

A Critical Analysis of the Current State of Iranian Hijab Styles on Instagram

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	<p>“Hijab style” has emerged as a form of activism as a result of the media-driven nature of contemporary humans and the transformations of the modern era. This phenomenon is global, not exclusive to Iran, but its significance is heightened in Iran due to hijab being a valued principle. This research endeavored to comprehend this emergent phenomenon by consulting with experts in the fields of modesty and hijab, fashion, and social media, in light of the numerous definitions of the phenomenon. The essence of the phenomenon, including its formation, characteristics, and categories of followers, was extracted through grounded theory.</p> <p>The analysis demonstrated that the dissemination of the hijab style can be attributed to behavioral, cognitive, and structural factors. The findings indicate that the formulation of the issue and the strategies for addressing it are deeply rooted in the context of modern civilization and media influence, where managerial and structural factors are of paramount importance. These factors have been classified as contextual and interventionist conditions, which have resulted in strategies in the following dimensions: religious, economic, promotional/media, cultural/social, and educational.</p> <p>Iranian society faces consequences in religious, psychological/moral, intellectual/cultural, and social domains. Ultimately, strategies for attaining a desirable state were identified in the economic, social, legal, media, and cultural domains after the current situation was outlined.</p>
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1. Introduction

One of the emerging trends that has been influenced and emphasized by the growth and proliferation of new media, particularly social networks, is the hijab style. This phenomenon has raised questions about its nature and strategies for dealing with it, alongside the increased activism of veiled women on these networks and its impact on the lifestyle of audiences in academic and cultural circles.

In the present day, media are an essential component of daily life, significantly influencing our lifestyle, culture, and societies. They are not only instrumental in our comprehension of global events, but they also play a substantial role in social interactions. We recognize our cultural identity and become acquainted with the beliefs, values, and norms of our society through media. Therefore, considering their role in the fashion industry as a symbolic representation of cultural identity and the media management process in an Islamic society is very important (Afroogh & Mehrabanifar, 2017: 10).

Consequently, the Islamic fashion industry is one of the sectors that has emerged as a result of the expansion of social networks. In this field, women are of the opinion that hijab does not conflict with fashionable attire; rather, they can be fashionable while adhering to Islamic attire and engage in fashion activities. These women employ social media to establish their identity and convey themselves, with the intention of presenting a unique perspective that differs from the prevailing societal norms (Zarghami, 2019). In fact, the proliferation of social networks has opened up new opportunities for individuals to engage with these platforms and to reevaluate their identities and perspectives (Kazemi, 2021).

Instagram is presently one of the most significant online environments for Iranian users, with an increasing user base. This platform is instrumental in illustrating the lifestyles of individuals. Displaying daily life through photos, videos, and other features provided by Instagram is one of the main reasons for its appeal among Iranian users. Sharing styles under the title "hijab style" is an example of this representation (Zarghami, 2019). The term "style" denotes the unique way in which an individual dresses, which serves as a representation of their cultural capital and personal identity. In the modern era, having an independent identity aligned with one's culture and religion is a fundamental need for humans (Mehrabanifar, 2017).

Iranian society is prevented from emulating non-Iranian Islamic identities by emphasizing the identity-creating aspect of fashion in social media. Moreover, showcasing Iranian-Islamic identity is particularly important for us. Consequently, in order to differentiate and exhibit our Iranian-Islamic identity in comparison to other identities, we must express it through cultural and creative products and be pioneering and influential in this domain. Social networks, a new generation of websites, have facilitated the gathering of users around specific topics in the virtual space, thereby introducing a new era in human existence. Numerous individuals engage in interactions and exert influence within these networks (Soleimani & Karimi, 2017).

Given these points, social media like Instagram, due to their visually engaging nature, have provided a suitable environment for the growth of various businesses, especially in the fashion sector. This area also presents opportunities for the emergence of new references, such as hijab bloggers or "hijab style" influencers.

Therefore, this research aims to understand the current state of hijab styles on Instagram in Iran. In doing so, it endeavors to acquire a comprehensive initial understanding of the hijab styles on Instagram in Iran and to comprehend the desired perspective. It is designed to compare the current and desired situations in order to identify the main issues and priorities that are necessary for effective policy-making and activism in this field.

2. Methodology

The current investigation is a qualitative investigation that employs a grounded theory methodology to offer a critical and interpretive comprehension of social reality. In this method, the researcher extracts theories from data without theoretical preconceptions and focuses on reality. These theories can offer effective guidelines for action. The sampling process for this research was both theoretical and intentional, involving 16 activists, policymakers, and experts in the fields of fashion and modesty/hijab. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, utilizing three-stage coding (open, axial, and selective).

The initial stage involved the extraction of 350 codes, which were subsequently converted into 85 concepts. Subsequently, 26 categories were established to organize these 85 concepts. Finally, these categories were condensed into seven fundamental propositions. This process assists the researcher in acquiring a more profound understanding of the subject matter and presenting a theory that is more closely aligned with reality.

3. Results

The subsequent axes were developed to inquire about the relationship between hijab and aesthetics, media, and fashion, as well as to define the new phenomenon of hijab style on Instagram, in accordance with related studies in this field, based on a variety of theories and aspects of hijab style and its impact on audiences:

- Definition of hijab style by individuals;
- Factors expanding this phenomenon and its creation contexts;
- Conditions and factors reinforcing or weakening the phenomenon;
- Global status of hijab style and its relation to Iran;
- Consequences of the current state of hijab style;
- Strategies for dealing with the current situation;
- Desirable state of media representation, advertising, and showcasing hijab.

The following categories were identified based on the interviewees' responses and the examination of related content in this field: 'the essence of hijab style,' 'factors expanding hijab style,' 'contexts forming hijab style,' 'factors and conditions reinforcing or weakening hijab style,' 'existing strategies for dealing with this phenomenon,' 'consequences of this phenomenon,' and 'proposed strategies for achieving a desirable state.' The following is the coding of these categories:

3-1. The Essence of Hijab Style:

Initially, hijab style is regarded as a distinct concept in the fashion industry that is designed to showcase Islamic dress styles. However, with further investigation and interviews with activists, it was found that hijab style has evolved in the virtual space, particularly on Instagram, and includes veiled women, clothing designers, and bloggers. Four primary axes were identified to comprehend this phenomenon in response to inquiries regarding the definition of hijab style:

- Analyzing the concept of hijab style: From traditional clothing to modern activism;
- Hijab and style: The paradox of women's presence in modern society;
- The origin of hijab style: Modernity and social activism;
- Analyzing the audience of hijab style on Instagram.

3-1-1. Analyzing the Concept of Hijab Style: From Traditional Dressing to Modern Activism

The hijab style is inherently associated with the manner in which women wear in accordance with Islamic principles. Nevertheless, this term also encompasses the activism of veiled women in the virtual realm, particularly on Instagram, as defined by interviewees. In a more precise definition, this activism aims to offer a contemporary interpretation of hijab and to disassociate itself from formal and customary frameworks. The results of interviews suggest a connection between modest fashion and hijab style, despite the fact that the former is distinct in both public and private dimensions. The primary distinguishing characteristic of hijab style from modest fashion is its identity and branding, which can be characterized as a paradox of identity.

3-1-2. Hijab and Style: The Paradox of Women's Presence in Modern Society

Hijab, as a symbol of women's presence in society, is in conflict with the concept of style, which refers to display and showmanship. These two concepts simultaneously create a paradox. In the virtual space, the characteristics of hijab style activists include self-display, showmanship, bodily expression, and ostentatious consumption. By selectively engaging with hijab and representing themselves in the virtual space, these activists aim to achieve social status and prominence. Without a profound comprehension or knowledge of hijab, they endeavor to reform Islamic attire into their own style.

3-1-3. The Origin of Hijab Style: Modernity and Social Activism

Two primary factors are responsible for the genesis of this phenomenon. Initially, the conditions of modernity, which result in the flourishing of economic motivations and secularism, are acknowledged as the primary source of numerous capitalist systems in the modern era. Secondly, the apprehensions of those who advocate for hijab, who endeavor to counter cultural invasion and anti-compulsory hijab footage by presenting hijab as a free choice for women. They participate in activism on social media platforms, particularly Instagram.

3-1-4. Analyzing the Audience of Hijab Style on Instagram

It is essential to comprehend the audience of these activists on Instagram when defining hijab style. Studies show that most of the audience consists of young people who tend to combine religious values with modern elements. Furthermore, some of these followers are attracted to hijab as a result of their familial or environmental circumstances and attempt to alleviate their compulsions by imitating hijab styles.

3-2. Factors Expanding Hijab Style

The phenomenon of hijab style on social networks, particularly Instagram, has currently captured the attention of cultural activists. It is of the utmost importance to identify the factors that are responsible for the dissemination of this phenomenon. One of the primary reasons for the emergence of hijab style is the cognitive gap regarding hijab and the concept of beauty, leading to its misrepresentation as a rival to attractiveness. Three primary categories are identified when the factors that expand hijab style are examined: cognitive, behavioral, and structural. The cognitive factor is acknowledged as the most fundamental.

3-3. Contexts Creating Hijab Style

The emergence of the hijab style phenomenon on the social network Instagram is influenced by the requirements of modern society and media conditions. This phenomenon is acknowledged as a media-driven and contemporary concept. The increase in the prevalence of display-oriented lifestyles and the development of a virtual identity in conjunction with real life have been the consequences of the expansion of virtual space, particularly social networks. This has led to the establishment of a "second life" for individuals.

The primary context for the development of hijab style is the global dissemination of imagery and image-centric social networks such as Instagram. The metaverse concept's widespread adoption will result in a significant expansion of issues such as hijab style, which emphasis imagery. To the extent that virtual space becomes more image-oriented and user interaction becomes easier, better conditions are provided for the formation of the hijab style phenomenon.

The formulation of hijab style has been influenced by two primary contexts, as per expert opinions: the influences of the capitalist system and the requirements of modern global civilization, and virtual space and image-centric social networks. As consumers and marketers, activists are essential to the survival and perpetuation of the capitalist system and social networks.

3-4. Reinforcers and Weakeners of Hijab Style

The majority of the factors that influence the hijab style phenomenon are in alignment with and reinforce it, given the current contexts and the conditions of modernity. The weakening factors are restricted and primarily pertain to the enhancement of audience awareness. The factors that are effective are categorized into two groups: managerial and structural. It is important to acknowledge that the structural factor that is effective in this context is distinct from the structural factor that is associated with expansion.

A) Managerial Factors:

- The use of hijab styles by famous media personalities, especially TV presenters;
- Incomplete understanding of national media managers: Challenges and social consequences of hijab style;
- Lack of managerial strategies: Intelligent perspective in dealing with hijab style.

B) Structural Factors:

- Contemporary representation of hijab: Capabilities and challenges;
- The absence of appeal and diversity in official hijab patterns;
- Neglect of Iran's cultural diversity: An opportunity for innovation in dressing styles.

3-5. Existing Strategies for Dealing with This Phenomenon

Institutions and centers have implemented programs and actions that are based on interventionist and contextual conditions, as a result of the emergence of this central phenomenon. These programs and actions can be classified into five groups: educational, social and cultural, promotional and media-related, legal, and economic.

A) Legal:

- Lack of a coherent and convergent governmental discourse in the field of fashion and clothing;
- Dominance of control over facilitation and weakness of incentive support;
- Inefficiency of institutions responsible for fashion and clothing.

B) Economic:

- Inadequate market and economic management in the field of fashion and clothing;

- Unconventional supply of hijab products.
- C) Promotional and Media:
- Inadequacy in media representation of hijab style.
 - The absence of an efficient and up-to-date advertising system in the field of fashion and clothing.
- D) Cultural and Social:
- Dual standards in the field of fashion and clothing;
 - Insufficient attention to cultural diversity and existing capacities in fashion and clothing.
- E) Educational:
- Weakness in training and educating specialized forces in fashion and clothing adhering to Islamic principles;
 - Lack of a coherent and purposeful educational program in the field of fashion and clothing.

3-6. Consequences of the Current Situation

The current state of hijab styles is not in accordance with religious desirability, and this form of activism frequently undermines the concept and philosophy of hijab rather than promoting it, thereby weakening religious values. Religious, moral, cultural, and social are the four categories into which the repercussions of this phenomenon can be classified. The religious domain is the primary impact, resulting in the expression of hijab with new concepts. This approach disregards the fundamental philosophy of hijab and undermines religious values.

In a society where hijab is regarded as a social apparel, sexual attractions are on the rise, and girls who refrain from exhibiting such behavior may experience low self-esteem and confidence. The indigenous culture undergoes a transformation as it emulates Western lifestyles and stylists, and the beliefs and preferences of the younger generation diverge from Islamic civilization as this trend continues. In this context, hijab, as a symbol of Islamic civilization in modernity, becomes a consumable concept, and society progresses toward self-display and competition for attention, ultimately resulting in deviance from norms.

4. Conclusion

The causal and contextual conditions of this phenomenon were determined by utilizing the grounded theory method to analyze the comprehension of hijab design and its influencing factors. Theoretical foundations and religious literature, which highlight religious values and norms, helped clarify the effective conditions for the emergence of this phenomenon. Additionally, the fundamental characteristics of hijab design were ascertained through discussions in accordance with the definitions of experts. In order to enhance existing programs and establish Islamic civilization, effective strategies were identified to serve as a guide for activists in this field. Additionally, the necessity of precise indexing was underscored in order to differentiate the Islamic approach from other approaches, such as the capitalist approach. This distinction has the potential to prevent perplexity that arises from a lack of clarity and inappropriate connections between content and form.

The equalization of modest fashion and hijab style, which must be clearly differentiated, is one of the other challenges. The hijab style is influenced by religious norms, whereas modest fashion is based on personal principles and beliefs. The harms that result from this phenomenon can be mitigated by establishing distinct boundaries and indicators. Therefore, governance based on expertise and adherence to religious principles can lead to the creation of a dynamic and responsive system that aligns with global changes and local needs. The present circumstances of Islamic society necessitate the development of specialists who are capable of formulating programs to preserve and develop national culture, as well as the ability to respond to social requirements and developments.

The purpose of this study is to define hijab style and investigate the factors that contribute to the development of this phenomenon. The investigation delves into the fundamental principles of hijab design and the factors that influence it, as well as the development of suitable strategies. Furthermore, this phenomenon's repercussions are presented. Based on the examined axes, strategies for achieving a desirable state have been identified. By adhering to these strategies and taking into account threats and opportunities, it is feasible to leverage existing capabilities to introduce and promote hijab and broaden the standard of Islamic attire in the nation.

Strategies:

A) Economic:

- Establishing connections and relationships between different components of the Iranian Islamic clothing cycle;
- Intelligent organization of the Iranian Islamic dressing style cycle in accordance with the existing capacities to achieve the desired model;
- Accurate understanding of the economic relationships of the hijab style and considering economic measures in dealing with it;
- Creating a competitive environment and ensuring profitability in the Islamic clothing according to the

defined indicators.

B) Cultural:

- Creating a positive attitude towards the principle of hijab among the audience;
- Enhancing people's knowledge and insight (strengthening cultural literacy of dressing);
- Providing a desirable model for displaying and promoting hijab;
- Balancing the jurisprudential and moral approaches;
- Attending to Iran's cultural diversity and audience taste in design, supply, and representation;
- Balancing conceptual and practical definitions of hijab and preventing extremist and negligent approaches.

C) Media:

- Drawing and implementing a desirable framework for media representation of hijab based on the monotheistic nature of human beings and Iranian-Islamic cultural diversity;
- Attending to differences in media representation;
- Revisiting the identity of Muslim women and the quality of their social presence in media productions;
- Moving away from Western body-centric attractiveness standards in media representation.

D) Social:

- Adopting an opportunity-oriented approach to hijab style while considering its risks;
- The necessity of precise audience analysis in clothing policies and having the capability and guarantee of implementation;
- The necessity of attending to the functionality and usability of clothing in meeting needs;
- Adapting structures to the current situation;
- Strengthening and activating academic capabilities in terms of specialization and religion in connection with society and industry;
- Identifying, activating, and networking people's capacities;
- Employing religiously concerned and specialized individuals in executive positions related to the field of dressing style;
- Training and educating specialized forces in the field of Iranian-Islamic dressing style.

E) Legal:

- Formulating a clear system of desirability and indicators in hijab style and explaining the governmental discourse precisely, providing clear indicators for hijab styles, and conducting supervision and evaluation based on them;
- Facilitating and supporting hijab styles by the government within the framework of its system of desirability and indicators;
- Attending to the sense of agency and choice in policymaking, production, and supply.