

# *From Cultural Identity to Fashion Design Decisions: Developing Evidence-Based Guidelines for Iranian Fashion Designers*

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DOI: [10.22059/jdt.2026.411778.1189](https://doi.org/10.22059/jdt.2026.411778.1189)

Received: 22 February 2026, Revised: 3 April 2026, Accepted: 18 April 2026, Available Online from 18 April 2026.

## **A**bstract

*Iranian fashion designers face the challenge of expressing Iranian–Islamic cultural identity while creating garments that remain contemporary, wearable, and appropriate across everyday contexts. Although previous studies have discussed identity and modest dress, they provide limited guidance that can be directly used in fashion design practice. This study aimed to develop evidence-based design guidelines by identifying consumer meanings of Iranian–Islamic fashion and refining them through expert evaluation. A sequential qualitative multi-source design was used. In Phase 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 urban Iranian women aged 20–40. In Phase 2, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 fashion professionals, including designers, stylists, brand managers, pattern makers, and educators. Data were coded in ATLAS.ti 23 and analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The findings from both phases were then integrated through a triangulation matrix that classified insights as convergent, complementary, or discordant. Consumer interviews identified seven themes, including dignity and respectability, elegance through simplicity, cultural recognizability without cliché, context-fit, social judgment management, comfort and material practicality, and bounded modernity. Expert interviews translated these themes into design considerations related to silhouette, layering, materials, cultural referencing, and prototyping checks. The final synthesis produced a structured set of actionable guidelines for concept development, collection planning, and sampling. The study contributes an empirically grounded and context-specific framework for translating consumer meanings of Iranian–Islamic dress into design implications and actionable fashion guidelines in the Iranian context.*

## **K**eywords

*Iranian–Islamic Fashion, Cultural Identity in Dress, Modest Fashion Design, Evidence-Based Design Guidelines, Fashion Design Decision-Making.*

## Introduction

In contemporary Iran, fashion operates as a visible interface between cultural identity, social legitimacy, and everyday practicality. Designers must create garments that read as Iranian–Islamic yet remain contemporary, wearable across settings, and able to navigate social expectations and judgment. This is challenging because modesty is not a single aesthetic rule but a shifting practice shaped by religiosity, self-expression, and social belonging (Bucar, 2017; Manzoor et al., 2024; Shin et al., 2025). Iran-focused studies further suggest that “Islamic–Iranian identity” is often reduced to narrow visual cues (e.g., coverage) and not coherently integrated with other design elements, pointing to a design-translation problem rather than a lack of cultural resources (Jahanpour & Zarezadeh, 2020).

Despite research on identity, dress, symbolism, and the expanding modest fashion market, there remains limited designer-ready, evidence-based guidance grounded in consumers lived meanings. This gap matters more as clothing meaning is socially produced and rapidly mediated (e.g., online shopping journeys), reshaping what counts as “appropriate,” “authentic,” and “stylish” in practice (Shin et al., 2025; Alserhan & Alserhan, 2012; Alqahtani et al., 2025). Broader fashion scholarship also highlights rising demands for responsible value creation and credibility, where consumers respond more to concrete cues (quality, comfort, trust, narrative coherence) than abstract value claims (Schiaroli et al., 2024). Related evidence shows cultural symbols and craftsmanship can influence emotional attitudes and purchase intention, but effects depend on how cultural elements are selected and interpreted, not merely their presence (Lai et al., 2025). Together, these studies imply a need for a systematic pathway to translate cultural identity into actionable design decisions, silhouette, layering logic, materials, motif placement, and storytelling, aligned with consumer meaning and social context.

Accordingly, this study elicits everyday consumers’ meanings of Iranian–Islamic fashion, translates them into actionable design guidelines, and then refines those guidelines through expert review focused on feasibility, implementation, and design risk. Methodologically, it follows contemporary qualitative standards emphasizing transparent thematic reasoning and explicit interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022), guided by:

**RQ1:** *What meanings do urban Iranian consumers associate with Iranian–Islamic fashion?*

**RQ2:** *How do norms, situations, and practical constraints shape these meanings and choices?*

**RQ3:** *How can these insights be converted into actionable design decisions and guidelines?*

## Literature Review

### 1. Cultural identity, dress, and meaning-making

Dress is a socially legible system through which people negotiate identity, belonging, respectability, and legitimacy in everyday life. In value-laden contexts, what “fits” is shaped not only by taste but by situational norms, anticipated judgment, and the moral meanings attached to appearance. Modest dress research shows that “modesty” is a context-dependent practice combining coverage, aesthetics, dignity, and self-expression, interpreted differently across communities and occasions (Bucar, 2017; Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Manzoor et al., 2024). Increasingly, digital and market infrastructures mediate how modest and identity-coded dress is learned and evaluated: platforms and influencers accelerate hybridization, intensify comparison, and reshape what counts as “appropriate” or “authentic,” often turning moral meanings into consumable style signals (Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Manzoor et al., 2024). Market-level dynamics also matter; institutional work in clothing markets influences how norms evolve, legitimacy is built, and “acceptable” styles circulate and stabilize (Ghaffari et al., 2019). Together, these strands suggest that identity meanings and constraints are co-produced through social interpretation, mediated visibility, and institutional structures rather than individual preference alone.

## 2. Iranian–Islamic aesthetics in contemporary contexts

Within Iran, Iranian–Islamic aesthetics are commonly discussed through modesty norms, symbolic references, and tensions between authenticity and modernity. Yet research suggests a recurring “translation” problem: identity may be treated as a surface layer (e.g., coverage or decorative cues), while coherence across silhouette, proportion, materiality, and overall visual grammar is less consistently articulated as an integrated system (Jahanpour & Zarezadeh, 2020). Iran-focused studies on dressing also reinforce that meaning is lived and contextual. For instance, qualitative work examining girls’ narratives of dressing in Iran foregrounds how colors, patterns, and styles carry situated meanings shaped by media, social expectations, and local context, underscoring that “identity” emerges through interpretation and constraint, not merely through designer intent (Daneshmehr & Hassankhani, 2022). More recent work analyzing Iranian public controversies around hijab further suggests that dress-related meanings can become politicized assemblages entangled with objects, bodies, media, and public discourse, an environment in which everyday choices are negotiated under heightened symbolic pressure (Zahrani et al., 2025). Taken together, these studies support your focus on capturing *consumer-articulated* meanings and the situational pressures that shape them, rather than relying on fixed or purely formal definitions of Iranian–Islamic aesthetics.

## 3. Translating meaning into design decisions

The core challenge is not only identifying cultural meanings but translating them into designer-ready decisions. Design research argues that culturally grounded design requires a transparent pathway from cultural context and values to actionable concepts, rather than intuition-led “inspiration”; recent frameworks specify steps to study users’ cultural context, synthesize situated differences, and translate values into design concepts, consistent with a “*theme, implication, guideline, example decision*” logic (Dhadphale, 2024). Related work shows how cultural characteristics and storytelling are operationalized into innovation and product concepts, while cross-cultural scholarship stresses integrating values, norms, and aesthetics in ways that respect cultural specificity and support contemporary usability (Gumulya et al., 2023; Chen, 2025).

Translation is also ethically fragile: cultural references can slip into stereotyping, tokenism, or appropriation when symbols are detached from meaning systems or used without contextual integrity. Consumer research demonstrates how “*appreciation*” versus “*appropriation*” is negotiated and can reshape legitimacy and consumption, and stakeholder analyses of apparel scandals show that perceived misuse can damage trust, underscoring the need for guidelines addressing semantic integrity, crediting, and responsible referencing, not just visual borrowing (Cruz et al., 2024; Maiorescu-Murphy, 2021). Sustainability-oriented research adds a practical constraint: values matter when converted into credible product cues and narratives, and this is especially salient in Iranian modest fashion contexts where brand value is co-created through user–brand meaning-making rather than communicated unilaterally (Haghbin et al., 2025). Reviews show sustainable apparel behavior is constrained by trust, information, and perceived trade-offs, making value claims fragile unless grounded in tangible attributes and believable stories, and empirical studies find cultural symbols and craftsmanship can strengthen emotional connection and purchase intention when elements are carefully selected and framed, supporting structured translation into decisions rather than superficial ornamentation (Schiaroli et al., 2024; Schiaroli et al., 2025; Sinha et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2025; Saepudin et al., 2023).

This translation challenge is also relevant to adjacent work on structured design toolkits. For example, Lee et al. (2024) show that scenario-based and user-oriented tools can support more systematic decision-making in inclusive fashion design. Their work is important because it demonstrates the value of explicit design-support structures rather than intuition-led development alone. However, such toolkits are not designed specifically for Iranian–Islamic fashion or for the translation of culturally situated modesty meanings into context-sensitive design rules. The present study extends this line of thinking by offering a culturally specific and empirically grounded translation framework tailored to Iranian fashion practice.

#### 4. *Restating the gap*

Across these literatures, three points converge: identity-coded dress meanings are situational and socially negotiated, increasingly shaped by media and market infrastructures (Bucar, 2017; Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Manzoor et al., 2024; Ghaffari et al., 2019); Iran-specific evidence shows these meanings and constraints are lived and narrated in context and can be intensified by public discourse and controversy (Daneshmehr & Hassankhani, 2022; Zahrani et al., 2025); and although cultural and sustainability research recognizes cultural meaning, credibility, and responsible referencing, it still offers limited designer-ready guidance that converts consumer meanings into usable decision rules (Dhadphale, 2024; Chen, 2025; Cruz et al., 2024; Schiaroli et al., 2024; Sinha et al., 2023; Lai et al., 2025). Accordingly, the key research need is an empirically grounded bridge that elicits consumer meanings of Iranian–Islamic dress, specifies the normative/situational/practical constraints shaping them, and translates the resulting themes into explicit and actionable design decisions and guideline statements. The contribution of this study is not to propose a universal theory of modest fashion, but to develop an empirically grounded, context-specific translation framework that links consumer meanings of Iranian–Islamic dress to design implications, expert refinement, and actionable guideline statements for fashion practice.

A further reason for an Iran-focused guideline framework is that modest fashion meanings are not identical across Muslim-majority contexts. Research from Turkey and Indonesia, for example, shows that modest fashion is shaped by social media mediation, influencer culture, hybridized style norms, and locally specific negotiations of piety, fashionability, and public legitimacy (Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Gökariksel & Secor, 2009; Bagdogan, 2023; Jones, 2007; Shin et al., 2025). These studies are highly relevant, but they do not provide directly transferable guidance for Iranian fashion design, where the interaction between cultural recognizability, social judgment, everyday feasibility, and anti-cliché identity expression takes a distinct form (Bayat & Hodges, 2024). The value of the present study therefore lies not in claiming universal modest fashion rules, but in specifying how consumer meaning and design translation operate in the Iranian context.

## Methodology

This study employed a sequential qualitative multi-source design to develop evidence-based, designer-oriented guidelines for Iranian–Islamic fashion design. The research was conducted as completed empirical work in three linked phases. Phase 1 explored consumer meanings and everyday constraints associated with Iranian–Islamic fashion. Phase 2 examined expert perspectives on feasibility, implementation, and design risk. Phase 3 integrated the findings from both datasets through structured triangulation in order to generate the final guideline set.

### 1. *Research timing and context*

Data collection was conducted in May 2025. Phase 1 involved interviews with urban Iranian women, and Phase 2 involved interviews with fashion professionals. The interviews were conducted in Persian. Where excerpts or summaries were translated into English for reporting and analysis, translation was carried out carefully to preserve meaning equivalence.

### 2. *Participants and sampling*

Phase 1 included 30 urban Iranian women aged 20–40 recruited from Islamic Art University of Tabriz. Phase 2 included 15 fashion professionals, including designers, stylists, brand managers, pattern makers, and educators, each with at least 3 years of relevant professional experience in fashion practice. Participants were selected using purposive maximum-variation sampling. In Phase 1, variation was sought across age, everyday dress practice, and level of engagement with fashion in order to capture a range of meanings attached to Iranian–Islamic fashion. In Phase 2, variation was sought across professional role and area of fashion expertise so that the feasibility, risks, and design implications of the consumer-derived themes could be examined from multiple practice-based perspectives. The purpose of this sampling strategy was not

statistical representativeness, but the inclusion of participants with different experiences relevant to the research questions.

### **3. Recruitment procedure**

Participants were recruited through posters distributed in student communication channels at Islamic Art University of Tabriz, which directed interested individuals to a registration form. A total of 58 individuals completed the form. After screening for eligibility and relevance to the study criteria, 49 individuals were considered eligible and contacted for participation. Of these, 45 agreed to participate and were scheduled for interview. Thirty participants were included in Phase 1 and 15 participants were included in Phase 2. Four eligible individuals declined participation after contact, and no participant withdrew after the interview had begun. Because the invitation was circulated openly through university communication channels, the total number of individuals who viewed the poster could not be determined.

### **4. Ethical considerations**

This study was a non-interventional, minimal-risk qualitative interview study. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to decline to answer any question or to withdraw at any point before completion of the interview. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. To protect privacy, data were collected and processed in anonymized form, no identifying personal information was retained in the analytic dataset, interview materials were stored securely and used only for research purposes, and participants were not asked to disclose sensitive personal information beyond what was necessary for the study. According to the applicable institutional policy governing anonymous, minimal-risk qualitative interview studies involving voluntary adult participants and no clinical, physical, or psychological intervention, formal ethics committee review was not required for this study. Nevertheless, the research was conducted in accordance with core ethical research principles throughout, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and secure data handling.

### **5. Data collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. In Phase 1, interviews explored how participants defined Iranian–Islamic fashion, which visual and material cues they associated with authenticity or inappropriateness, how meanings shifted across everyday settings, and how practical factors such as comfort, climate, maintenance, and anticipated social judgment shaped clothing choices. Example prompts included: “How would you describe Iranian–Islamic fashion in everyday life?”, “What makes a design feel culturally appropriate or inappropriate to you?”, and “How do your clothing choices change across different settings such as university, work, commuting, or family gatherings?”

In Phase 2, interviews focused on the translation of these meanings into design practice, including feasibility, production constraints, styling limits, risks of cliché or tokenism, and the refinement of consumer-derived insights into design decisions and guideline statements. Example prompts included: “Which consumer meanings can be realistically translated into design decisions?”, “What production or material constraints shape these decisions?”, and “What kinds of cultural references risk becoming cliché, tokenistic, or misinterpreted in contemporary fashion practice?”

The interviews were conducted by the researcher in a semi-structured format. Interviews lasted approximately 20–30 minutes in Phase 1 and a comparable duration in Phase 2, depending on participant availability and depth of response. All interviews were recorded with participant permission and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The transcripts were then de-identified prior to coding.

### **6. Researcher reflexivity**

Because this study used Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the role of the researcher was understood as interpretive rather than neutral or fully detached. The researcher’s background in fashion and cultural design informed familiarity with the topic, but reflexive attention was maintained throughout the research process in order to avoid imposing fixed assumptions on participants’ accounts. Reflexive memos were kept during

coding and theme development, analytic decisions were documented in an audit trail, and emerging interpretations were revisited iteratively across the dataset. This process supported transparency in how meanings were interpreted and translated into design implications.

## 7. Data analysis

The interview data were managed and coded in *ATLAS.ti* 23. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach. The researcher had prior qualitative research training in interview-based analysis and used *ATLAS.ti* as a tool for data management rather than as a substitute for interpretive analysis. First, the researcher familiarized herself/himself with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and preliminary note-taking. Second, initial codes were generated inductively from the interview material in relation to meanings, judgments, contextual shifts, and practical constraints associated with Iranian-Islamic dress. Third, related codes were compared and clustered into candidate themes within each phase. Fourth, the candidate themes were reviewed against both the coded extracts and the broader dataset to assess coherence, distinction, and relevance to the research questions. Fifth, the themes were refined, named, and defined more precisely. Sixth, the final analytic narrative was developed and linked to design implications.

All coding and theme development were conducted by the researcher within a reflexive thematic framework. In this approach, coding was treated as an iterative and interpretive analytic process rather than as a positivist procedure aimed at achieving coder consensus through formal inter-rater reliability statistics. For this reason, formal inter-rater reliability measures were not used. To strengthen analytic rigor, developing codes, candidate themes, and theme boundaries were critically reviewed by the researcher through iterative reflection and re-examination of the data. Analytic decisions were documented throughout the process in reflexive memos and an audit trail. This procedure supported transparency and critical reflection in the movement from initial coding to the final seven themes.

Phase 1 and Phase 2 were first analyzed separately in order to preserve the specificity of each dataset. After phase-specific themes had been developed, a structured triangulation matrix was used to compare consumer themes with expert confirmations, refinements, and contradictions. Integrated insights were classified as convergent, complementary, or discordant. Rather than removing discordant insights, these were retained analytically and translated into boundary conditions or conditional decision rules. The final guideline set was then developed through an explicit synthesis chain linking theme, design implication, actionable guideline, and example decision.

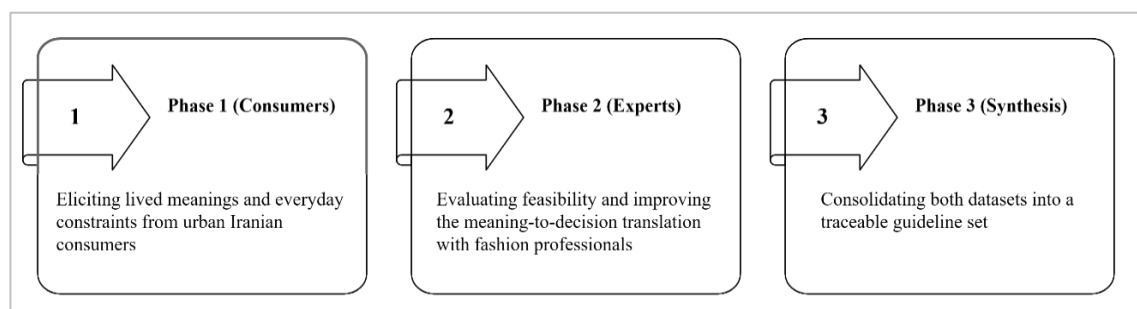


Figure 1: Research Conduct

## 8. Trustworthiness

Several steps were taken to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. These included maintaining an audit trail of coding and theme development, using reflexive memoing throughout the analytic process, and returning a concise summary of developing themes to a small subset of participants for feedback. Together, these procedures supported the credibility, transparency, and defensibility of the interpretation and of the translation from empirical findings to actionable design guidance.

## Results

This section presents the findings in three linked stages corresponding to the analytic progression of the study. First, Phase 1 findings are reported as a consumer-derived meaning landscape of Iranian–Islamic fashion. Second, Phase 2 findings show how these consumer-articulated meanings were refined by fashion professionals into more explicit design, feasibility, and risk considerations. Third, the integration stage is presented through triangulation, showing where the two datasets converged, where expert input extended or operationalized consumer meanings, and where tensions emerged that required boundary conditions or conditional decision rules rather than simple agreement.

The results are reported in a way that makes the analytic movement more transparent than in the earlier version of the manuscript. Rather than presenting themes as isolated labels, the following subsections show how the analysis moved from patterned participant meanings to expert refinement and then to integrated implications for design decisions. Tables 1–3 therefore function not merely as summaries, but as analytic displays linking empirical material to interpretive claims. This structure is especially important because the contribution of the study lies not only in identifying what Iranian–Islamic fashion means to consumers, but in demonstrating how those meanings can be translated into designer-relevant guidance without reducing cultural identity to fixed aesthetic formulas.

### **1. Consumer-derived themes: the meaning landscape of Iranian–Islamic dress**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the Phase 1 interviews produced seven themes that together describe Iranian–Islamic dress as a context-dependent framework of meaning rather than as a single fixed visual formula. The analytical progression moved from repeated familiarization with the interview transcripts to inductive coding, clustering of related codes, development of candidate themes, and iterative refinement of final themes. The resulting themes were not derived from isolated keywords or one-off topical mentions, but from recurring interpretive patterns concerning dignity, appropriateness, cultural recognizability, practicality, and bounded self-expression across everyday settings.

Across the consumer interviews, Iranian–Islamic fashion was not described as a narrow category of garments or a checklist of visible features. Instead, participants articulated it as a mode of dress evaluation shaped by social legibility, context, bodily comfort, and anticipated judgment. In the interview material, garments were assessed not only in terms of whether they appeared “covered,” but in terms of whether they communicated dignity, looked refined rather than excessive, felt culturally recognizable without becoming costume-like, adapted well across situations, reduced social risk, and remained wearable under everyday conditions. In this sense, the consumer data suggest that Iranian–Islamic fashion is experienced as a layered meaning system in which aesthetics, morality, practicality, and public readability are continuously intertwined. Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the Phase 1 interviews moved from repeated transcript familiarization to inductive coding, clustering of related codes, development of candidate themes, and iterative refinement of final themes. The seven themes reported below were not derived from isolated keywords or single-topic mentions, but from patterned meaning structures that recurred across interviews and were reviewed against the dataset as a whole. Table 1 therefore presents each theme together with its core meaning, representative code groupings, participant coverage, and illustrative participant paraphrased quotations in order to demonstrate that the themes remained grounded in the interview material rather than being imposed deductively by the researcher.

#### **Respectability and dignity**

The first major theme concerned respectability and dignity. Participants repeatedly associated Iranian–Islamic dress with seriousness, composure, self-respect, and social legitimacy. What mattered here was not merely physical coverage in a narrow or technical sense, but the total impression produced by the garment. Clothing was expected to appear balanced, stable, and socially readable in a way that conveyed self-possession rather than carelessness, theatricality, or overt display. Participants often described this in terms of wanting a look that felt “*proper*,” “*composed*,” “*serious*,” or “*worthy of respect*” in public settings.

Importantly, this theme was not reducible to moral vocabulary alone. In the interview material, dignity often appeared through references to proportion, visual order, fit, and the ability of an outfit to communicate coherence rather than disruption. A garment could technically meet expectations of modesty and still fail this criterion if it looked visually unstable, poorly coordinated, or overly attention-seeking. For that reason, dignity emerged as a social reading produced through the overall construction and appearance of the outfit rather than through a single design feature.

### **Elegance through simplicity**

The second theme concerned elegance through simplicity. Participants frequently linked appropriateness and beauty to visual restraint, refined simplicity, and an absence of unnecessary excess. Rather than valuing ornamental density or highly demonstrative styling, many associated Iranian–Islamic fashion with clean lines, balanced proportions, controlled palettes, and a composed visual order. Simplicity in this sense did not mean emptiness or lack. Rather, it referred to an aesthetic of deliberate restraint in which harmony and refinement took precedence over accumulation. This theme often overlapped with dignity, but it remained analytically distinct because participants specifically framed beauty and appropriateness through the language of visual calmness, non-excessive detail, and understated elegance. Simplicity was valued not because participants rejected fashionability, but because they associated elegance with coherence, moderation, and refined visual order. The data therefore suggest that “simple” was often used positively, as a sign of maturity, refinement, and aesthetic discipline.

### **Cultural recognizability without cliché**

A third theme concerned cultural recognizability without cliché. Participants did not reject cultural reference; rather, many explicitly wanted Iranian–Islamic identity to remain visible in dress. At the same time, they drew a clear boundary against what they perceived as exaggerated, theatrical, costume-like, or overly literal symbolism. What participants preferred were subtle and integrated cultural cues rather than enlarged motifs, direct emblematic repetition, or design gestures that reduced identity to decorative performance. This theme is important because it shows that consumer meanings of cultural identity were already reflexive and selective. Participants did not call for absence of reference, but for forms of reference that felt rooted, contemporary, and non-caricatured. In the interview material, this often appeared in distinctions between garments that “*felt Iranian*” and those that merely “*looked symbolic*,” between subtle resonance and forced signaling, and between authenticity and cliché. The consumer data therefore already contained a strong anti-tokenistic logic even before expert refinement began.

### **Context-fit and situational switching**

The fourth and most widely distributed theme concerned context-fit and situational switching. Participants consistently emphasized that the meaning of Iranian–Islamic dress changes across settings and audiences. A garment that feels appropriate in one environment may not function in another. University, professional settings, commuting, family occasions, and public visibility each imposed different expectations regarding formality, layering, movement, visual intensity, and interpretive risk. Appropriateness therefore emerged as situational rather than universal. This theme was central because it organized many of the others. Dignity, simplicity, recognizability, and comfort were all interpreted through context. Participants described the need to shift or recalibrate clothing choices depending on where they were going, who would be present, and how the setting shaped the likely public reading of the outfit. The interviews therefore suggest that adaptability was not merely an aesthetic preference but a practical and social requirement. At the same time, this adaptability was not understood as arbitrary change, but as calibrated switching between contexts that remain linked by an underlying shared meaning system.

### **Social judgment management**

A fifth theme concerned social judgment management. Participants repeatedly described dress as a way of managing the possibility of negative evaluation, unwanted attention, or misrecognition. This did not always appear as explicit anxiety; more often, it emerged through descriptions of being careful, avoiding misreading, or choosing garments that reduce the likelihood of being socially categorized in undesirable ways. In public settings especially, participants were attentive to the social consequences of garments that

might appear too revealing, too conspicuous, too trend-driven, or simply “*not right*” for the situation. This theme is analytically distinct from context-fit because it focuses not only on situational adjustment, but on anticipated evaluation. Participants were not merely matching garments to environments; they were also thinking ahead about how others might interpret them. This suggests that Iranian–Islamic dress, as understood by participants, is partly shaped by the management of public readability. Clothing choices therefore functioned not only as self-expression, but as a practical strategy for moving through environments where appearance is socially decoded.

### Comfort and material practicality

The sixth theme concerned comfort and material practicality. Participants made it clear that cultural appropriateness could not be separated from everyday wearability. Breathability, ease of movement, drape, climate suitability, ease of maintenance, and general comfort were all described as integral to whether a garment could function in daily life. Clothing that looked appropriate but felt heavy, clingy, hot, restrictive, or difficult to maintain was frequently described as unsuccessful in practice. This theme is analytically important because it challenges any purely symbolic account of identity-based dress. In the interviews, comfort was not treated as a secondary or optional design attribute. Rather, practicality functioned as a condition of viability. A garment could not sustain its intended cultural meaning if it failed under everyday conditions of motion, temperature, maintenance, and duration of wear. In that sense, material performance was not external to meaning, but one of its enabling conditions.

### Modernity and individuality

The final theme concerned modernity and individuality. Participants expressed a desire for contemporary relevance and some degree of personal style, but within limits that preserved social and cultural coherence. They did not describe Iranian–Islamic fashion as something that should remain static or historically fixed. Instead, many wanted clothing that felt current, fresh, and personally meaningful. However, this did not extend to unlimited experimentation. Rather, participants described a bounded form of individuality, one that allows interpretation, distinction, and contemporary styling without breaking the shared meaning system within which the clothing must still be read. This theme shows that the consumer data do not support a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. Instead, participants articulated a negotiated modernity in which newness was welcome when it remained compatible with dignity, context-fit, and recognizability. Modernity in the data was therefore not associated with rejection of Iranian–Islamic identity, but with its controlled re-expression in ways that remain wearable and socially legible. Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the Phase 1 interviews moved from repeated transcript familiarization to inductive coding, clustering of related codes, development of candidate themes, and iterative refinement of final themes. The seven themes reported below were not derived from isolated topical mentions, but from patterned meaning structures that recurred across interviews and were reviewed against the dataset as a whole. Table 1 therefore presents each theme together with its core meaning, representative code groupings, participant coverage, and an analytic paraphrase of participant accounts in order to show how the interpretation remained grounded in the interview material.

**Table 1:** Consumer-derived themes of Iranian–Islamic dress identified through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Phase 1;  $n = 30$ )<sup>1</sup>

Theme	Core meaning	Representative code groupings	Participants mentioning theme, n (%)	Illustrative participant account (paraphrased)
Respectability and dignity	Iranian–Islamic dress was associated with seriousness, composure, dignity, and socially legible self-presentation.	dignity, respectability, composed appearance, balance, seriousness, social legitimacy	27 (90%)	Participants described Iranian–Islamic fashion as clothing that should communicate seriousness, self-respect, and a composed public presence rather than visual provocation or disorder.
Elegance through simplicity	Participants linked appropriateness and beauty to restraint, visual order, refined simplicity, and non-excessive styling.	clean lines, minimal detail, harmony, refined simplicity, quality finishing	25 (83%)	Participants often associated elegance with simplicity, explaining that a design feels more appropriate when it is visually calm, well-finished, and free of excessive ornamentation.

<sup>1</sup> The proportion of Phase 1 participants whose interviews contained coded material relevant to each theme.

Cultural recognizability without cliché	Participants preferred culturally recognizable cues, but rejected costume-like, exaggerated, or superficial symbolism.	subtle heritage cues, authenticity, anti-cliché boundary, non-costume identity	22 (73%)	Participants wanted Iranian cultural identity to remain visible in dress, but emphasized that this should happen through subtle and authentic cues rather than theatrical or overly literal symbols.
Context-fit and situational switching	Appropriate dress was highly dependent on setting, audience, and situational expectations.	setting calibration, adaptability, modularity, formality switching, situational appropriateness	29 (97%)	Participants stressed that the same outfit cannot work in every situation and that Iranian-Islamic dress must be adjusted according to setting, audience, and everyday movement between contexts.
Social judgment management	Dress choices were shaped by concern about being judged negatively, attracting attention, or appearing socially inappropriate.	reputation protection, avoiding unwanted attention, label avoidance, evaluation risk	26 (87%)	Participants frequently described choosing clothes in ways that reduce the risk of negative interpretation, unwanted attention, or being seen as inappropriate in public space.
Comfort and material practicality	Wearability depended on comfort, climate suitability, mobility, maintenance, and fabric behavior in everyday use.	breathability, mobility, drape, wash durability, practicality, climate fit	24 (80%)	Participants explained that a garment cannot succeed as Iranian-Islamic fashion if it is uncomfortable, too hot, difficult to move in, or impractical for repeated daily use.
Modernity and individuality	Participants wanted contemporary expression and personal style, but within socially acceptable and culturally coherent limits.	trend moderation, individuality, innovation in cut, smart layering, controlled modernity	21 (70%)	Participants expressed a desire for clothing that feels modern and allows some personal signature, but not in ways that disrupt dignity, appropriateness, or cultural coherence.

As shown in Table 1, the themes functioned as patterned meaning structures rather than isolated topical mentions. The paraphrased participant accounts are included to illustrate the interpretive basis of each theme, while the participant-coverage column indicates how widely each pattern appeared across the Phase 1 interviews. The relational structure of these themes is summarized visually in Figure 2, which shows context-fit and situational switching as the central organizing theme linking the other consumer-derived themes. These themes were subsequently carried into Phase 2, where they were further refined in relation to feasibility, implementation, and design risk.

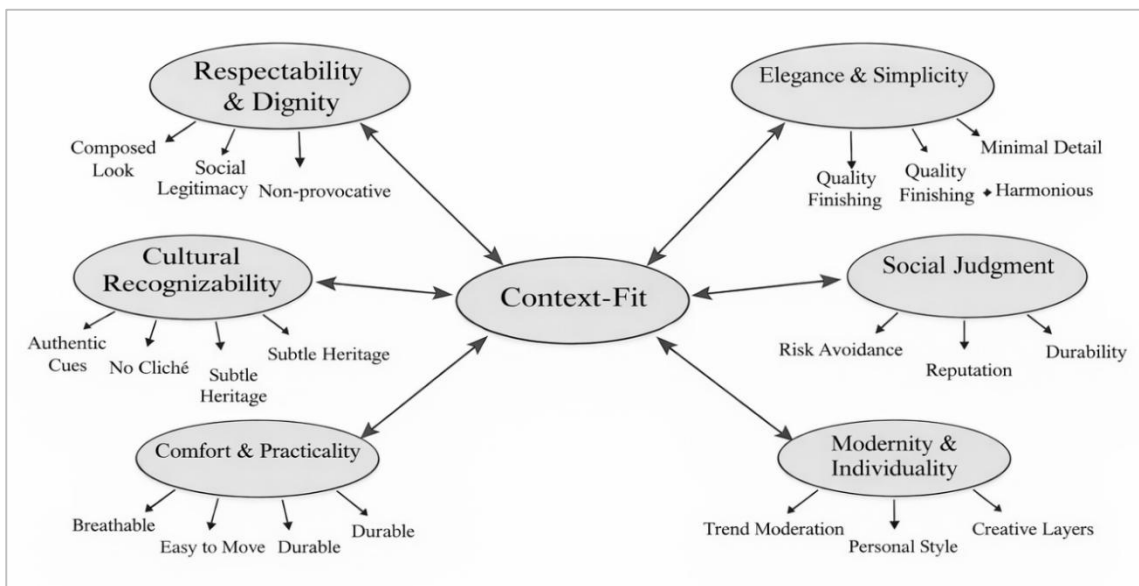


Figure 2: Thematic network of Phase 1 consumer-derived meanings of Iranian-Islamic dress

## ¶. *Expert-derived insights: translation, feasibility, and design risk*

Phase 2 did not function merely as a confirmation exercise. Instead, the expert interviews translated the consumer-derived themes into practice-oriented design logic by identifying where broad meanings required technical interpretation, where feasibility constraints limited direct application, and where risks such as cliché, over-layering, weak execution, or material misbehavior could undermine intended outcomes. The fifteen fashion professionals interviewed in Phase 2 treated the Phase 1 themes as realistic and recognizable, but repeatedly emphasized that these themes would be useful for designers only when expressed in terms of silhouette, layering architecture, material behavior, construction quality, motif logic, and prototyping requirements.

A major contribution of the expert phase was therefore to shift the language of the findings from consumer meaning to design consequence. Dignity was translated into visible technical controls such as fit stability, opacity, and finishing; simplicity was reframed as requiring stronger construction discipline rather than merely fewer details; and social judgment management was converted into testing procedures related to transparency, movement, and cling. In this sense, Phase 2 did not replace Phase 1, but acted upon it analytically by tightening broad cultural meanings into implementable and testable design considerations.

### **From adaptability to scenario-based design**

Experts strongly confirmed that context-fit was the central organizing principle of the consumer meaning landscape. However, they also argued that the consumer language of flexibility or switching across contexts needed to be made more specific if it was to inform design practice. Rather than treating adaptability as a generic goal, experts proposed that designers define a limited set of use scenarios, such as university daywear, professional work settings, public commuting, or family-formal occasions, and then specify what each scenario requires in terms of coverage stability, mobility, visual intensity, layering tolerance, and material performance.

This was one of the clearest examples of expert refinement. Where consumers emphasized the importance of switching across settings, experts converted that meaning into scenario-based design logic. They also introduced a feasibility warning that was not as visible in the consumer interviews: layering may appear to solve adaptation problems, but excessive layering can create heat discomfort, silhouette bulk, and visual inconsistency. Expert input therefore made clear that adaptability should be engineered through pattern, closures, layering logic, and fabric choice rather than treated as a matter of simply adding more components.

### **From dignity and simplicity to technical visual grammar**

Experts also refined the closely related themes of dignity and elegance through simplicity. While consumers described these in experiential and evaluative terms, experts reformulated them as a visible technical grammar. In their accounts, dignity was not primarily a moral abstraction but a design outcome produced through proportion control, coverage stability, opacity management, clean construction, and material credibility. Likewise, simplicity was not equated with plainness. Experts repeatedly stressed that minimal aesthetics increase the visibility of weak construction, poor finishing, unstable drape, or unresolved silhouette

This refinement matters because it makes the consumer themes practically actionable. The expert data suggest that garments intended to communicate dignity and refined simplicity require higher control over construction and material choices than garments that rely on decorative density to carry visual interest. Minimalism, in this reading, is not easier design but more demanding design. Expert input therefore translated these themes from broad consumer values into specific technical design conditions.

### **From cultural recognizability to integrated referencing**

The expert interviews were especially precise in relation to the anti-cliché theme. Experts strongly agreed with consumers that cultural recognizability should not be reduced to superficial symbolism. However, they pushed this further by distinguishing between integrated referencing and surface borrowing. In their accounts, Iranian-Islamic identity should be embedded through materiality, texture, rhythm, proportion, craft-informed detailing, and compositional logic rather than through isolated emblematic symbols applied

onto otherwise unrelated garments. This expert refinement also brought risks into sharper focus. Whereas consumers mostly described what felt forced or costume-like, experts explicitly named the problems of tokenism, oversized motifs, context-free references, repetitive symbolic use, and poor execution quality. The expert phase therefore sharpened the anti-cliché preference into a practical rule of semantic integrity: cultural reference must make sense at the level of scale, placement, production quality, and relation to garment architecture.

### **From social concern to prototyping safeguards**

The social judgment management theme also changed significantly in Phase 2. Consumers described the need to avoid being misread or attracting negative attention, but experts translated this concern into technical safeguards. They argued that garments often fail socially not because the designer intended the wrong meaning, but because fabric transparency changes in daylight, sleeves shift during movement, drape becomes clingy, or contrast and fit become more visually aggressive than expected in use. This was one of the clearest transformations from social meaning to design procedure.

Experts therefore recommended tests related to daylight opacity, movement stability, anti-cling behavior, neckline and sleeve security, and moderation of contrast or fit in higher-risk contexts. The implication is that judgment risk is not only a sociocultural matter but also a prototyping and fabric-performance issue. In this way, the expert phase made social readability materially testable.

### **Comfort as feasibility gate**

Experts strongly reinforced the importance of comfort and material practicality, but did so in stronger terms than consumers. While consumers treated comfort as essential to daily wearability, experts described it as a feasibility gate: if a garment does not perform in terms of breathability, drape, low-static behavior, mobility, and maintenance realism, it will fail as Iranian–Islamic fashion in practice regardless of its symbolic or cultural intention.

This expert framing is analytically important because it positions material performance not as a desirable add-on but as a threshold condition. It also connects the findings more directly to production realities, since experts linked performance requirements to local material availability, durability, climate conditions, and cost constraints. As a result, the comfort theme was refined from user preference into a design acceptance criterion.

### **Bounded modernity and controlled novelty**

The expert data also refined the modernity and individuality theme. Experts agreed that contemporary relevance matters and that garments must avoid appearing historically frozen. However, they insisted that novelty must be bounded if it is to remain coherent with the broader meaning system articulated by consumers. In practice, this meant encouraging innovation through cut, proportion, outer-layer architecture, and styling logic rather than through simultaneous accumulation of high-salience trend signals

This was another case in which expert input did not reject consumer desire but narrowed its practical range. Consumers wanted some degree of contemporaneity and personal signature; experts agreed, but reframed this as controlled novelty. Their concern was that overuse of trends, excessive motif manipulation, or uncontrolled silhouette experimentation could destabilize the garment's cultural and social readability. The resulting insight was therefore not anti-modern, but selectively modern. Phase 2 did not function merely as a confirmatory stage.

Rather, it translated consumer-articulated meanings into more explicit design logic by identifying where broad meanings required technical interpretation, where feasibility constraints limited direct application, and where specific design risks had to be addressed before guideline development. Table 2 therefore shows not only expert agreement with the Phase 1 themes, but also the specific ways in which expert input refined, narrowed, or operationalized those themes into implementable design considerations.

**Table 2:** Consumer-derived themes of Iranian–Islamic dress identified through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Phase 1; n = 30)<sup>2</sup>

Consumer theme from Phase 1	What consumers emphasized	Illustrative expert account (paraphrased)	What experts added, challenged, or refined	Resulting design translation
Context-fit and situational switching	Dress meaning shifts by setting; adaptability matters.	Experts emphasized that adaptability becomes useful in practice only when it is defined through specific use scenarios such as university, commuting, work, or family-formal occasions rather than treated as a vague design goal.	Experts agreed with the importance of adaptability, but argued that it must be translated into scenario-based design rules. They also warned that layering-based switching may create bulk, heat discomfort, and silhouette inconsistency.	Scenario-based design rules; modular adjustment through cut, closures, and controlled layering rather than indiscriminate added layers.
Respectability and dignity	Dignity, seriousness, and social legitimacy matter.	Experts explained that dignity is not communicated by symbolic intent alone, but by visible technical factors such as fit stability, opacity, proportion, clean construction, and finishing quality.	Experts translated dignity from an abstract value into visible technical qualities such as fit stability, opacity, proportion, and finishing.	Proportion control, clean construction, stable coverage, and finishing quality as design criteria.
Elegance through simplicity	Simplicity and refinement are preferred to excess.	Experts noted that minimal or restrained looks are especially demanding because poor finishing, weak pattern control, or unresolved silhouettes become more visible when ornament is reduced.	Experts agreed but stressed that simplicity requires stronger construction discipline; otherwise, it risks reading as plain or careless.	Ornament restraint, focal-point logic, silhouette clarity, and precision finishing.
Cultural recognizability without cliché	Identity should be visible but not costume-like.	Experts argued that cultural identity should be embedded through integrated material, texture, rhythm, and craft-informed detail rather than through enlarged symbols or repetitive decorative references.	Experts sharpened this into a distinction between integrated cultural referencing and superficial symbolic borrowing, and highlighted risks of tokenism and repetitive motif use.	Cultural cues embedded through materiality, rhythm, proportion, and craft-informed detailing rather than enlarged symbols.
Social judgment management	Participants anticipate judgment and avoid being misread.	Experts reframed judgment risk as partly a technical problem, noting that transparency in daylight, cling in motion, unstable sleeves or necklines, and excessive contrast can make a garment socially riskier than intended.	Experts reframed this as a prototyping issue, arguing that misreading often results from fabric behavior, transparency, cling, or movement instability rather than design intention alone.	Daylight opacity tests, movement checks, anti-cling controls, and moderation of fit/contrast in high-risk contexts.
Comfort and material practicality	Comfort, mobility, and fabric performance are essential.	Experts treated comfort as a feasibility threshold, stressing that breathable fabrics, workable drape, mobility, wash resilience, and maintenance realism are necessary for garments intended for repeated daily wear.	Experts positioned comfort as a feasibility threshold rather than a secondary preference, stressing maintenance realism and local material constraints.	Breathability, drape, low-static behavior, wash resilience, and realistic maintenance requirements.
Modernity and individuality	Consumers want contemporaneity and some personal expression.	Experts supported modern expression, but argued that it should be achieved through controlled innovation in cut, silhouette, and layering rather than through multiple trend-heavy signals in a single look.	Experts agreed but insisted that modernity must be bounded to maintain coherence with shared meaning systems and market feasibility.	Innovation through cut, silhouette, and layering architecture, with bounded novelty controls.

<sup>2</sup> How Phase 2 refined, operationalized, and in some cases constrained consumer-derived meanings in order to support guideline development.

Table 2 shows that the expert phase did more than confirm the plausibility of the Phase 1 themes. It transformed consumer-articulated meanings into implementable design logic by identifying where meanings required technical translation, where feasibility constraints narrowed possible applications, and where specific risks needed to be addressed explicitly before guideline development.

### **3. *Triangulation and integrated synthesis***

The final analytical stage brought the two datasets into dialogue through a structured triangulation matrix. The purpose of triangulation in this study was not to treat expert data as a simple validity check on consumer data. Rather, it was to identify how consumer meanings and expert feasibility assessments aligned, extended one another, or came into productive tension. This made it possible to distinguish between core rules that appeared strongly across both datasets, refinements that emerged when expert input operationalized consumer meanings, and discordances that required boundary conditions or conditional rules rather than generalized prescriptions.

The triangulation process revealed three broad patterns. First, there were strong convergences between the two datasets on the centrality of context-sensitive appropriateness, the importance of practicality, and the rejection of costume-like symbolism. Second, there were multiple complementary relationships in which experts converted consumer meanings into more precise technical and design-oriented terms. Third, there were genuine tensions, especially where consumer desires for flexibility, individuality, or visible identity encountered expert warnings about comfort failure, production limitations, silhouette instability, or semantic overstatement.

#### **Convergences**

The strongest convergence between the two datasets concerned the idea that Iranian–Islamic fashion functions as a context-dependent framework of dress meaning rather than a fixed style category. Both consumers and experts treated situational appropriateness as central. Likewise, both groups strongly rejected exaggerated or costume-like symbolism and preferred more subtle, integrated forms of cultural recognizability. Comfort and everyday feasibility also emerged as a zone of strong convergence. Consumers framed these in terms of lived experience, while experts framed them in terms of material thresholds, but the underlying logic was aligned: a garment cannot sustain the meaning of Iranian–Islamic dress if it fails in daily use.

#### **Complementarities**

Several themes showed complementary rather than identical relationships across datasets. Dignity and elegance through simplicity are the clearest examples. Consumers described these as values and visual impressions; experts turned them into design variables such as fit, opacity, finishing quality, ornament restraint, and focal-point logic. Social judgment management also functioned this way. Consumers articulated the social concern; experts specified the technical mechanisms by which garments become misread and therefore the tests required to prevent such failures. Modernity and individuality similarly moved from a broad preference for bounded self-expression to more explicit controls concerning trend use, silhouette experimentation, and production realism.

#### **Discordances and boundary conditions**

The clearest discordance concerned adaptability. Consumers strongly valued the ability to switch across contexts, but experts warned that one common way of achieving this, adding layers, could create heat discomfort, visual bulk, and silhouette inconsistency. This was therefore not a disagreement about values, but a disagreement about implementation. A second tension concerned cultural recognizability: consumers wanted identity to remain visible, but experts warned that making cultural reference more explicit could quickly produce tokenism or costume effects if not carefully integrated. A third tension concerned individuality and novelty. Consumers wanted contemporary relevance and some personal signature, whereas experts cautioned that excessive trend layering or high-salience novelty could break the shared meaning system that made the garment socially legible in the first place. These tensions were analytically

productive rather than problematic. Instead of treating them as contradictions to be hidden, the study retained them as evidence that design rules must remain conditional and situation-specific. In practice, this meant converting points of tension into boundary conditions, for example, adaptability only when layering is controlled, cultural visibility only when compositional integration is preserved, and individuality only when novelty remains bounded by dignity, practicality, and coherence.

**Table 3:** *Triangulation matrix integrating consumer meanings and expert feasibility assessments*

Theme	Consumer-side pattern	Expert-side response	Triangulation status	Illustrative tension or alignment	Integrated implication
Context-fit and situational switching	Consumers valued flexible switching across settings.	Experts supported adaptability but warned that layering-led switching may create heat, bulk, and silhouette inconsistency.	Discordant	Consumers emphasized adaptability as desirable; experts warned that some forms of adaptability undermine comfort and visual coherence.	Adaptability should be scenario-defined and engineered through cut/fabric planning; layering must be limited and controlled.
Respectability and dignity	Consumers described dignity as a key meaning.	Experts agreed and translated it into fit, opacity, construction, and finishing.	Complementary	Consumer value language was broad; expert input converted it into technical criteria.	Dignity becomes a quality-and-fit rule, not only a symbolic or moral descriptor.
Elegance through simplicity	Consumers valued restraint and simplicity.	Experts agreed but stressed that simplicity increases demands on pattern precision and finishing.	Complementary	Consumers framed simplicity as aesthetic restraint; experts reframed it as a higher construction burden.	Simple designs require stronger execution controls to avoid appearing careless.
Cultural recognizability without cliché	Consumers preferred visible but subtle identity cues.	Experts agreed but emphasized the risk that stronger symbolic reference may become tokenistic or costume-like if poorly scaled or placed.	Discordant / tension-sensitive	Consumers wanted recognizability; experts warned that increasing symbolic visibility can undermine authenticity.	Cultural referencing should remain integrated, subtle, and compositionally coherent rather than being intensified through isolated symbols.
Social judgment management	Consumers described fear of negative reading or unwanted attention.	Experts agreed and translated this into technical testing requirements.	Complementary	Consumer concern was social; expert response was technical and prototyping-based.	Judgment-risk concerns should be addressed through opacity, movement, cling, and fit testing.
Comfort and material practicality	Consumers prioritized comfort and everyday wearability.	Experts treated comfort as a non-negotiable feasibility gate.	Convergent	Strong alignment between everyday meaning and design feasibility.	Material performance must function as a threshold criterion in design selection.
Modernity and individuality	Consumers wanted personal style and contemporary relevance within limits.	Experts agreed but imposed bounded novelty and production-feasibility constraints.	Complementary / tension-sensitive	Consumers emphasized expression; experts emphasized coherence and production realism.	Modernity should be expressed through controlled innovation rather than trend overload.

The triangulation results show that the two datasets did not simply mirror one another. Instead, the integration process revealed a combination of convergence, operational refinement, and productive tension. This was especially visible where consumer desires for flexibility, recognizability, or individuality encountered expert concerns about comfort failure, tokenism, production feasibility, or silhouette instability. These tensions were retained in the analysis because they directly informed the conditional and boundary-based logic of the final guideline set.

## Narrative synthesis

Taken together, the integrated results show that Iranian–Islamic fashion is best understood as a negotiated meaning system in which dignity, appropriateness, cultural recognizability, practicality, and bounded modernity are co-produced across social interpretation and design feasibility. The consumer data established the meaning landscape; the expert data translated that landscape into design logic; and the triangulation stage revealed that useful guideline development depends not only on areas of agreement, but also on points of tension where consumer desire and expert feasibility do not align automatically.

This integrated picture is important because it prevents both oversimplification and false consensus. It shows, for example, that adaptability is important but must be engineered carefully; that cultural identity should remain visible but not over-signaled; that simplicity is valued but technically demanding; and that modernity is possible but bounded. The findings therefore justify the next step of the study: the development of evidence-based guidelines that move from consumer meaning, through expert refinement, into actionable design decisions without erasing the constraints and tensions revealed by the data.

The overall analytical progression can therefore be summarized as follows. Phase 1 identified Iranian–Islamic fashion as a context-sensitive meaning system organized around dignity, restrained elegance, non-cliché cultural recognizability, situational adjustment, social readability, practicality, and bounded modernity. Phase 2 translated these consumer-articulated meanings into implementable design logic by making explicit the roles of silhouette, construction, material performance, layering architecture, motif logic, and prototyping checks. Phase 3 integrated the two datasets in a way that retained both alignment and tension, showing that actionable guidance can only be robust if it acknowledges not only what participants want, but also what design practice can realistically support without undermining the intended meaning of the garment.

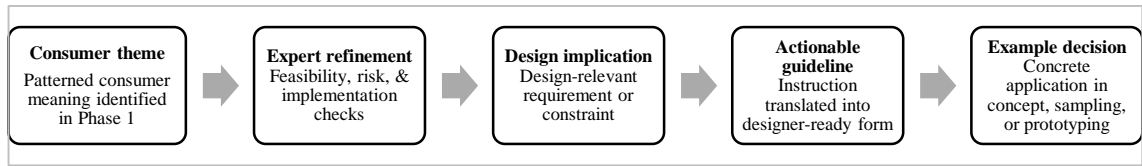
## Evidence-Based Guidelines for Iranian Fashion Designers

### 1. Guideline framework and translation logic

This section operationalizes the study’s practical contribution by translating the integrated findings from Phases 1–3 into a designer-ready guideline set for Iranian–Islamic fashion. The need for guidelines arises directly from the results: consumers articulated Iranian–Islamic fashion as a context-dependent meaning framework shaped by dignity, refined aesthetics, cultural recognizability, judgment management, and everyday feasibility, while experts emphasized that these meanings become usable only when converted into concrete decision rules for silhouette, layering architecture, materials, motif logic, finishing, and communication. Guideline development followed the study’s explicit translation chain (Theme, design implication, actionable guideline, example decision) to maintain analytic transparency and methodological consistency with Reflexive Thematic Analysis and the triangulation approach used to integrate datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022).

In this chain, a theme is treated as an interpretable meaning pattern and constraint structure; the design implication specifies what the theme requires from design variables; the guideline expresses this requirement as an action-oriented instruction; and the example decision illustrates how the instruction is applied in practice.

Triangulation strengthened the guideline set by differentiating the evidential status of rules. Convergent insights were treated as core rules (shared across consumers and experts), complementary insights became usability and feasibility refinements (adding production and risk-check logic), and discordant insights were preserved as boundary conditions or conditional rules to avoid overgeneralization. The resulting guidelines are action-oriented and intended for use in concept development, collection planning, sampling/prototyping, and brand storytelling, without reducing Iranian–Islamic identity to fixed symbols. This translation sequence is summarized visually in Figure 3 in order to show how integrated findings were converted into design implications, guideline statements, and example decisions.



**Figure 3:** Visual summary of the translation chain from integrated findings to design implications, actionable guidelines, and example decisions.

## 2. Guideline set

The integrated implications generated through Phase 3 triangulation were translated into a designer-ready guideline set using the study’s explicit chain (Theme, design implication, actionable guideline, example decision). Each guideline in Table 4 is action-oriented and clearly linked to the Phase 1 consumer meaning patterns and constraints, as refined by Phase 2 expert feasibility and risk checks. Convergent triangulation outcomes inform the core rules, complementary outcomes add implementation and usability detail, and discordant outcomes are retained as boundary conditions or conditional IF/THEN rules to avoid overgeneralization. The guidelines are intended to support concept development, collection planning, sampling and prototyping decisions, and culturally responsible communication and storytelling within Iranian–Islamic fashion. Table 4 presents the translation chain through which the integrated findings were converted into actionable guidelines for Iranian–Islamic fashion design.

**Table 4.** Translation chain from integrated findings to actionable guidelines for Iranian–Islamic fashion design

Integrated theme / evidence source	Design implication	Actionable guideline	Example decision
Context-fit and situational switching, refined by expert scenario-based logic	Design choices should be anchored in clearly defined wearing scenarios rather than generic “appropriateness.”	Define use-scenarios before designing and set targets for formality, coverage stability, and mobility.	Specify different targets for university-day, professional-work, commuting, and family-formal use before sketch development.
Context-fit theme with expert warning about bulk/heat from layering	Adaptability should be engineered through garment architecture rather than solved by excessive layering.	Build adaptability through cut, proportion, and components, not by indiscriminate addition of layers.	Use adjustable closures or reconfigurable outerwear instead of adding a heavy third layer.
Respectability and dignity, operationalized through expert refinement	Dignity must be translated into visible technical and structural garment qualities.	Use proportion control, clean construction, and coverage stability as dignity cues.	Stabilize neckline and sleeves, control ease, and prioritize finishing quality rather than decorative excess.
Elegance through simplicity, refined by expert restraint logic	Minimal or restrained design requires higher precision in silhouette and finishing.	Use one focal point, keep the rest visually calm, and tighten execution quality when the design relies on minimalism.	Restrict ornament to one controlled detail and ensure hem stability, seam clarity, and silhouette definition.
Cultural recognizability without cliché, strengthened by semantic-integrity concerns	Cultural identity should be embedded through integrated formal and material cues, not isolated symbolic borrowing.	Embed Iranian cultural identity through materiality, texture, rhythm, proportion, and craft-informed details rather than enlarged motifs.	Use culturally resonant texture or seam rhythm instead of placing a large overt emblem on the garment.
Social judgment management translated into technical safeguards	Social risk should be addressed through prototyping checks and fabric-behavior testing.	Test opacity, movement, cling, and coverage stability before finalizing prototypes.	Evaluate garments under daylight and movement conditions and adjust fabric or pattern where instability appears.
Comfort and material practicality treated as a feasibility gate	Material performance is a threshold condition for successful Iranian–Islamic fashion design.	Require breathability, non-cling drape, low-static behavior, and maintenance realism.	Exclude fabrics that are visually appropriate but perform poorly in heat, movement, or repeated wear.
Modernity and individuality bounded by coherence and feasibility	Contemporary expression should occur through controlled innovation rather than trend overload.	Update silhouette and layering architecture while preserving dignity, coherence, and cultural readability.	Introduce one contemporary proportion or cut update while keeping palette, ornament, and symbolic cues restrained.

### 3. Usability notes and scope conditions

Designers can use the guideline set as a practical workflow across the design process: establish scenario targets during concept development, translate core meanings into silhouette and construction decisions during pattern development, apply material-performance gate criteria during sourcing, and use prototyping checks (daylight opacity and movement stability) during sampling to reduce judgment-risk failures. At the collection level, the guidelines support coherent variation across scenarios (e.g., commuting, university, professional work, formal gatherings) while maintaining shared identity cues through integrated cultural referencing and restrained elegance. For communication and brand storytelling, the guidance promotes coherent, non-essentializing narratives by emphasizing coherent meaning systems and responsible cultural referencing rather than fixed symbols. Scope conditions should be considered when applying the guidelines. The consumer meaning landscape was derived from an urban, age-bounded sample, and the findings underscore strong setting dependence; therefore, scenario definition and conditional rules should be treated as central design controls rather than assuming universal applicability across regions, age groups, or audiences. The next section (Discussion) interprets these contributions in relation to the broader field and elaborates their theoretical and practical implications.

## Discussion

Across the integrated phases and guideline-translation logic, the findings suggest Iranian-Islamic fashion is best understood as a context-dependent framework of dress meaning rather than a fixed aesthetic. This aligns with modest fashion research showing modesty is enacted through situational norms, religiosity, self-expression, and belonging (rather than uniform visual rules), and with work showing mediated visibility reshapes what is read as “*appropriate*,” “*authentic*,” and “*fashionable*” in everyday life. In Iran, clothing meanings are likewise narrated and negotiated under locally situated pressures rather than reducible to formal codes, explaining why context-fit emerged as the strongest organizing logic shaped by setting expectations and audience sensitivities (Bucar, 2017; Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Manzoor et al., 2024).

The dignity/respectability cluster reflects design-relevant legitimacy work: public readability is managed through a visual-structural grammar, fit stability, construction quality, opacity control, and coherent proportions, so moral-social meanings are produced through technical execution as well as symbolism (Chen, 2025; Dhadphale, 2024). Elegance-through-simplicity similarly operates as coherence management across audiences; expert refinements highlight that minimalism increases sensitivity to patterning, finishing, and material credibility, consistent with evidence that consumers respond to tangible quality and trust cues (Schiaroli et al., 2024; Bucar, 2017). The anti-cliché identity theme aligns with warnings that detached symbols invite tokenism/costume readings; the emphasis on integrated cues (materiality, texture, rhythm, proportion, craft-informed details) supports arguments that culturally grounded design needs a systematic pathway from context/values to coherent concepts rather than surface borrowing, echoing concerns that Iranian-Islamic identity can be flattened into decoration (Jahanpour & Zarezadeh, 2020; Dhadphale, 2024). Judgment-risk management plus comfort/material practicality form the everyday feasibility layer: prototyping safeguards (daylight opacity, movement stability, anti-cling) make social risk testable, while maintenance realism and climate comfort reflect findings that practical barriers often determine whether value-aligned apparel choices persist (Schiaroli et al., 2024; Daneshmehr & Hassankhani, 2022). Finally, media/market mediation helps explain why meanings are both stable (shared dignity/appropriateness cues) and dynamic (context switching, trend boundaries): platform ecologies intensify hybridization and scrutiny, reinforcing bounded modernity and calibrated storytelling, while institutional work in fashion markets suggests legitimacy stabilizes through shared evaluative criteria, supporting the guideline set as a tool for designing within, and strategically shaping, those legitimacy structures (Karakavak & Özbölük, 2023; Ghaffari et al., 2019).

Compared with existing modest fashion and inclusive fashion design resources, including scenario-based and user-oriented toolkit approaches such as Lee et al. (2024), the present guideline set is more explicitly

grounded in Iranian consumer meanings and in the specific tensions identified between everyday dress expectations and expert feasibility assessments. Whereas existing structured resources such as scenario-based or user-oriented design toolkits help organize design decision-making in broader ways, the current framework is tailored to the Iranian context and places stronger emphasis on dignity, anti-cliché cultural recognizability, judgment-risk management, context-fit across everyday settings, and the translation of these meanings into conditional and scenario-specific design rules.

The study makes three linked contributions. Empirically, it maps a seven-theme meaning landscape through which urban Iranian consumers interpret Iranian–Islamic fashion. Methodologically, it demonstrates a context-specific translation process in which qualitative themes are refined through expert feasibility and risk assessment before being converted into design guidance. Practically, it offers a structured guideline set intended to support concept development, collection planning, prototyping, and communication in Iranian fashion design. The originality of the study therefore lies less in proposing a new general theory of fashion and more in making visible and explicit a design-relevant pathway from cultural meaning to design action in a specific context.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the consumer sample was restricted to urban Iranian women aged 20–40 recruited through a university setting, which means that the meaning landscape identified here should not be treated as fully representative of all Iranian women or all Iranian fashion users. Meanings associated with Iranian–Islamic dress may differ across age groups, non-university populations, rural or smaller-city contexts, and groups with different levels of fashion engagement or socioeconomic positioning. Second, the study was qualitative and interpretive in design; its purpose was to generate an empirically grounded and context-specific framework rather than statistically generalizable claims. Third, although the guideline set was refined through expert input, it was not implementation-tested through garment development, designer workshops, or user evaluation of finished collections. The findings should therefore be understood as analytically derived and practice-informed rather than as universally validated design rules.

## **C**onclusion

The contribution of this study should therefore be understood primarily as translational and practice-oriented rather than as a universal theoretical model of modest fashion. The study demonstrates how consumer meanings can be interpreted, refined through expert input, and converted into context-specific design guidance for Iranian fashion practice. However, the resulting guideline set should be understood as analytically derived and expert-refined rather than implementation-tested. Future research should examine the usability and effectiveness of these guidelines through prototyping studies, designer workshops, collection development processes, and user evaluation of garments developed with the framework.

This paper addresses a persistent design problem: Iranian fashion designers are expected to express Iranian–Islamic cultural identity while keeping garments contemporary, wearable, and socially legible across diverse everyday settings. The literature offers limited designer-ready, evidence-based guidance grounded in consumers’ lived meanings, and “identity” is often reduced to surface cues rather than integrated design logic. These challenges are intensified by context sensitivity (appropriateness shifts by situation), rapid media/market mediation that reshapes evaluation criteria, and the ethical fragility of cultural referencing, where cliché or tokenistic symbolism can undermine credibility. Feasibility constraints, materials, construction quality, climate comfort, and production capability, also mean meaningful concepts can fail if they do not translate into implementable decisions.

To close this gap, the study builds a traceable bridge from cultural identity to design decisions by addressing: what meanings urban Iranian consumers associate with Iranian–Islamic fashion (RQ1), how norms/situations/practical constraints shape those meanings (RQ2), and how insights can be converted into actionable decisions and guidelines (RQ3). The aim is both interpretive and translational, producing

guidance usable in concept development, collection planning, prototyping, and communication. The contribution is the integration of evidence, feasibility, and action through a sequential multi-source qualitative design (consumers, experts), Reflexive Thematic Analysis, a triangulation matrix, and an auditable translation chain (Theme, design implication, actionable guideline, example decision). Phase 1 interviews with urban Iranian women ( $n=30$ ) identified a meaning system organized around dignity/respectability, elegance-through-simplicity, non-cliché cultural recognizability, context-fit/switching, judgment-risk management, comfort/material practicality, and bounded modernity/individuality. Phase 2 expert interviews ( $n=15$ ) confirmed and sharpened these meanings into implementable rules, feasibility constraints, risk filters, and testable prototyping checks (e.g., opacity and movement stability), showing that judgment risk often stems from technical fabric behavior rather than intent. Phase 3 triangulation integrated convergences, complementarities, and discordances as boundary conditions, most notably the tension between consumer context switching and expert cautions that layering-based adaptability can create heat, bulk, and silhouette instability unless engineered and scenario-defined.

Practically, the guideline set (G1–G14) functions as decision support: it begins with scenario definition, specifies quality/fit cues for dignity and refined simplicity, embeds identity through integrated cues rather than isolated symbols, and includes sampling checks that reduce failures related to transparency, movement instability, and comfort. Overall, the study offers a structured pathway from cultural identity to design decisions that remains traceable to consumer meanings, tempered by expert feasibility, and usable for Iranian fashion practice.

### **Funding**

The authors declare that no funding was received for the conduct of this study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The qualitative interview data generated and analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and ethical restrictions associated with anonymized but potentially identifiable contextual material.

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