

HOME > RETAIL

# Modest fashion and plus-sized fashion rarely overlap — but experts predict a combination of those two billion-dollar markets could be the next big retail segment

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Plus-size Hijabi model Leah Vernon. Courtesy of Leah Vernon

**Demand for both modest fashion and plus-size fashion are steadily increasing around the world, yet the two markets, worth billions each, rarely overlap — only a few major brands cater to consumers wanting both.**

**Independent designers are finding success in the space these two groups of consumers meet, offering bold colors and flattering prints. Some tell Business Insider that larger retailers could cash in on this growing trend if they act fast.**

**Lebanese designer Dima Ayad says that if retailers ask designers to make plus-size and modest clothing, "most will agree, and undoubtedly they will sell."**

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Modest fashion is booming, amid the rising popularity of hijabi Instagrammers and projections of Muslims' growing spending power. The demand for stylish, plus-size fashion is also skyrocketing, thanks to activists calling for clothing to fit all body types. Both movements are fronted by runway stars such as Halima Aden, a Somali refugee who wears a hijab, and Ashley Graham, who champions body positivity. Both markets are valued in the billions. Yet they're rarely paired together.

Only a handful of big brands, including online retailer ASOS, sell clothes that cater to the combined demographic, and most modest fashion clothing lines only stock standard sizes. But both analysts and independent labels who have found success in this space tell Business Insider that modest, plus-size fashion is growing evermore popular — and that if large retailers act fast, they could cash-in on a lucrative market.

Historically, both modest and plus-size retail categories have lacked fashionable designs, instead appearing dowdy and matronly. Lauren Morrison, founder of UK-based trend forecasting service Fashion File, says that the motivations of plus-size consumers mirror those who buy modest fashion. "They have a good synergy together because of how the consumer wants to view herself. She needs clothing that suits her [body or modesty guidelines] and that is a reflection of her personality, with colors and prints that are stylish."

Amna Abbas, a fashion and beauty consultant at Euromonitor International, says the fashion industry is becoming "more consumer-driven," and more "accepting that women come in all shapes and sizes, and want to dress according to their personalities."

Unlike most retailers, ASOS has sought to combine plus-size and modest fashion. The UK-headquartered website has a permanent modest fashion section, which can be filtered by "body fit" and includes clothing by American modest wear brand Verona, which launched in 2015 at New York department store Macy's, and produces many of its designs in sizes beyond XL. (An ASOS spokesperson tells Business Insider it aims to accommodate "the growing number of 20-somethings around the world who chose to dress modestly")

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A modest outfit by ASOS Curve. ASOS

"It's important for us to be inclusive for plus-size women," says Verona cofounder Lisa Vogl. "The majority of American women are size 12 (EU size 46) or larger. We want to be a brand that represents diversity in all aspects."

While other e-commerce and retail stores have dedicated modest wear sections, they fall short of inclusive sizing. Disgruntled with the lack of inches in mainstream, standard-sizing ranges, many entrepreneurs have launched their own brands catering to modesty-conscious consumers with curvier bodies.

Lebanese designer Dima Ayad, who was part of the launch team of now-defunct luxury-modest-wear e-tailer The Modist, started her eponymous label in 2010 centered on size-inclusive glamour. Now, her sequined midi-dresses with pleated designs, kaftan cuts, and wrap-silhouettes are stocked on 11 Honoré, the designer plus-size e-commerce platform that opened 2019's New York Fashion Week with a size-inclusive runway presentation, and in the same year received close to £8 million (\$10.59 million) in funding for strategic

expansion from investors including US department store firm Nordstrom.

"Guaranteed, the first size that always disappears off the shelves is the XL, purely because the way purchasing was done, was to only buy one or two units of that size," Ayad says, adding that larger sizes are particularly popular in modest fashion.

"In the world of modest wear, predominantly, women take one size up to ensure the fit is quite loose ... If she's an XL, she can't go up a size due to the fact that there is none.

"Designers don't showcase the breadth of the size range they can produce up to, because the question is never asked. If retailers ask designers to produce it, most will agree and undoubtedly they will sell."



Moving into plus-size modest wear isn't necessarily easy for retailers, because they must contend with the separate challenges of both markets. Fashion File's Morrison, who has studied the evolution of the UK's plus-size market, says retailers will need to conduct size metric studies to ensure clothes fit different body shapes and sizes. Quality is also key: If fabric is expected to stretch more when on larger bodies, it must be long-lasting and ideally, sustainable, says Euromonitor International's Abbas, who points to an increasing demand for eco-friendly fashion.

In modest dress, some labels, such as Mango, have been criticized for past collections that seemed to prioritize glamour and embellishments over actual "modest" silhouettes, while other collections utilize sheer textiles or unlined lace. "When targeting modesty, some international brands fall short of understanding that women look for pieces that are not made from see-through fabrics," says Abbas.

...ing, makes buying certain the... demographics you want to sell to, it's important to have their faces in front of the camera too.

"Underrepresented demographics are disproportionately ignored," says Morrison, who says it's essential for mainstream advertising to reflect the diversity of fashion consumers. For example, ASOS highlighted Black, hijab-wearing women on its homepage during Ramadan this year, and has started using hijabi models for some of its regular product shoots too. Online trading and financial spread betting website IG.com claims ASOS has outperformed rival high street platforms during the pandemic, and that its shares are expected to rise over the rest of 2020.

While these challenges may sound daunting for some retailers, overcoming them could prove lucrative. According to the latest annual "State of the Global Islamic Economy Report," consumer spending on retail by Muslims is expected to grow to £307 billion (\$405 billion) 2024. "While brands in the Middle East are creating modest wear without the label of 'modest fashion,' Western brands have huge potential to make modest wear catering to various body sizes, ensuring they market it in an attractive way to their target audience," says Abbas, emphasizing that the demand is diverse and internationally.

"Size availability and inclusion is really a must in today's world," added Ayad, the Lebanese designer. "It cannot be ignored and is definitely an additional revenue stream that once tapped into, will reap its returns."

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