The Differences in Meaning between Muslim Women's Modest Clothing and Women's Clothing Advertorials

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ABSTRACT

Modest fashion has progressed positively in the last two decades. Designers and advertisers are trying to attract modest fashion's consumers. One of the mediums to promote it is by advertorials. Analyzing words and phrases used in advertorials can help advertisers, practitioners and other concerned parties to understand how advertorials are written. Using Leech's theory toward meanings, this study aimed to analyze and compare the differences between the advertorials of Muslim women modest clothing and women's clothing from semantic perspective. This study applied a descriptive qualitative approach by analyzing four advertorials of women's modest, formal, and casual clothing. The results of this study show that the advertorials of modest clothing seem to use a thematic meaning by creating the images of comforted and elegant looking Muslim women in modest clothes. On the other hand, the advertorials of women's formal and casual clothing look to portray the wearers as sexy and confident women. Although both types of advertorials give meanings with empowering themes, they explore different aspects of empowerment to give understanding toward their potential consumers.

Key words: advertorial, meaning, Muslim, semantic, women

INTRODUCTION

The demand for modest fashion which is usually worn by women with religious backgrounds, such as the *hijab* for Muslim women, shows a positive trend. Although modest clothing is also recommended for the followers of other religions or belief, such as Christianity, Judaism or Hinduism (Menon et al. 2020), the notion of modest fashion in this research is limited to the use of *hijab* or Muslim clothing to focus the analysis. Related to modest clothing, the increasing inclusivity of women with modest clothing or in this context the *hijab* and pro-*hijab* movement is seen in the ready-to-wear industry (Latif 2016; Lewis 2018). As a result, the Muslim clothing market is estimated to be in the billions by 2019 (Rogers 2019). In addition, various well-known brands such as Nike, Marks & Spencer, Veilgarments, Capsters, and Natasha have also introduced options for *hijab* (Ahmed 2017, Bahath 2017, Hosie 2018, Yazid 2016). It can be concluded that modest fashion industry has become a profitable business.

Considering the development of modest clothing, advertising is needed to become one of the effective mediums for marketing the products. One form of advertising is advertorial. Advertorials can be defined as advertisements that are shaped like articles. In contrast to the advertisements that usually only use short texts but are dense with images, advertorials use paragraphs consisting a lot of words, phrases, and sentences to describe the subjects of the advertisements (Hanson 2014). As a hybrid form of advertising, advertorials have experienced significant growth, especially advertorials in the field of fashion and beauty (Hanson 2016). To be accepted by the public, advertorials must be adapted to the target market, because, as Hanson (2016) argues, if advertorials have a positive

effect on readers, the advertised brand or product will also have a similar positive effect from readers. Particularly for Muslim women, the selection of modest clothing purchases is not only based on their personal taste but also subjective values, such as the perspective of modesty for each individual (Leonnard et al. 2019). A study of Zain et al. (2021) shows that Malay fashion bloggers can affect the purchasing decision of Malaysian Muslim women who want to adhere the religious values as well as follow latest fashion styles. In this case, women, when they want to buy modest clothes, will be influenced by what is considered polite by their religion as well as updated to the latest trends. Therefore, the advertorials containing the perspective of modesty in modest clothing or *hijabs* can influence the purchase of the products by consumers.

Related to the point mentioned in the above paragraph, the language used in advertorials of modest clothing should be adapted to the target market. The same principle needs to be performed when writing advertorials for women's clothing. Studies that analyze semantic differences in advertorials of those types of clothing will be of great help for practitioners who want to write advertisements or educators who are going to teach it. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the differences in advertorials for modest clothing and women's clothing through a semantic analysis. The latter type of advertorials is chosen as a comparison for modest clothing.

Modest Clothing

Modest clothing or modest wear refers to the outfits worn by women or men from various religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism or Hinduism that encourage their followers to wear closed clothes or head coverings for men and women whose concept is the same with the way Muslims or adherents of Islam dress (Menon et al. 2020). Despite the various interpretations of the modest clothing worn by Muslim women, including from a cultural perspective (Mossière 2012), the notion of *hijab* for Muslim women refers to the modest clothing regulated in al-Qur'an, as the holy book of Islam, and al-Hadith, a collection of the actions or words from the Prophet Muhammad SAW that have been written by his followers, that is the clothing that does not attract attention from others (Ahmad 2017). However, the Qur'an does not specifically regulate what kind of clothing all Muslim women should wear uniformly (Shirazi 2010). The use of *hijab* is not considered an injustice but a means to express their identity and beliefs through clothing (Byng 2010). The above points show the definition of *hijab* ruled by Quran and Hadith as the guidelines of Muslims.

In spite of the habit of using black for the hijab (Mahfoodh 2008), Muslim women have started to use various colors, accessories, and styles of clothing (Zabeen et al 2017). The use of clothing is important in Islam because Muslims are required to pay attention to the beauty and cleanliness of clothes when they are socializing with other people or doing worship (Yafai 2017). In addition, the use of the *hijab* does not prohibit the wearer from looking stylish and professional or choosing colors other than black (McLaughlin-Duane 2015). The use of modest clothing has become popular in recent decades (Zabeen et al 2017). Muslim clothing or *hijab* has even become an expensive high-end fashion concept (Prahastuti et al 2020). Therefore, the Muslim fashion or *hijab* market must implement a variety of more effective strategies to be able to support the development of the Muslim fashion industry (Rai 2018). The points above show a changing perception of *hijab* and the development of the industry.

Semantic Meaning

The use of language in advertisements can be investigated by using semantic analysis. In this sense, semantic refers to a study of meaning expressed through language (Saeed 2016). Someone can comprehend what is talked about through

meaning (Heriyawati and Febriyanti, 2019). Thus, semantic deals with how meanings are given through a linguistic system which consists of various different unit structures such as sentences, phrases, words, morphemes or else (Yunira et al. 2019). Furthermore, Leech in Heriyawati and Febriyan (2019) breaks down meanings into seven types, namely conceptual meaning (denotative or real-life meanings), connotative meaning (meanings related with the cultural and personal experiences), social meaning (meanings associated with the language style in social culture), affective meaning (meanings related with feelings or attitudes of the speakers), reflected meaning (meanings influenced by another sense in the same expression), collocative meaning (meanings associated with mental understandings of speakers), and thematic meaning (meanings linked with grammatical order or thematic structure).

In regard to this study, semantic analysis seems to be a preferable approach to analyze advertorials as one form of advertisements. Several studies have used semantic approaches to analyze texts in advertising. Similar to this study, a study of Emodi (2011) analyzed 20 advertisements and found the majority of advertisements used connotative meaning and adjectives to persuade potential consumers by using Leech's theory. Similarly, Sugiharti and Yurike (2016) used Leech's theory to analyze twenty billboards written in English in Batam. They found that the majority of billboards use lexical meanings, connotative meanings and social meanings. In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Dong and Shah (2016) analyzed the ambiguity in advertisements through a semantic approach. Although the above studies have managed to analyze meanings found in advertisements, there is still a paucity of studies that discuss meanings found in the advertorials.

METHOD This research was designed under a descriptive-qualitative approach. The descriptive qualitative approach can be defined as a form of inquiry that analyzes and offers enhanced understanding of practical issues in the real world (Tenny et al. 2022). In this study, the researchers analyzed advertorials to understand how meanings are used to convey messages. The data in this study were collected by observation and documentation techniques. The advertorials chosen were particularly which show Muslim women in modest clothing and others that illustrate casual woman clothing. In addition, this research also used advertorials collected from a website named Pinterest as the research subjects. After data collection, two advertorials of Muslim women modest's clothing and two advertorials of women's casual clothing were used as the research subjects.

In order to provide a more focused analysis, this study only analyzed meanings used in selected words, sentences or phrases in the advertorials of Muslim women modest clothing and women's casual clothing. The meanings found in those advertorials will be categorized based on Leech's categorization of meanings. In the process of data analysis, this study followed the steps of qualitative content analysis proposed by Kuckartz (2019). Firstly, the researchers developed the main categories by using the types of meanings set by Leech. Therefore, the research subjects were then coded according to the categories. After the research subjects or the data were completely analyzed, they were presented and discussed in the research report.

THE DIFFERENCES IN MEANING The following are the results and discussion on the differences in meaning between advertorials of Muslim modest clothing and woman clothing from the semantic perspective.

Muslim Women's Clothing Advertorials

Figure 1 is an advertorial from an online magazine. The first clause of the advertorial text is "whether it is for grocery shopping or walking out with your child" has a conceptual meaning because it refers to daily activities conducted by Muslim women. The clause means that the outfits are not only suitable for single but also married women. In the next clause "use a combination of comfortable pieces to look chic and breezy", the word 'comfortable' has a conceptual meaning as well. It is related to good feeling that may come when a woman is wearing the product being advertised. Meanwhile, the words 'chic' and 'breezy' can be categorized as having reflective meanings. While 'chic' refers to being elegant and stylish, 'breezy' means pleasantly windy. In this sense, the words 'comfortable', 'chic', and 'breezy' used in the advertorial reflect a concept of a Muslim woman who feel comforted, looking chic, and breezy wearing modest clothing. In addition, the advertorial text has an affective meaning as it seems to communicate positive attitudes of the writer toward modest clothing.

Figure 1: Muslim women's modest clothing advertorial (Pinterest, 2024)

From the second sentence, The flare jeans might not be for everyone, but for a casual chic look, they do the work", the phrase 'the flare jeans' refers to a conceptual meaning of jeans whose shape is like a bell-bottom. This type of jeans is less revealing and considered more suitable for modest clothing. In addition, the clause "the flare jeans might not be for everyone" reflects a connotative meaning these pants may not look good on everyone' body but can be different for certain style, such as the modest one. In the last sentence, "Pair them with a loose modest shirt for a cuteerrands running outfit", the word 'modest' gives a conceptual meaning of simple or unassuming. In regards to this advertorial, 'modest' refers to how a Muslim woman prefers to clothe herself, modestly. Thus, the word 'modest' has a reflective meaning as well as it refers to modest clothing worn by Muslim women. On the other hand, the following phrase "a loose modest shirt for a cute errand running outfit" contain a thematic meaning as it follows the theme of the advertorial, modest clothing for active Muslim women. In this sense, as Muslim women and men should wear clothing according to rules written in Quran and Hadith (Kamarulzaman and Shaari 2020), the advertorial uses a thematic meaning by portraying a Muslim woman with modest outfits which can also be used for running errands without forsaking its

elegant aspect. According to the writer, modest clothing, especially the ones for Muslim women, seems to be geared to make the wearer feel elegant but comforted at the same time.

Figure 2: Another Muslim women's modest clothing advertorial (Pinterest, 2024)

In Figure 2, the first sentence of the advertorial, "Casual outfits are everyone's favorite!", shows an affective meaning as it communicates how positively the writer feels toward casual outfits. Then, it is followed by "What could be more comfortable than...?" The writer suggests some outfits that can be used to make the wearer feels comforted. The sentence gives a conceptual meaning. Other than that, the word 'fashionably' brings a conceptual meaning as well since it shows the state of being stylish. In addition, the phrase 'quality time' seems to have a collocative meaning as it shows the time spent exclusively to build a relationship with the closest ones. Next, the last phrase "a park or mall or watching your toddler play" can be put into a thematic meaning as it follows the theme used for the advertorial, a portrayal of active Muslim woman.

Women's Clothing Advertorials

The women's formal clothing advertorial in Figure 3 shows the actress Angelina Jolie wearing a black dress. The tagline is "Show skin strategically" which reflects a connotative meaning. In this sense, showing skin means baring certain parts of body, while strategically refers to the parts of body one chooses to show to the public. Similarly, the first sentence, "looking truly sexy involves knowing what to bare-and what to keep under wraps" shows a conceptual meaning as well since it is related to the tagline. In order to look sexy, as mentioned by the tagline, a woman should know which parts of her body that stay covered or bared. In addition, the same sentence can be assorted as having a reflective meaning as well since 'bare' also means a state of being naked. However, in this context, bare means showing skin. The next sentence, "Otherwise, where's the mystery?" reflects a connotative meaning as it refers to how less revealing clothes can make a woman becomes more mysterious. Next, the advice from Jolie' stylist, Jen Rade—"If is cleavage, don't show your legs. If it's your legs, stay covered on top"—can be considered as a conceptual meaning as it refers to a situation of only showing certain parts of body while keeping other parts stay covered. The diction in this particular advertorial does have a thematic meaning as the advertorial describes the wearer as a sexy as well as classy being.
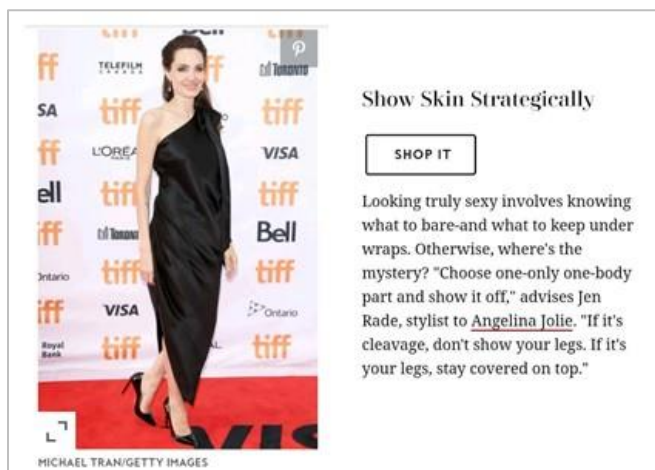
Figure 3: Women's formal clothing advertorial (Pinterest, 2024)

Figure 4 shows an advertorial of women's casual clothing with the tagline "Accessorize with brights". This tagline can be said as having connotative meaning as 'brights' refers to articles of clothing in bright colors. The message of the first clause "If you've got a closet full of neutrals—be they navy, black, camel, or gray..." can be assorted into a conceptual meaning since the phrase refers to a closet full of neutral clothes. Then, the expression "add energy with boldly hued shoes and bags" shows a connotative meaning as it refers to energized feeling that may come when a woman wears a brightly hued article of clothing.
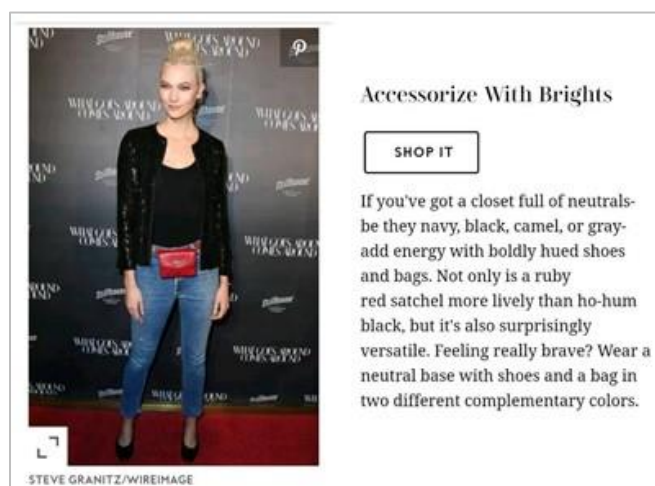

Figure 4: Women's casual clothing advertorial (Pinterest, 2024)

Besides, the next clause "Not only is a ruby red satchel more lively than ho-hum black..." gives a reflective meaning. Lively means active or outgoing. The writer reflects that wearing red ruby satchel is livelier than wearing the black one. In the third sentence, the expression "feeling really brave?" has a connotative meaning as the phrase can also mean being outrageous or confident while wearing bright colors. Meanwhile, the last sentence "Wear a neutral base with shoes and bag in two different complementary colors" can be considered as having a conceptual meaning as it explains the selection of clothing. Overall, there

is a thematic meaning in this advertorial by portraying a bold and confident woman.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the advertorials of modest clothing mostly use conceptual, reflective, connotative, affective, and thematic meanings. In this regard, Muslim women are usually portrayed as chic or elegant. The focus of advertorials also shows how modest clothing can be comfortable and elegant for women who are busy with their daily activities, such as doing chores or going to the office. Rosenberg (2019) argues that modest fashion, such as the one worn by Muslim women, can be considered as a visible strategy for Muslim women to be acknowledged and validated in their public and professional contexts. Thus, it is important to portray the Muslim women as active people while wearing modest clothing. Such portrayal can be considered as an empowerment for Muslim women who used to be judged as extremists (Rosenberg 2019). In addition, the advertorials of modest clothing describe Muslim women as mothers. Therefore, the advertorials of modest clothing do not only portray Muslim women as active people in professional settings but also in their personal lives as mothers.

Almost similar to that of modest clothing, the advertorials of women's clothing mostly use connotative, reflective, conceptual, and thematic meanings as well. However, while modest clothing advertorials focus on describing the comfort aspects, the advertorials of women's clothing emphasize on the bold aspects of the clothes such as making the wearer feel sexy or courageous. As clothing is commonly used to project the inner self such as self-image, mood, social aspirations or else, consumers opt products that match their personal identities (Samadi 2019). Thus, potential consumers need to be able to relate with certain products or brands in a personal level so that they can see their personal identities being fulfilled by the products or brands (Zatwarnicka-Madura and Nowacki, 2018). In this case, the projection of bold aspects of the clothing is aimed to make the potential consumers feel empowered when they are wearing it.

In addition, the result of this this study also show the differences in how writers perceive potential consumers of modest and women's clothing. Unlike that of modest clothing, women clothing advertorials do not emphasize on women' roles as mothers but their personal feelings, especially for being sexy or brave while wearing the clothes advertised. It may be related to the concept of being modest which is closely related to religions. Furthermore, although both types of advertorials seem to emphasize on empowering the aspects of clothes, the advertorials of women's clothing focus on sexual empowerment. The differences in both types of advertorials show that the dictions and meanings used for different potential consumers should match the personal identities aspired by them so that the potential consumers may relate with the products being advertised.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the differences in the advertorials of modest and women's clothing by using a descriptive-qualitative approach to investigate the problems. Four advertorials were used as the objects of research. The results show that both types of advertorials mostly use conceptual, connotative and thematic meanings. Although both advertorials use an empowerment theme to describe the article of clothing, the aspects they emphasize are different. While modest clothing advertorials focus on describing the comfortable and elegant side of wearing modest clothes, both women's formal and casual clothing advertorials tend to portray sexy and bold aspects of the clothes. These differences show how

the writers of the advertorials perceive the potential consumers of each clothing product.

Due to the limitation of the objects and duration of this research, the researchers really hope that in the future, there will be conducted other studies that provide more insights from the same objects, such as by incorporating readers' perceptions of the advertorials or involving the writers' arguments why they use certain dictions or meanings for the advertorials.

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