to pick up new fashion forms and trends as its bloodline. The past decade has seen the inclusion of Muslim attire as a fashion trend, which is gaining acceptance and popularity in an accelerated rate. Now-a-days designers have introduced Muslim attire to the fashion ramps, especially in countries like Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey and Arab Emirates (Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006; Gökariksel and Secor, 2009; Sobh *et al.*, 2010; Hassan and Harun, 2016). On the other hand, countries like USA and UK have opened up towards multiculturalism which in turn contributed in the spread of Muslim attire in those societies (Ali, 2005).

Muslim attire does not pertain to any particular clothing. Rather it can be defined as any clothing which follows the principle of modesty. Islamic principle of modesty suggests that women’s clothing in public should cover the whole body and essentially be made of non-transparent fabric (Boulanouar, 2006; Jackson and Monk-

Turner, 2015). Muslim attire can be broadly classified into two components; head coverings and body coverings. Most popular head covering is known as 'Hijab' or headscarf, which sometimes joins a 'Nikab' or face covering as well. Common body coverings include 'Jilbab', 'Abaya' and 'Manteau', all of which are loose fitting full sleeve gown or over coat (Mahfoodh, 2008).

Historically the color has been restricted to mainly black (Mahfoodh, 2008) and has been worn as part of religious commitment (Ali, 2005). But with time, Muslim clothing has opened up to new colors and cuts to appeal to a larger market. According to the estimation of the Pew Research Center (2015) during the next four decades, Islam will grow faster than any other major world religion. The projected growth rate would be 73% resulting in an overwhelming 2.76 billion by 2050. The same report claims that 34% of current Muslim population is aged below 15, creating a young, vibrant, fashion conscious and socially active target market. Discovering this growing market of a global and young Muslim population, new styles in attire, color and accessories have been introduced. Thus it can be seen that Muslim women all around the world are picking up these trends which respond to not only their religious choice, but also to their personal sense of fashion. Modern Muslim women who are choosing stylish outfits and matching headscarves to carry on fashionable lifestyle within the boundaries of religious dressing, are now being termed as 'Hijabistas' and considered to be an important market segment for the fashion industry (Hassan and Harun, 2016).

Islamic products can be broadly categorized into three groups: Islamic Finance, Islamic Food/Halal Food and Islamic Fashion. There have been numerous academic researches on Islamic finance and Islamic food, both of which are considered as strong global industries. But as the Islamic fashion gained momentum very recently, it has been relatively unexplored and requires deep understanding from both marketers' and customers' perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From the Islamic perspective, any sort of modest dress that covers whole body of women can be called Islamic attire. Despite the concern that the women body must be cloaked, women cloth should be like one which does not show the body shapes (Mossière, 2012). According to Muslim scholars, Islamic attire should not be closely fitting to body and the fabrics should not be thin so that it can't show too much skin of women. It should have long and loose sleeves to cover up arm, as well as humbly cover neckline, and hair for women.

Many Muslim women wear dress according to Islamic way simply because they believe that it is their religious duty and commitment (Ali, 2005; Wagner *et al.*, 2012; Pasha-Zaidi, 2015). Many of them learn about and are motivated toward Islamic dress-up from their family, friends in educational institutes or on their own from Quran and hadith (Ali, 2005; Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006; Mahfoodh, 2008). Some find it worthy, from their own experience, to have hijab/niqab/veil/scarf as a shield against undesired male concentration or carnal temptation when they go for co-education or interact with males for professional purpose (Ali, 2005).

2.1. Conflicts between Modesty and Vanity

Muslim attire and fashion becomes subject of somewhat controversy since it merges two systems that are apparently different. Muslim attire is outcome of modesty for Muslim women that constitute a set of religious cultural orientation whereas fashion is outcome of self-identity and vanity. It is related to consumer choice and linked with process of continuous changes with time and somewhat associated with capitalism and modernity (Gökarıksel and Secor, 2009).

Many Muslim women perceive that Islamic attire may create positive effect on others' mind to perceive them by inner excellence and modesty (Huq and Rashid, 2008). Again many think that wearing Muslim cloths with modern fashionable clothes signify their individuality with sense of freedom, self-pride, self-confidence (Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006). Their clothing choice represents their conception of religious and social identities (Sobh *et al.*, 2010). Muslim women from countries like Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, Cote D'Ivoire, UK, India, Mali, have the

option to decide by their own whether to observe modest dress whereas women of countries like Yemen and Iran, are supposed to wear black loose outfit like black abaya and burqa to obey their social and cultural values (Sobh *et al.*, 2010).

Women often go through confusion between their desire for fashionable and modern clothes to convey their beauty with elegance, and expression of their individualism on one side and desire to keep up modesty in dressing in order to comply with Islamic sense on the other side (Mahfoodh, 2008; Sobh *et al.*, 2010). Today many protagonist Muslim women can hardly avoid fashion in dressing (Moors, 2007). At present, many Muslim women try to allay their confusion between choosing either from fashionable clothes and fully covered traditional clothes by avoiding forced choice. Women now use ornaments like broach, pin along with Muslim attire, handbags of different shapes, attractive sunglasses, and different shaped shoes including high heels over diverse patterns of dresses. This helps to offer beauty and level of elegance without harming Islamic viewpoint (Sobh *et al.*, 2010).

2.2. Muslim Clothing as a Fashion Trend

Akin to many other industries, fashion industry has been affected too much by the touch of technology and globalization which enables many designers to communicate their creative ideas and fashion thoughts to explore one's beauty in different dimensions (Fernandez, 2016). These new fashion ideas also denote and promote innovative pattern of newly defined Muslim Identity (Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006). Today mass globalization motivates women, even a little Muslim girl, to believe that simply a full hijab may be helpful for them to create an individual identity (Mahfoodh, 2008). Many Muslim women also consider full covered attire as a protection of skin in the summer along with a bit of fashion (Ali, 2005). At present, many fashion designers creatively plan and execute their design in the light of modest and decent look (Kavakci, 2014) applicable for Muslim women. They create a western mix-up with touch of their local trends (Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006; Mossière, 2012). Today many famous brands of UK started to pile up Muslim women's clothing in their shelves to market to Muslim women. Many clothing companies in the USA have been inspired to design and produce women clothes following Islamic philosophy with the intention to craft Islamic identity (Wilson and Liu, 2011).

Moreover, different local and global brands and fashion houses organize fashion shows and hire well-known models to promote new fashion trends of Islamic attires. Hence, local small producers also get to know about new trends in the fashion world for local Muslim women (Genel and Karaosmanolu, 2006).

2.3. Islamic Fashion Industry Overview

According to Thomson Reuters (2013) world's combined Muslim population, which was figured out at 1.6 billion in 2012, spent an amount of \$224 billion (approximately) on clothing and footwear during the year 2012. It was projected to have growth rate of 43.75% to yield a market of \$322 billion by the year 2018. This means that the Muslim clothing market is the second largest global market just behind the United States. From the report it was also found that Muslim clothing market has been dominated by Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan respectively. Again, Muslims spent around \$266 billion jointly on clothing and footwear during the year 2013 which was larger than total spending on fashion by Japanese and Italians in the same year (Thomson Reuters, 2015). It was also found that Muslims spending on clothing and footwear is expected to swell up to \$484 billion by the year 2019 with an expected growth rate of 81.95%.

Researchers found that Muslim clothing and footwear constitutes a significant share of the total clothing and footwear market in countries like France, Canada, US, Germany, UK where Muslims are minor (IFDC, 2016). The report also mentioned that in the year 2012, Muslims collectively spent around \$21 billion on clothing and footwear in the said countries. On the other hand, UAE, with a value of approximately \$7.18 billion on importation of clothing, led among the leading GCC clothing imports, followed by Saudi Arabia (\$3 billion), Turkey (\$2 billion), Kyrgyzstan (\$1.7 billion) and Iraq (\$0.72 billion).

2.4. Factors Affecting Purchase of Muslim Attire

Consumer behavior is influenced by four factors: social, cultural, personal and psychological (Kotler and Armstrong, 2016). According to Solomon and Stone (2002) age may play a vital role for determination of one's preferences regarding fashion cloths. The young people are mostly to buy relatively fashionable cloths compared to old aged people whereby the second group may find it comfortable to buy cozy dresses instead of fashionable ones.

Studies show that the clothing pattern increases the feeling of belongings to a particular society and it also impacts the purchasing behavior of that society. Increasing society's fashion involvement creates a greater chance to purchase more cloths (Schiffman *et al.*, 2014). Earlier researchers also found that Islamic value guides Muslim consumption (IFDC, 2016). Accordingly, it may support the growth rate of demand for Halal products as well as Islamic fashion. The report also suggests that many young Muslim women are now coming out of their shell and are trying to become self-dependent. They are having technological training, becoming part of active workforce, enjoying financial independence and all these are happening keeping the Islamic philosophy in mind.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research has been designed in two phases. The first phase consists of relevant literature review to comprehend the concept of Muslim attire and reasons for its growing popularity. To gain better understanding on these issues from the context of Bangladesh, a primary in-depth interview on ten (10) women who dress in Muslim attire have been carried out. From the literature and in depth interviews, fourteen (14) independent variables have been identified which can influence the choice of Muslim dressing among women.

The second phase involves a survey on 150 Bangladeshi women aged 13 to 65 who wear Muslim attire. Judgmental sampling technique has been used to identify suitable respondents. A structured questionnaire was used and respondents were asked to rate the previously identified fourteen (14) variables on a 5 point likert scale to express their viewpoint. The hypothesis that has been developed and tested is as follows:

H₀: The identified fourteen (14) independent variables have no linear relationship with growing use of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh.

H₁: There is relationship between growing use of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh with the 14 identified variables.

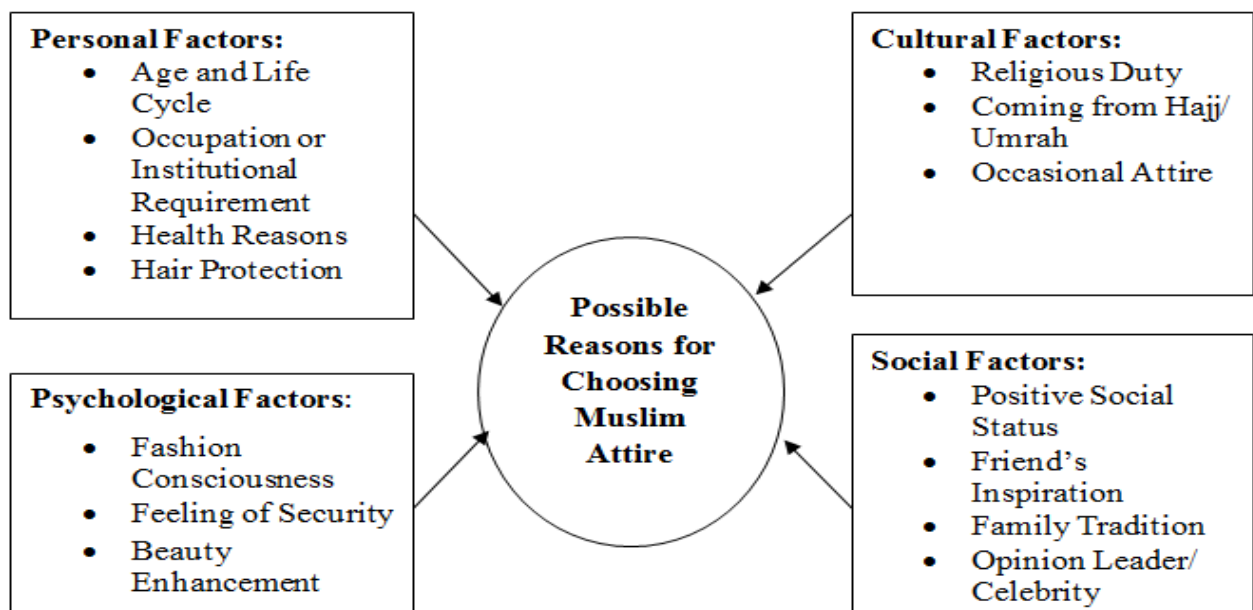


Figure-1. Reasons behind Growing Popularity of Muslim Attire (Compiled by the Authors)

Source: The figure has been prepared by the authors based on "reasons affecting consumer behavior" (Kotler and Armstrong, 2016).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The fourteen (14) identified variables can be categorized into four types of factors based on the model of factors affecting consumer behavior (Kotler and Armstrong, 2016) which have been demonstrated in the following framework.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Respondents' Demographic Analysis

70% of the 150 respondents belong to the age group of 20-35 years, 10.7% belong to the age group of 35-45 years, 10% are above 45 years, and the remaining are teenagers (13-19 years). Among the respondents, 65.3% are students, 14% are service-holders, 15.3% are housewives, 2% are involved in business and the remaining are self-employed. From the collected data, it is observed that, almost 39% respondents' monthly average family income is from 30,000-60,000 taka, 35.3% have an income from 60,001-150,000 taka, another 18% have an income of less than 30,000 taka, and only 8% have an income of more than 150,000 taka.

5.2. Frequency Distribution

Table-1. Frequency Distribution of Survey Questionnaire

Sl. No.	Survey Questionnaire Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
1.	I saw my friends wearing Muslim attire and was inspired by that.	10.7%	24.0%	29.3%	25.3%	10.7%	100%
2.	My family members influenced me to wear Muslim attire.	7.3%	23.3%	12.0%	34.7%	22.7%	100%
3.	Wearing Muslim Attire is a part of my family tradition.	4.7%	22.0%	18.7%	30.0%	24.7%	100%
4.	I saw Opinion leaders /celebrities wearing Muslim attire and was inspired by that.	20.0%	32.7%	12.0%	22.0%	13.0%	100%
5.	I think our culture and society positively view Muslim attire.	2.0%	12.0%	20.7%	44.0%	21.3%	100%
6.	I consider Muslim attire as a part of my religious duty.	0.0%	1.3%	12.0%	32.0%	54.7%	100%
7.	I think Muslim attire is fashionable and trendy.	9.3%	22.7%	22.0%	24.0%	22.0%	100%
8.	I think Muslim attire creates a sense of security.	3.3%	9.3%	23.3%	41.3%	22.7%	100%
9.	Wearing Muslim attire enhances the beauty.	2.0%	20.0%	20.0%	32.0%	26.0%	100%
10.	I prefer Muslim attire in certain occasions.	14.0%	32.0%	26.0%	16.7%	10.7%	100%
11.	Protecting my hair from pollution is a reason to choose Muslim dress.	32.7%	40.0%	10.7%	14.7%	2.0%	100%
12.	I choose Muslim Attire due to health reasons.	32.7%	47.3%	9.3%	7.3%	3.3%	100%
13.	I started using Muslim attire after coming from Hajj/Umrah	33.3%	50.0%	6.0%	4.7%	6.0%	100%
14.	Wearing Muslim attire is an institutional requirement.	40.7%	35.3%	12.0%	10.7%	1.3%	100%
15.	I wear Muslim attire always.	0.0%	2.0%	8.7%	30.7%	58.7%	100%

Source: Generated from SPSS based on response from sample population

From the frequency distribution table, it can be observed that, most of the respondents are wearing Muslim attire at all times and they believe that today's women mostly wear Muslim attire from their belief on their religious

duty. Moreover, family tradition influences them highly to accept this lifestyle as it is viewed that Muslim attire has a positive image in their culture. From the perspective of Bangladesh, women wearing Muslim attire are getting social acceptance and they have been inspired by their opinion leaders in different sectors. Thus, favorable attitude has been recorded from the respondents on this issue. On the other hand, on the statement of friends' influence on wearing Muslim attire, majority of the respondents chose the neutral option. From the respondents' viewpoint, Muslim attire is part of a fashion which not only enhances their beauty but also ensures their security. However, from the frequency table, it is seen that, number of women wearing Muslim attire for health purpose or for hair care or for institutional requirement is very few. Some respondents have been identified who have started to use Muslim attire after coming from Hajj/Umrah.

5.3. ANOVA

Table-2. ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	35.223	14	2.516	7.386	.000 ^a
	Residual	46.327	136	.341		
	Total	81.550	150			

Source: Generated from SPSS based on response from sample population

According to the table, the result of ANOVA shows that the sum of square for regression is 35.223 with 14 degrees of freedom and sum of square for residual is 46.327 with 136 degrees of freedom. The F value is 7.386 (2.516/.341) with 14 and 136 df resulting a probability of 0.000. As the associated probability is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis that the identified 14 variables (friend's influence, family's influence, family tradition, opinion leaders' influence, cultural influence, religious duty, fashionable, security, beauty, occasional use, hair protection, health benefit, hajj/umrah effect, institutional requirement) have no linear relationship with increasing use of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh is rejected.

5.4. Regression Analysis

In order to explain the increasing use of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh, data has been collected from 150 respondents based on the identified 14 variables (friend's influence, family's influence, family tradition, opinion leaders' influence, cultural influence, religious duty, fashionable, security, beauty, occasional use, hair protection, health benefit, hajj/umrah effect, institutional requirement).

The estimated regression equation is:

$$Y = 1.984 + 0.063 X_1 + 0.061 X_2 + 0.014 X_3 + (-0.097)X_4 + 0.044 X_5 + 0.523 X_6 + 0.035 X_7 + 0.062 X_8 + (-0.110) X_9 + (0-.076) X_{10} + (-0.103) X_{11} + 0.086 X_{12} + 0.037 X_{13} + 0.027 X_{14}$$

These all are beta coefficients which are representing the partial coefficients where all the variables have been standardized to a mean of 0 and a variance of 1.

So, the increasing use of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh (Y) = 1.984 + 0.063 friend's influence + 0.061 family's influence + 0.014 family tradition + (-0.097) opinion leader's influence + 0.044 cultural influence+ 0.523 religious duty+ 0.035 fashionable+ 0.062 security+ (-0.110) beauty+ (0-.076) occasional use+ (-0.103) hair protection + 0.086 health benefit + 0.037 hajj/umrah effect+ 0.027 institutional requirement.

Table-3. Multiple Regression Coefficients (a. Dependent Variable: How frequently do you wear Muslim attire?)**Coefficients^a**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.984	.385		5.159	.000
	I saw my friends wearing Muslim attire and was inspired by that.	.063	.047	.102	1.353	.178
	My family members influenced me to wear Muslim attire.	.061	.049	.105	1.258	.210
	Wearing Muslim Attire is a part of my family tradition.	.014	.052	.024	.275	.784
	I saw Opinion leaders /celebrities wearing Muslim attire and was inspired by that.	-.097	.041	-.179	-2.353	.020
	I think our culture and society positively view Muslim attire.	.044	.054	.060	.815	.417
	I consider Muslim attire as a part of my religious duty.	.523	.077	.532	6.832	.000
	I think Muslim attire is fashionable and trendy.	.035	.044	.060	.793	.429
	I think Muslim attire creates a sense of security.	.062	.054	.086	1.148	.253
	Wearing Muslim attire enhances the beauty.	-.110	.054	-.161	-2.058	.042
	I prefer Muslim attire in certain occasions. (Milad/condolences)	-.076	.044	-.124	-1.747	.083
	Protecting my hair from pollution is a reason to choose Muslim dress.	-.103	.059	-.153	-1.756	.081
	I chose Muslim Attire due to health reasons.	.086	.055	.118	1.562	.121
	I started using Muslim attire after coming from Hajj/Umrah	.037	.054	.054	.697	.487
	Wearing Muslim attire is an institutional requirement.	.027	.059	.038	.466	.642

Source: Generated from SPSS based on response from sample population

5.5. Significance Testing

The significance value (t) is tested with the values of un-standardized beta coefficients and standardized beta coefficients where if the value of t test comes below 0.05 significance levels, the measurement will be accurate. So the significance of the partial co-efficient of identified 14 variables with the increasing use of Muslim attire can be tested using the equation—

$$t = b / SEb$$

$$= 0.063 / 0.102$$

$$= 1.353 \text{ (significance value is .178 which is greater than 0.05 significance level)}$$

Likewise, all the calculation has been done and analyzed. From all the multiple regression, 3 variables (opinion leader's influence, religious duty and beauty) have significant role on increasing use of Muslim attire among women as their significance level is lower than 0.05 level ranging 0.020, 0.000 and 0.042 respectively.

5.6. Model Fit

Table-4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.657 ^a	.432	.373	.584

Source: Generated from SPSS based on response from sample population

The regression model will be fit when the value of adjusted R^2 will be closer to the value of R^2 . From the given statistical table, it can be seen that, the adjusted R^2 0.373 is closer to the R^2 value of 0.432. Here, R^2 obtained from the multiple regressions represents the simple correlation between the identified 14 variables with the increasing usage of Muslim attire among the women in Bangladesh. So based on the rule, the regression model of this study is fit.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

From the data analysis part, it has been observed that three factors have significant role in increasing popularity of Muslim attire among women in Bangladesh. These are religious duties, influence of opinion leaders, and enhancement of beauty. It is not surprising that the religious duty has the strongest influence as Muslim attire is first and foremost a religious commitment. Therefore all the respondents, irrespective of their age or occupation or income level, have religious duty as their primary consideration. Moreover, the literature review suggests that the studies which have been conducted on Muslim attire have similar viewpoint.

The other two contributing factors, influence of opinion leaders and enhancement of beauty, are closely interrelated and can be considered as the two sides of a coin. From both the in-depth interview and survey session, it has been observed that majority respondents believe that Muslim attire does not only fulfill religious obligation but also enhance their beauty. The reason behind this attitude could be attributed to the fact that Muslim women are now more socially engaged, mostly due to education and career. Thus, they have a strong demand for clothing which ensures both modesty and beauty. At the same time, especially the young Muslim women are highly influenced by opinion leaders (i.e. youth icons, celebrities, teachers, friends, and family) who have adopted Muslim attire and have already made their mark in the society.

During the in-depth interview, some respondents mentioned that they have been motivated by numerous video tutorials in YouTube that particularly deal with beautification of Muslim attire. For example, there are tutorials on how to wrap hijab in different ways or how to accessorize the attire and these tutorials are being followed by thousands of subscribers. These findings are in line with the current practices of some companies which are showing models appearing in Muslim attire in their advertisements to promote their products or services. Furthermore, many notable beauty parlors have introduced makeup packages that include the option of wearing hijab. These practices reflect how opinion leaders and beauty concerns have contributed towards this phenomenon.

In view of the above inferences, it seems highly plausible that women in Bangladesh have grown a more positive attitude towards Muslim attire as it creates a balance between their religious values and personal sense of fashion. Hence, its popularity and adoption have become highly visible making Muslim attire a part and parcel of today's clothing fashion.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributors/Acknowledgement: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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Appendix
Frequency Table

Age of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	13-19	14	9.3	9.3	9.3
	20-35	105	70.0	70.0	79.3
	35-45	16	10.7	10.7	90.0
	45 and above	15	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

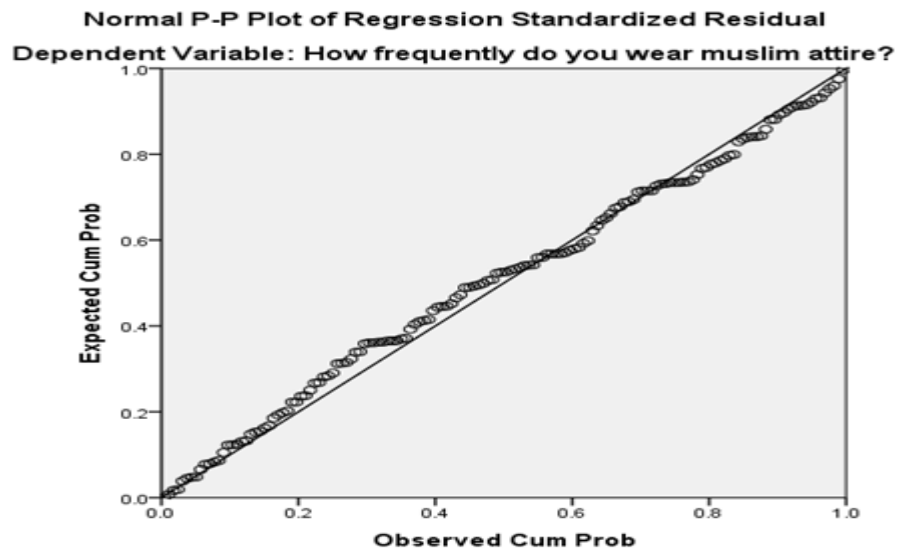
Occupation of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	98	65.3	65.3	65.3
	service holder	21	14.0	14.0	79.3
	Business	3	2.0	2.0	81.3
	Housewife	23	15.3	15.3	96.7
	Others	5	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Average monthly family income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Within 30 thousand	27	18.0	18.0	18.0
	30 to 60 thousand	58	38.7	38.7	56.7
	60 thousand to 1.5 lacs	53	35.3	35.3	92.0
	More than 1.5 lacs	12	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Linear relation between dependent and independent variables



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