

Staging the Halo Effect in Modest Fashion: A Visual Analysis of dUCk's Instagram Pictures

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ABSTRACT

Visual presentation has become increasingly important for modest-fashion brands in Malaysia, particularly on Instagram, where carefully staged photographs establish a recognisable presence. Against this background, this article examines how dUCk constructs its brand identity through Instagram pictures and presents its products as more than functional fashion items. More specifically, it considers how the halo effect emerges when positive qualities associated with the overall visual presentation are extended to the products featured in the pictures. The study therefore investigates the visual elements that contribute to this effect and the role they play in communicating dUCk's identity on social media. Using Ledin and Machin's (2020) multimodal approach, the study analyses selected Instagram pictures published by dUCk between 2022 and 2024, with particular attention to the participants, objects and settings represented in them. The findings show that the halo effect stems from deliberate visual choices that evoke associations with sophistication, exclusivity, and modernity. These visuals not only draw in the audience but also strengthen dUCk's image and identity as a premium Muslim women's brand in Malaysia. The study highlights the halo effect as a powerful part of visual storytelling in social media branding and shows how much multimodal design can shape customer opinions.

Keywords: Halo Effect, Instagram, Modest Fashion, Social Media, Visual Analysis



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1 INTRODUCTION

Instagram is one of the most prominent visual-based social media platforms and its visual affordances have been shown to influence consumer purchasing behaviour (Piehler et al., 2021). By exploiting these affordances, many fashion brands have utilised Instagram to market their products, enabling users to connect with and form perceptions of specific brands, products/services and brand-related activities. Given the platform's large and active user base, fashion brands increasingly rely on Instagram to promote their products, and the platform is designed to encourage consumer interest and potential purchase intention (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Instagram's focus on visual content means product presentation and user portrayal are key to enhancing brand visibility. This strategy leverages the halo effect, where attractive visuals improve consumer perception, even if the products offer limited practical value (Harris et al., 2018; Natale, 2019). The halo effect is particularly powerful in advertising and marketing because it relies on initial impressions often formed without considering the product's actual usefulness or quality.

The dUCk Group started in 2014 and has become one of Malaysia's fastest-growing lifestyle brands, with several physical stores in Malaysia and Singapore. At first, the brand focused on scarves and *hijabs*,

but later it also began selling cosmetics, accessories, stationery, and home products. However, scarves and *hijabs* remain the brand's signature items and best-selling products (Hassan et al., 2018; Mohamad, 2021). Studying the dUCK brand is especially important in Malaysia because it shows how entrepreneurship, social media influence and Muslim women's fashion are connected. At the point of writing in 2024, Vivy Yusof, the founder of dUCK, is a prominent businesswoman and social media influencer with over 1.8 million Instagram followers and she plays a crucial role in the brand's success by actively engaging her audience through both personal and corporate content (Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021; Mohamad & Hassim, 2021). It is believed that the rise of the dUCK brand is closely associated with her prominence and influence, mainly among Muslim women, who are also fashion-savvy individuals in Malaysia (Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021; Mohamad & Hassim, 2021). dUCK has recalibrated public perceptions of the *hijab* by presenting it as a fashionable and premium product targeted at urban Muslim women, moving away from conventional portrayals. The brand employs marketing strategies such as limited-edition releases, compelling storytelling and interactive social media campaigns that are all consistently shaping consumer behaviour and enhancing brand visibility (Mohamad, 2021; Nuzulrudin & Hussein, 2019; Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024).

Modest fashion, in particular, has gained traction on Instagram due to the platform's visual nature (Bardakcı & Wood, 2021; Tafesse & Wood, 2021) that allows users and followers to feel connected to the industry, trends and brands. Over the past five years, modest fashion has grown into a global trend, attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. In response to this rising demand, international brands such as H&M, Uniqlo, Dolce & Gabbana and Lacoste have introduced modest fashion lines (Khondkar, 2021). In the Malaysian context, the brand dUCK has emerged as one of the most prominent players in the modest fashion sector, especially during its prime period from 2018 to 2023 (Mohamad, 2021; Nuzulrudin & Hussein, 2019; Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024). In this context, Malaysian consumers may evaluate modest fashion based on both contemporary aesthetic preferences and perceived religious appropriateness. It was found that Malaysian youth preferred minimalist modest-fashion designs and perceived Malaysian designs as more Sharia-compliant than Indonesian designs (Saaidin et al., 2022). Despite the premium pricing of its scarves and other lifestyle products, dUCK has maintained its pricing strategy and established itself as one of the most profitable modest fashion brands in Asia, with over one million units sold globally (Dinar Standard, 2020).

Branding communication strategies are essential for establishing a brand's positioning and fostering consumer loyalty, especially in the digital era, where promotion and marketing across brands are widespread. Marketing strategies on visually oriented platforms, such as Instagram, increasingly focus on aesthetics (de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019), narrative and emotional resonance rather than solely on product attributes or pricing. Commonly, brands employ various visual and narrative strategies to establish appealing identities that resonate with lifestyle objectives and generate perceived value. These techniques often rely on managed visual consistency and influencer collaborations (Jamrin, 2019; Zain, 2020) and followers' engagement to foster customer trust and emotional values. The halo effect is a crucial concept related to positive perceptions of a brand's attributes. For instance, elements like a product's aesthetic appeal or the perceived prestige could influence other aspects such as product quality or purchasing desirability (Caldeira, 2020; de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019; Zappavigna & Ross, 2022). Moreover, visual storytelling intensifies the values of the products, especially when each post is meticulously constructed in terms of design, representation and ambience.

This article argues that Instagram marketing strategies have been vital to dUCK's branding success. The halo effect created by the brand's visual content cultivates consumer trust and affects purchasing decisions (Harris et al., 2018). Therefore, the visual appeal of pictures and videos that include the individuals featured and contextual elements significantly influences consumer perception and purchasing intent. Based on this orientation, the first objective of this study is to investigate how the halo effect operates through visual elements on Instagram, and secondly is to analyse the role of visuals in shaping dUCK's branding strategies within the social media environment. In order to do this, Ledin and Machin's (2020) multimodal framework is employed to examine how dUCK's Instagram pictures generate the halo effect and communicate the brand's identity and values, particularly in the presentation of products that may be perceived as premium or overpriced.

The analysis demonstrates that by using Ledin and Machin's 2020 multimodal framework, visual components in dUCk's pictures, such as the choice of participants, objects and settings can help depict the brand's exclusivity, sophistication and prestige (Ledin & Machin, 2020a). This scenario is also supported by many studies, whereby modest fashion is increasingly associated with modern life and aspirational values among Muslim women in Malaysia, reflecting a trend towards exclusivity and enhanced collective identity (Kamarulzaman & Shaari, 2020). In the analysed dUCk posts, Islamic attire is not represented as visually conservative. Instead, it is associated with cosmopolitan settings, coordinated styling and premium consumption. Through these visual choices, modest fashion is presented as compatible with sophistication, modernity and a progressive lifestyle. However, these representations reflect the identity the brand constructs rather than the actual social behaviour or preferences of Muslim women.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Halo Effect Theory

Natale (2019) describes the halo effect as a cognitive bias in which a positive impression of one attribute, such as a product's design or brand reputation, influences judgements about its other qualities. A visually appealing product, for example, may be regarded as high-quality or reliable even when there is little evidence to support this judgement (Natale, 2019). This illustrates how an initial impression can shape how consumers evaluate a product and may affect their purchasing decisions. The same effect may occur when a product is associated with a credible or attractive endorser. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) found that consumers may evaluate a product according to their impression of the person promoting it rather than the product's actual qualities. Consequently, a positive recommendation from a well-liked individual can influence the overall impression formed of the product. Marketers often use this effect by leveraging strong brand reputations or celebrity endorsements to increase the appeal of otherwise ordinary products and justify higher prices (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

In a study by Bettiga and Noci (2024), the halo effect is evident when the media is contextually relevant. The study confirms that television programming influences consumers' emotional and cognitive reactions to advertising, their perceptions of brands and how they value them (Bettiga & Noci, 2024). The results have emphasised the importance of aligning television content with advertising to achieve greater communication effectiveness. A similar scenario is observed in another study by Harris et al. (2018), in which advertisements for unhealthy food and drinks include health-promoting elements such as pictures of sports activities or nutritious foods like fruit and milk. Many of these advertisements have led people especially children, to perceive these products as healthy. Rather than improving children's understanding of nutrition, these marketing strategies can create misleading impressions, making nutrient-poor products appear more nutritious and valuable than they are.

2.2 Instagram as a Marketing Hub

Instagram has become a highly influential promotional platform because it integrates multiple forms of communication within a single space. Initially created for photo sharing, it has developed into a highly interactive social network where users engage with one another through visuals, short videos, music clips, GIFs, stickers, filters, polls and hashtags (Leaver et al., 2020). The introduction of the Application Programming Interface (API) enabled connections with other platforms and applications, such as Facebook, expanding its functionality and reach. This feature allows users to manage multiple social media accounts simultaneously. Thus, it increases the potential for visibility and interaction across various digital platforms. As smartphones became more widespread, the practice of documenting daily life through visual content also grew rapidly (Lindquist & Ramirez-Zohfeld, 2019).

Instagram users can access posts from accounts they follow and from public accounts, whether or not they follow them. Users can also search for pictures or videos utilising specified keywords or

hashtags. Initially popularised on X (previously Twitter), hashtags have emerged as a potent instrument for disseminating ideas, endorsing movements and advocating ideologies (Saxton et al., 2015; Veszelszki, 2016). Research has confirmed that hashtags facilitate user engagement, enhance information organisation, improve accessibility and link people to pertinent topics and communities. As soon as hashtags became available on Instagram, they became particularly useful for promoting a wide range of products, especially in the fashion industry. The platform facilitates the innovative presentation of style while endorsing the development and evolution of fashion. Instagram's emphasis on pictures and videos makes it easier for users to view, understand and engage with fashion content.

It has been observed that brands are increasingly using Instagram to advertise products and build their public image as part of their visibility (Rizkavirwan & Tirtadarma, 2022). In Malaysia, it has become a key marketing tool for fashion and lifestyle labels that rely on visual storytelling to communicate brand values (Thimm, 2017). Beyond its technical features, the platform encourages indirect forms of social bonding through shared content. This aligns with Zappavigna's (2012) concept of ambient affiliation, which describes how users form connections around shared interests and values through recurring discursive elements such as hashtags. For instance, the hashtag #duckscarves appears not only on dUCk's official account but also in user-generated content, suggesting a sense of belonging and shared identity among followers (Zappavigna, 2012; Zappavigna & Logi, 2024).

This interaction may contribute to the halo effect by linking the brand to positive meanings that extend beyond the products themselves. Through consistent visual branding and culturally relevant messages, a brand can present itself as aspirational and trustworthy. However, such content does not necessarily show how audiences evaluate product quality or whether they decide to purchase. In Muslim women's fashion, Instagram provides a space where brands can construct idealised representations of modesty, femininity and lifestyle. Its visual and interactive features allow selected images to contribute to wider cultural narratives surrounding Muslim identity and contemporary modest fashion (Logi & Zappavigna, 2021; Zappavigna & Martin, 2018).

2.3 dUCk: An Influential Modest Wear Brand in Malaysia (2022-2024)

Established in 2014, the dUCk Group has developed into a prominent Malaysian lifestyle brand with a presence in Malaysia and Singapore. Although it initially focused on headscarves or *hijabs*, the brand later expanded its product range to include accessories, cosmetics, stationery and household items. *Hijabs* nevertheless remain central to its brand identity (Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021). This development reflects a broader trend in modest fashion, where contemporary designs are combined with characteristics associated with Islamic attire. Such a combination allows modest clothing to remain culturally and religiously meaningful while also being presented as modern and fashionable (Saidan et al., 2022). dUCk is also recognised for its limited-edition scarf collaborations with international brands such as Swarovski and Disney.

Its founder, Vivy Yusof, has played an important role in building the brand's visibility through her presence as both an entrepreneur and a social media influencer. Her personal and corporate Instagram content has contributed to the close association between her public identity and the identity of dUCk (Mohamad & Hassim, 2021; Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024). Beyond promoting products, she presents fashion choices that bring contemporary styles together with religious and cultural expectations. In this way, her carefully constructed public image provides a visible example of how modest clothing can be fashionable, contemporary and culturally appropriate. For many Malaysian Muslim women, exploring new fashion trends requires navigating social and religious challenges. In their pursuit of modern attire, individuals must simultaneously adhere to religious principles and cultural conventions that may constrain their self-assurance and induce social anxiety or apprehension of rejection. In this context, Vivy Yusof's aesthetic serves as a reliable benchmark for modest design that adheres to religious principles while remaining fashionable, thereby mitigating perceived dangers for her audience.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Selection

This study used purposive sampling to select 25 posts with pictures published on dUCk's official Instagram account between January 2022 and December 2024. These years were selected to provide a recent account of the brand's active visual communication practices. The sample was deliberately limited to 25 posts because the study prioritises close, interpretative analysis rather than statistical representation or generalisation. A few factors determined which posts were included in the data. Firstly, the pictures must prominently display dUCk fashion products. Second, they included identifiable subjects or participants, objects or settings relevant to Ledin and Machin's (2020) analytical categories, and lastly, pictures that potentially contributed to recurring visual constructions of modesty, exclusivity, sophistication or lifestyle identity.

Therefore, posts that featured videos, reels, duplicate campaign pictures, or informational graphics in which the product was not visually prominent were not included in the data. The sample size was considered adequate for a qualitative visual analysis because recurring patterns were observed across the three analytical categories. Thus, the sample was considered analytically appropriate for addressing the objectives of this study while allowing sufficient depth and consistency in the multimodal analysis.

3.2 Ledin and Machin's (2020) Multimodal Framework

This article examines how dUCk's Instagram visual elements, such as pictures contribute to constructing a persuasive brand image that enables its positioning within the premium fashion segment in Malaysia, particularly in modest wear (Md Saad & Yaacob, 2021). Drawing on Ledin and Machin's (2020) multimodal framework, it allows an in-depth analysis of how meaning is encoded through visual choices, such as participants, objects, colours, setting and actions that is anticipated to collectively shape the viewer's interpretation (Ledin & Machin, 2018, 2019, 2020a). These visual resources are not natural because they are strategically selected and planned to create associations of luxury, elegance and exclusivity. By examining these visual patterns, this study aims to understand how dUCk exploits the halo effect in the brand's marketing strategies in which the overall aesthetic presentation positively influences how followers perceive the quality and value of individual products beyond their actual material worth and practicality.

This framework is employed because it could offer a systematic approach to analysing how visual communication contributes to meaning-making in contemporary media contexts. This framework is particularly useful for examining social media images that circulate among a wide online audience. By separating an Instagram picture into its visual components, the analysis moves beyond simply describing its aesthetic appeal. It considers how these elements work together to communicate particular values, construct social identities and reinforce the brand's underlying ideologies (Ledin & Machin, 2019; Machin et al., 2016; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016).

The dataset comprises selected posts from dUCk's official Instagram account featuring product placement, influencers and lifestyle imagery. These pictures are treated as communicative artefacts that construct aspirational meanings around identity, modernity and prestige. The analysis examines how visual choices position dUCk and its products within the premium modest-fashion market rather than determining whether they justify higher prices or generate consumer loyalty. It also considers how carefully constructed visual narratives can blur the distinction between direct product promotion and lifestyle storytelling (Ghaffari, 2022; Jacobson, 2020). The purpose of this study, there are three components that focus on participants (individuals or groups), objects and settings. Within this framework, the way participants are represented contributes to the meanings communicated by a picture. Presenting participants as a group may emphasise collective identity or shared institutional values, whereas depicting a person individually can create a more personal and humanised representation. Their poses, actions and positions within the composition also influence the visual

message made available to viewers. Similarly, objects take on different meanings depending on how they are selected, arranged, and placed in relation to other elements. By examining participants and objects, the analysis considers how favourable qualities associated with an attractive person or a carefully presented object may be extended to the brand. The halo effect is therefore discussed as a representational possibility rather than evidence that the pictures directly influence purchasing behaviour.

Settings form the third analytical element. Ledin and Machin (2020) explain that backgrounds contribute to meaning-making by drawing on particular cultural values and associations. A natural setting, for example, may suggest simplicity, purity or tradition, while an urban environment may convey modernity, ambition or sophistication. These settings are not merely decorative. They contribute to the overall meaning of the picture and may strengthen the halo effect by associating the brand with the cultural qualities communicated through the surrounding environment.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis began with the purposive selection of pictures published on dUCK's official Instagram account between 2022 and 2024. Since the account was publicly accessible, the posts could be viewed by both followers and other Instagram users. Posts were selected based on their relevance to the study, particularly those representing modest fashion, exclusivity and the brand's wider lifestyle identity.

The selected pictures were then examined using three categories from Ledin and Machin's (2020) multimodal framework: participants, objects and settings. Participants included the individuals shown in the pictures, such as models and the brand's founder, whose visual representation communicated meanings associated with modesty, modernity and exclusivity. Objects included the products, accessories and props featured in the pictures, such as *hijabs*, packaging, lamps, books, flowers, vases and furniture. Settings referred to the backgrounds, environments and spatial arrangements within which these elements appeared. Each picture was examined to determine how these visual choices contributed to the construction of the brand's identity and values.

The next stage considered how the different elements worked together within each composition. Particular attention was given to how participants' poses and gazes, as well as the arrangement of objects and settings, represented identity, modesty and prestige. The analysis also examined how non-fashion items complemented the products and contributed to the overall aesthetic associated with the brand.

Finally, the recurring visual patterns were interpreted within the broader cultural contexts of Islamic fashion, contemporary Muslim femininity and consumer culture. The brand's emphasis on refinement and exclusivity was considered in relation to lifestyle branding and the commodification of religious identity. This interpretation allowed dUCK to be examined not only as a fashion label but also as a brand that participates in shaping representations of modesty and modernity in contemporary Malaysia. Because the study examines brand-produced pictures rather than audience responses, engagement data or sales records, it does not measure their actual effects on purchasing behaviour, consumer loyalty or perceptions of product quality. The halo effect therefore refers to the meanings and evaluative associations made available through the pictures rather than to empirically verified consumer responses.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Participants: Let's Glow Them Up!

dUCK's Instagram posts commonly feature its main products, including *hijabs*, blouses, inner scarves, prayer wear, trousers, skirts and long dresses. Handbags, jewellery, cosmetics, shoes, sunglasses and hats are also incorporated into the styling. Rather than being displayed separately, these products are worn or carried by the participants as part of complete, coordinated outfits.

As the study relies entirely on visual data, it does not attempt to identify the participants' age, ethnicity, nationality or religious background. The analysis is limited to what can be observed in the pictures, including clothing, styling, pose, gaze, makeup, accessories and spatial arrangement. The *hijab* is therefore examined as a visible styling and cultural resource within dUCk's modest-fashion discourse rather than as evidence of a participant's personal religious identity.

This bodily presentation contributes to the construction of the halo effect. By combining the products within visually coordinated outfits, the pictures establish a shared aesthetic of polish and sophistication. Relatively simple items are repositioned as parts of a carefully styled ensemble. In Figure 1, for example, the appearance of a simple *hijab* is elevated through its combination with accessories such as earrings and sunglasses, as well as the participant's confident presentation.



Figure 1 Using fashion accessories to elevate the *hijab*'s aesthetic appeal

This aesthetic coordination strengthens the brand's identity by situating its products within an aspirational lifestyle. Rather than presenting items in isolation, the brand identifies them as part of a desirable way of living. Ledin and Machin (2019) describe aesthetics as visually appealing, personalised and closely aligned with contemporary modes of living. Such shifts reflect broader transformations in social structures and help normalise neoliberal values. Through the participants' curated appearances, the content invites an emotional connection with viewers. The wearers may be read as embodiments of beauty, modernity or sophistication (Ledin & Machin, 2019). The halo effect is evident at the representational level, as the favourable qualities communicated through the participants' appearances are extended to the products and the brand's wider cultural identity.

Within social media environments, where visual content is central to brand communication, aesthetic presentation provides resources for positioning products within particular visual and symbolic meanings. A well-groomed appearance and coordinated accessories can give the brand's products a pleasing 'glow' and raise their perceived value above and beyond usefulness. This visual presentation invites aspirational identification by connecting the products with a polished and sophisticated lifestyle, while also raising questions about the relationship between modest fashion and materialism. The brand's lifestyle may begin to connect with viewers by appealing to their interests. For example, a rather plain and simple *hijab*, like the one shown in Figure 1, can look much more sophisticated when paired with well-chosen aesthetic elements. The picture is aestheticised by accessories such as appealing jewellery or sunglasses. In these situations, the halo effect draws attention to the overall sophistication of the products rather than their simplicity and usefulness. Consequently, the aesthetic presentation foregrounds the products and constructs them as visually desirable and symbolically valuable. This suggests that the products are represented through their aesthetic and symbolic qualities rather than their practical functions alone. Aesthetics therefore operate as both adornment and a persuasive representational resource within fashion branding. However, we would like to emphasise that the analysis does not establish whether this visual desirability results in greater audience attention, purchasing behaviour or increased sales.

Besides accessories, the participants are also depicted wearing makeup as part of their overall presentation. This detail appears to be part of the overall visual styling rather than an incidental feature. Makeup contributes to a polished and cohesive appearance that complements the clothing and accessories. It adds another layer to the halo effect by extending the refined qualities of the participants' appearance to the fashion items they wear. Their luminous and seemingly flawless complexions further contribute to this idealised presentation, although it cannot be determined from the pictures alone whether digital enhancement was used.

In Figure 2, the participants appear almost flawless, with radiant and glowing skin. Although the advertised products such as *hijabs* are not directly related to facial products and cosmetics, the presence of carefully refined faces plays a significant role in shaping the visual impact of the image and the participants. This beauty-centred presentation generates a halo effect, whereby positive attributes associated with the participants, including youthfulness, confidence, and elegance, transfer to the products they wear. Within the composition, the positive qualities communicated through the participants' polished appearances are extended to the *hijabs* they wear. This scenario can be interpreted as a visual branding strategy in which smooth complexions, polished makeup and coordinated styling position the products within an idealised aesthetic of beauty and fashion. Through this idealised representation of beauty and fashion, the products are visually positioned as part of a wider ecology of elegance, confidence and contemporary femininity.



Figure 2 Radiant makeup to elevate the *hijab*'s overall appeal

4.2 Objects: The 'Loudness' of Props

In promoting fashion products on social media, brands rarely limit themselves to showing clothing and accessories alone. dUCK, for instance, often builds an entire scene around its products. Its posts include household elements such as couches, pillows, dining tables, flower-filled vases, candles, curtains, cabinets, lamps, paintings and indoor plants. These details contribute to the overall mood of the image and provide interpretative cues through which the featured products can be understood. This becomes even more noticeable in Figure 3. Items like the Monopoly set and measuring spoons are not presented for their practical use. Apparently, these objects are not presented according to their practical functions. The board game is not being played, and the measuring spoons are not being used for cooking. Instead, they form part of a carefully arranged setting that draws attention to their visual appearance. Within this composition, ordinary household items become associated with refinement and

luxury. The halo effect operates through this transfer of meaning, as the aesthetic qualities of the surrounding setting extend to the objects placed within it. As a result, simple items are represented as more elegant and visually distinctive than they might appear in an everyday setting.



Figure 3 Household furnishings and props as part of aestheticisation

As seen in Figure 3, the visual arrangement contributes to the halo effect by extending the qualities of the surrounding environment to the featured products. When fashion items are placed within carefully styled domestic or lifestyle settings, they become associated with elegance and exclusivity. Familiar activities, such as sitting on a couch or standing beside a window, are transformed through soft lighting, selected props and deliberate composition. Figure 4 demonstrates how these staged surroundings create an aspirational visual narrative in which both the products and the participants are presented as polished, refined and desirable.



Figure 4 Accessories and props are used to signify sophistication and luxury

Instead of using plain or neutral backgrounds, the pictures incorporate props to produce more elaborate and suggestive compositions. As shown in the second picture in Figure 4, accessories are photographed from above and arranged alongside potted plants and candles. These elements introduce associations with comfort, luxury and contemporary sophistication. Although they are unrelated to the products' practical functions, they create a visual environment through which the products acquire additional symbolic meanings. Their premium positioning therefore comes from the qualities of the overall composition rather than from any demonstrated functional or material superiority.

Burgin (1982, as cited in Machin, 2016) argues that the meaning of an artwork is not fixed but depends on the position from which it is interpreted. When approached as documentation, a picture may be understood as a record of a particular moment or event (Machin, 2016; Machin & van Leeuwen, 2016). In other words, a different reading or interpretation emerges when it is approached from an aesthetic or emotional perspective. Meaning therefore develops through the relationship between the visual composition and its interpretation.

A similar process can be observed in fashion imagery. Props do more than occupy the background; they contribute to the aesthetic character of the scene and make particular interpretations more readily available. Within this setting, the fashion items are framed as desirable, while the identity projected by the brand becomes more visually recognisable. As a result, a halo effect starts to develop. The meticulously selected environment enhances both the aesthetic of individuals wearing the fashion items and the perceived value of the items themselves. In this setting, the fashion is framed as desirable, while the brand's intended identity becomes more visually recognisable.

4.3 Mesmerising Settings

The next category of analysis focuses on the settings that serve as the background in the pictures examined in this study. Ledin and Machin (2020) explain that settings play a significant role in creating meaning by reflecting cultural values and social ideals, albeit symbolically. When products are placed against particular backgrounds, the setting provides visual cues through which the products and their associated brand values can be interpreted. A product photographed in a natural environment, for instance, may suggest simplicity or purity. An urban backdrop, on the other hand, can signal modernity or sophistication. On Instagram, backgrounds, lighting, colour and composition are important parts of how a brand presents itself. The setting therefore does not merely support the product, but it ultimately becomes part of a larger story that the brand is trying to tell.

Figure 5 illustrates this through the use of a natural environment. The greenery and open surroundings introduce associations with calmness, simplicity and authenticity. These qualities contrast with dUcK's premium positioning, allowing luxury and simplicity to exist within the same composition. The halo effect becomes relevant because the positive meanings associated with nature are also extended to the products. The picture consequently positions premium fashion alongside purity and authenticity. However, the visual analysis cannot determine whether audiences regard the products as more relatable, meaningful or appropriately priced.

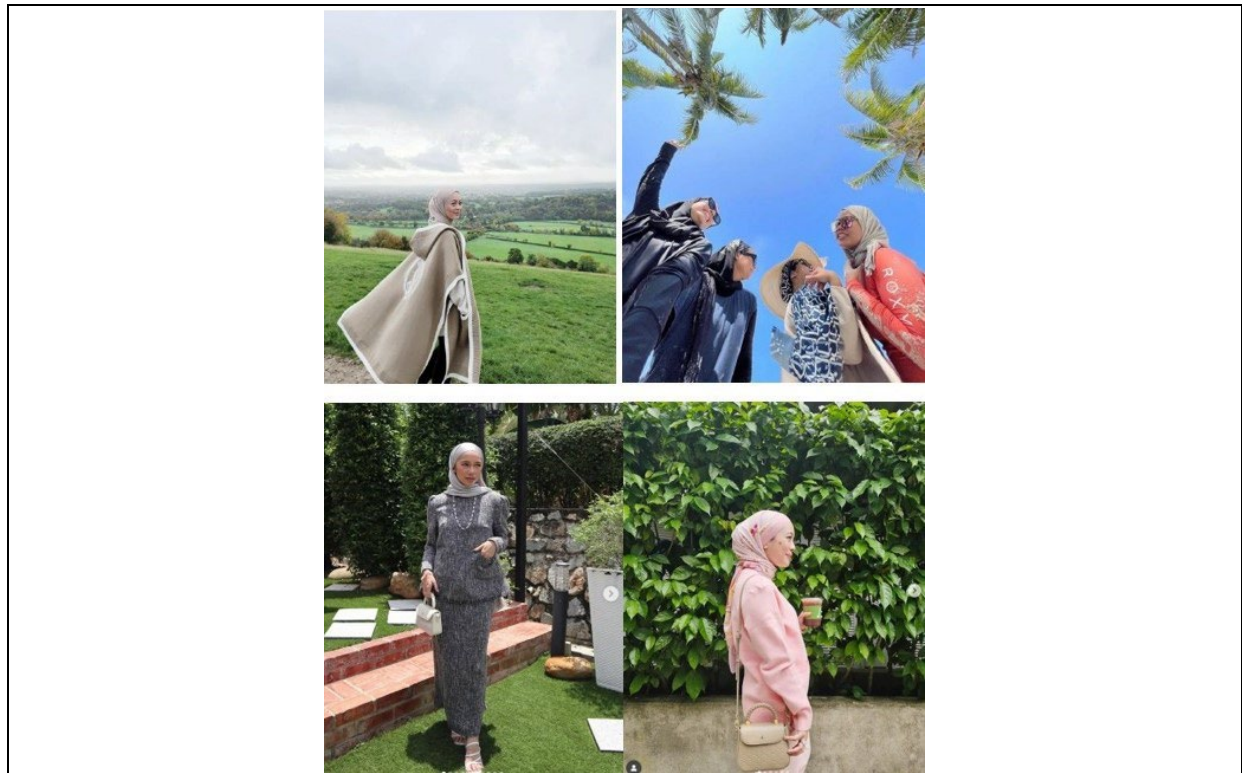


Figure 5 Pictures using a natural setting to show simplicity and authenticity

Figure 6 presents the products against urban backgrounds resembling well-known international cities. Although some may not represent actual locations, their design draws on familiar images of global city life. These stylised settings introduce associations with travel, cosmopolitanism and cityscapes place dUCk within an imagined global fashion environment. The halo effect emerges as the polished, cosmopolitan qualities of the settings extend to the products, framing them through meanings of prestige and premium status. By invoking pictures of international elegance, the brand is positioned as more aspirational and appealing, constructing its attractiveness beyond a purely local frame of reference.

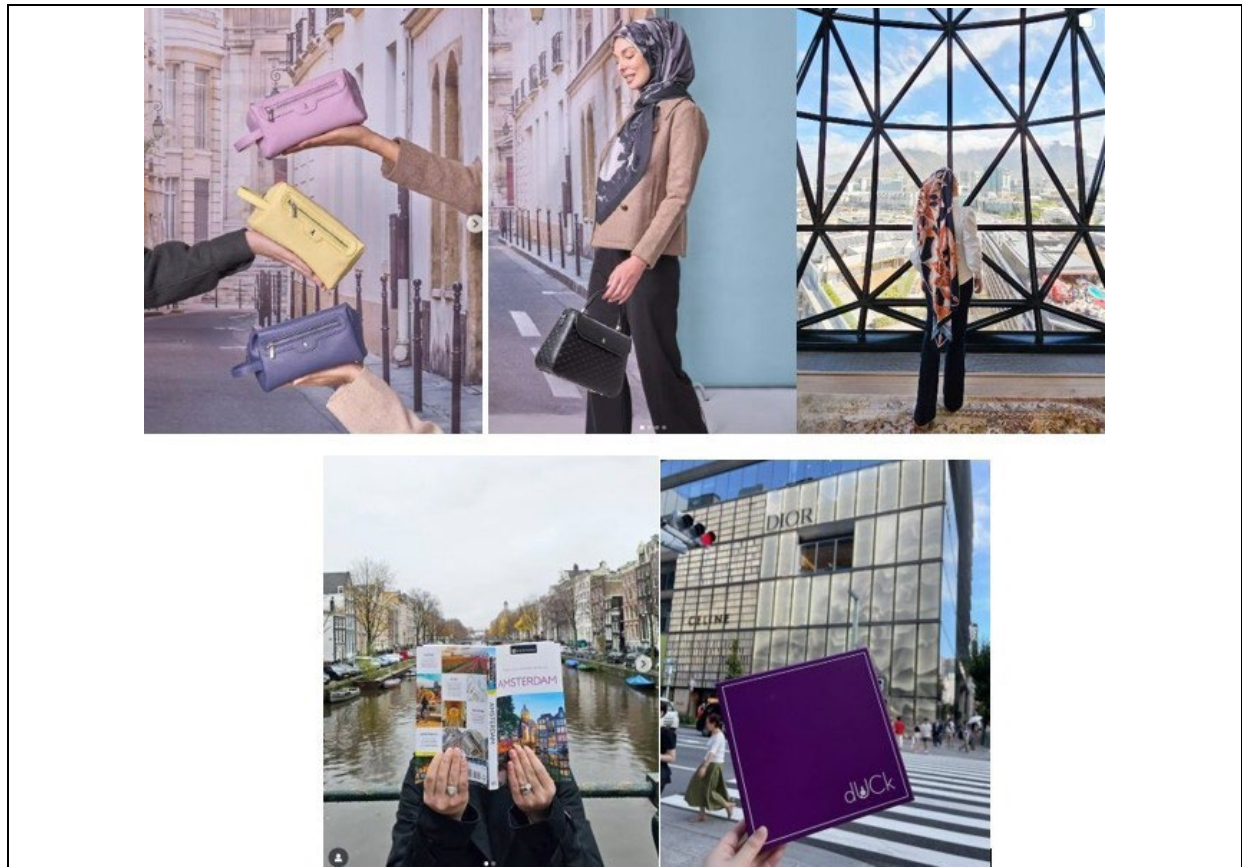


Figure 6 How urban backdrops are modelled on famous cities and brands to evoke global sophistication

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Implication of the Study

In order to investigate how the halo effect acts in the visual representation of the brand's products, this study looked at dUCK's Instagram material from 2022 to 2024 utilising three analytical dimensions, namely participants, objects, and setting that are drawn from Ledin and Machin's (2020) multimodal framework. According to the analysis, aestheticisation is central to dUCK's brand communication and provides preferred ways of interpreting its visual material. Meaning in fashion advertising is not restricted to the direct representation of products. It is also constructed through aesthetic and affective resources that encourage viewers to read the pictures as expressions of particular lifestyles, identities, and values.

Through its carefully constructed visual arrangements, dUCK develops aspirational narratives that connect its products with cultural relevance, contemporary expressions of modesty and an idealised way of life. The aesthetic elements used in these pictures are therefore not simply decorative additions intended to make the products look attractive. Instead, they function as important meaning-making resources that communicate the brand's values and strengthen its broader identity within the modest-fashion industry (Zulkifli & Rajandran, 2024). The visual storytelling on Instagram can also be understood as a persuasive representational strategy that reinforces particular ideas about identity, femininity, and lifestyle. Within these representations, branded consumption is presented as compatible with modesty rather than as something that contradicts religious or cultural expectations. At the same time, the products are associated with sophistication and a contemporary form of Muslim femininity that brings together religious identity, modern fashion and an aspirational consumer lifestyle.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study relate to the meanings constructed through dUCk's Instagram pictures rather than to any measurable effects these pictures may have on audiences. The study did not examine user comments, engagement statistics, consumer interviews, purchasing records or sales data. Therefore, it cannot determine whether the visual strategies employed by the brand directly influence purchasing decisions, increase sales or generate consumer loyalty. What the analysis demonstrates instead is how participants, objects and settings work together to create associations with sophistication, exclusivity and desirability within dUCk's visual discourse. These associations help position the products within an aspirational and premium lifestyle and may contribute to the construction and strengthening of the brand's halo effect. However, further audience-based research would be required to establish whether consumers recognise or respond to these meanings in the ways suggested by the visual analysis.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study is limited by its focus on a relatively small selection of Instagram pictures published between 2022 and 2024. The findings therefore cannot be used to make broad claims about dUCk's overall communication strategy or to determine how consistently the halo effect appears across all of the brand's social media content. The results are also specific to dUCk and should not be treated as representative of the marketing practices of other established modest-fashion brands in Malaysia, such as Naelofar and Ariani. Future studies could examine how these brands construct the halo effect through their own visual and branding strategies. A comparative study involving several brands would offer a broader understanding of how different aesthetic choices are used to engage intended audiences and communicate shared cultural or religious values.

Future research could also extend beyond visual branding by examining the role of social media influencers in the modest-fashion industry. Influencers often function as opinion leaders whose public identities may contribute to brand awareness, image formation and the communication of particular lifestyles. Examining how they promote modest-fashion products, represent Muslim femininity and negotiate commercial, cultural and religious values could reveal important patterns in digital marketing. It would also be useful to investigate whether the messages communicated by influencers correspond with the identities and values projected by the brands they represent. Such research could determine whether influencer partnerships strengthen the halo effect and establish how widely this strategy is used across the modest-fashion industry.

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Che Nooryohana Zulkifli contributed to the conceptualisation of the study, data analysis and drafting of the manuscript. Rajandran Kumaran contributed to the literature review, data organisation and provided critical feedback on the manuscript structure and content. Both authors read and approved the final version of the article.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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