Islamic Design Value: The Criteria of Design Pleased by Allah Based on Islamic Perspectives

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The primary purpose of good design is to fulfil consumers' needs and wants. This is because the global market has always been increasingly competitive than ever. Nevertheless, Muslims should always prioritise Allah SWT in every aspect of their lives, including in design. Unfortunately, this topic is rarely discussed and explored. Hence, this paper analyses the criteria of design based on Islamic perspectives, one that pleases Allah SWT, the Almighty God. Face-to-face interviews were conducted among Islamic scholars to explore their views on design criteria that align with Islamic principles. The findings were analysed using ATLAS.ti software, a qualitative data analysis tool, to systematically organize and interpret the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. The study highlights the importance of considering sustainability, ergonomics, aesthetics, Sharia compliance and fulfilment of human needs in design practices guided by Islamic principles. The findings serve as a guideline for designers, particularly Muslim designers, to create designs that please Allah SWT and contribute to a more inclusive and culturally sensitive design landscape. By integrating ATLAS.ti software into the analysis process, this study ensures rigor and transparency in the qualitative data analysis, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the research findings. Overall, the paper contributes to the discourse on design theory and practice within Islamic perspectives.

1. Introduction

Islamic design is often associated with religious symbols and aesthetics, such as geometric patterns, arabesques and calligraphy. However, there is more than that. Islamic design should be appreciated, criticised and analysed beyond the superficial stereotypes or assumptions. There is a concern that misinterpreting Islamic design within a specific design context leads to the misrepresentation of Islam in the eyes of the public. For example, cultural sensitivity in the design process is a critical consideration that requires careful attention and thoughtful engagement. The

lack of clear guidelines can result in a high risk of misuse that can damage a brand's reputation [1]. This paper emphasises that Islamic design interpretation is not limited to visual aesthetics and there are various ways of interpreting Islamic design. Islamic design is applicable and can be explored in various contexts. It provides a clear guideline of design criteria from Islamic perspectives and can be used by designers in their designs.

1.1 Existing Interpretation of Islamic Design

Religion is the pillar of many cultures around the world. As one of the largest religions in the world, Islam has become a lifestyle and shapes the identity of societies. In terms of design, "Islamic" is an aesthetic value and a design language that reflects the culture of people, for instance, ranging from the tiniest jewellery boxes to the scale of walled cities [2]. Figure 1 is an example of a building with Islamic design combining geometric ornaments in Islamic arts with architecture and focusing on geometric patterns' formalistic and aesthetic aspects.

Fig. 1. Stereotypical geometric treatments in public buildings [3]

Figure 2 shows different designs of face masks that are suitable for Hajj/Umrah pilgrims to use without violating Shariah law [4]. Most designs aim to cater to acute respiratory amongst Hajj pilgrims and provide personal preventive measures, hence contributing to easing the pilgrim while performing ibadah. This proves that the definition of Islamic design is not limited to visual interpretation. The designs mainly focus on Islamic design value, which is on functionality instead of a visual interpretation of Islamic design.

Fig. 2. Face mask designs used by Hajj/Umrah pilgrims as observed during field study [4]

1.2 Islamic Values in Design

Islam has values that can be applied in design, such as industrial equipment, furniture and interior design. Designing the interior of a space, for example, requires space planning, protecting privacy, comfort, safety, health, welfare, adequate facilities and respecting the environment [5,6]. Islamic interior design, in this sense, works as a platform to deliver and convey Islamic culture, values and identity [7]. Implementing Islamic values can usually be observed through buildings' exterior and interior designs, especially in mosques [8].

Figure 3 illustrates the layout designs of 24 mosques influenced by Islamic values and requirements, in which each mosque is built facing the direction of qibla.

Fig. 3. The interior layout designs of 24 selected mosques are influenced by Islamic values [9]

Figure 4 shows the interior layout of a traditional Malay house in Malacca with spaces that cater to different and specific needs and necessities; for example, the daughter's room is located far from the living room for privacy purposes and there are two entrances explicitly created for each gender, male and female for security purpose.
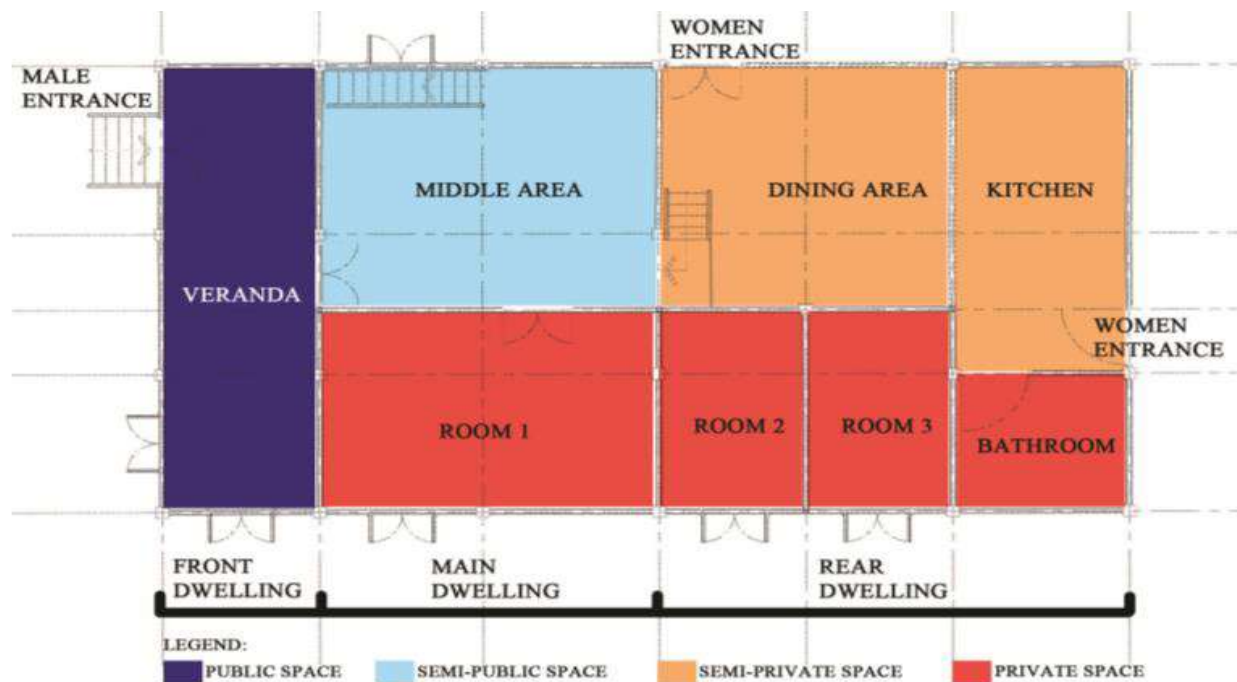
Fig. 4. Ordinary village dwelling layout plan [10]

1.3 Importance of Design Criteria

The industrial designer is an individual who practices professionally and places humans at the centre of the design process [11]. Most implement a user-centred approach to designing good products that focus on profit maximisation and human satisfaction, fulfilling human wants and needs. At the beginning of the design process, a designer must have product design specifications as a guideline to help designers achieve their design objectives. Table 1 shows a pilot study by Azman *et al.,* [4] conducted on various designs of face masks for Umrah/Hajj, which has an outcome of design specification, thus indicating the need for design specification in the design process. In this study, a face mask is designed based on the following aspects i.e.: quality, aesthetic, colour, ergonomics, legal, safety, style, technology and standard control [12].

Table 1
Product design specification (PDS) for face masks from a pilot study [4]

| Design Specification	Explanation
Universal design	It is usable by both genders, available in different sizes and usable by pilgrims with a beard, other facial hair and other conditions that prevent a good seal between the face and the sealing surface of the face mask.
Comfortable	Ergonomic: large breathing space (or dead space) for relaxed breathing; reduced facial covering without compromising the face mask efficiency.
Effectiveness	The therapeutic effectiveness of face masks against airborne infectious diseases is highly critical.
Low-cost	Low cost enables Tabung Haji to provide free face masks, as preferred by the pilgrims.

1.4 Good Design

Figure 5 demonstrates how a good design is closely interrelated with the designer's creativity and how a product can satisfy the consumers [13]. Good design can make products competitive, keep users happy and imply brand power, whereby the users are loyal to a particular brand and tend to

recommend it to others [3]. In other words, "good design" provides good products to the end-users. Good design is complex and has many attributes. How a good design is evaluated also depends on demographics, market segments and individual preferences; hence, defining the characteristics of a good design can be quite complicated. However, the significant design criteria or the good design attributes perceived by the user and the company are critical. The attributes of good design are categorised into two themes: customer- and company-related [14]. First, customer experience is paramount in sound design regarding ease of use, quality and emotional connection. A shared understanding of the definition and characteristics of good design is significant to designers when designing a good design product for end-users, as it ensures how the product should be created and becomes desirable to increase the market demand. Nevertheless, it was found that the existing designer's practice does not assimilate with Islamic teachings and values. Unconsciously, the concept of fulfilling human wants and needs means designers must prioritise consumers over Allah SWT. Supposedly, everything a human does should be for the sake of Allah. As stated in the Quran:

"It is You we worship and You we ask for help." (Al-Fatihah,1:5)

Furthermore, in Islam, all actions are judged by the intention (*nawaitu* or *niyyat*) behind them [15]. Thus, re-orientating the designers' design approach or intention towards Allah SWT in their practices is crucial.

Creativity of designer **+** Customer Satisfaction ⟶ Good Design
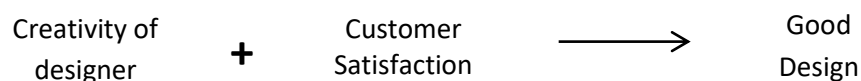
Fig. 5. The relationship between the designer and the consumer

1.5 Excellent Design that Pleases Allah SWT

Figure 6 formulated an excellent design concept that compromises the creativity of the designer and, at the same time, meets the user's satisfaction and Allah's pleasure. It will benefit all mankind if designers can facilitate humanity's pursuits of Allah SWT's pleasure through their designs. However, it is also imperative to find out why some designers are not keen on using their God-driven creativity and ideas to act like a Khalifah who can create excellent design products for the consumers and simultaneously obtain Allah SWT's pleasure. Without a God-oriented mindset, designers will only focus on fulfilling human wants and needs, which can make humankind become materialistic and lose their humanistic values.

Creativity of designer + Customers' satisfaction + Allah's pleasure ⟶ Excellent Design
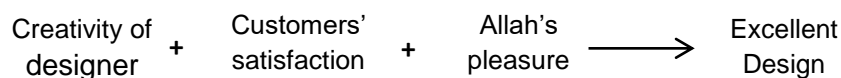
**Fig. 6.** Excellent design concept [15]

Figure 7 demonstrates three design categories i.e., good, excellent and ultimate. Excellent design, one step ahead of good design, focuses on pleasing both the people and the Creator (God). From an Islamic perspective, a design, no matter how good it is, will only surpass the "excellent" category if it pleases Allah SWT [8]. According to Ibn Kathir's Tafsir, this verse emphasizes that Allah is the ultimate Creator, the One who designs, brings into existence and perfects all things. He alone possesses the most beautiful and divine names (*Asma al-Husna*), reflecting His supreme attributes and sovereignty over all creation.

This interpretation is further supported by the following Quranic verse:

"He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; to Him belong the best names. Whatever is in the heavens and earth is exalting Him. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise." (Al-Hashr,59: 24)

"Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot and We made the clot into a lump (of flesh) and We made (from) the lump, bones and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators." (Al-Mukminun, 23: 14).
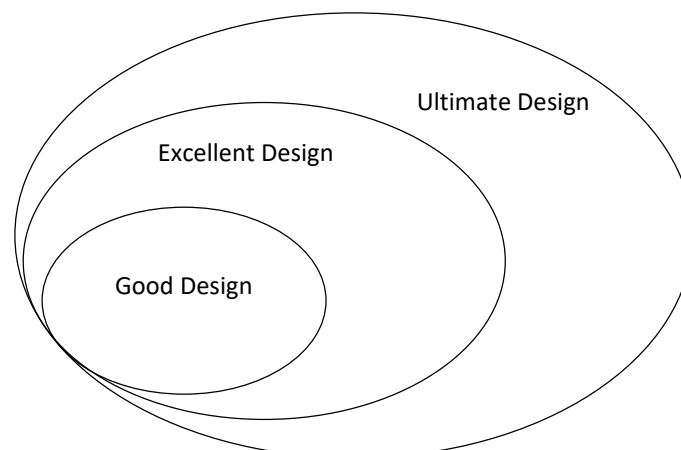
Fig. 7. Categories of design [16]

The mankind is created by Allah SWT in the best form, placed on the highest point in the hierarchy of creations and provided with *aql* (intelligence) as mentioned in the Quran [17]. Intelligence is a precious gift from Allah SWT that other creations do not have. Past civilisations have proven the amazing capabilities, skills, talents and knowledge of mankind. On the other hand, as the excellent design principles are based on the principles of *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah SWT) [18] the suitable criteria for an excellent design are that the product should ease, nurture and motivate Muslims to perform *ibadah* (rituals, duties and responsibilities performed to worship Him and manage other creations in this world).

2. Research Methodology

This study is society-based as it adapts interpretivism research philosophy and qualitative research [19]. Qualitative research uses verbal information extensively to obtain accurate, reliable and up-to-date information. As stated by Bryman [20], qualitative research typically emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (p.266), which was highly important in this case, as explanations were sought from experts and practitioners based on their perspectives. Since the nature of these studies is a humanistic qualitative method, interviews among Islamic scholars need to be conducted to gain input on the design criteria that can please Allah. To obtain input, face-to-face interview sessions were conducted with Islamic scholars to discover their views regarding the design criteria that please Allah based on the Islamic perspective. The interview schedule was designed to obtain data from the experts, who were Islamic scholars, to look at their views or feedback regarding the design criteria that can please Allah. As an operational definition of the experts in the interview session, they were labelled informants.

Table 2 lists the information of the informants who participated in the interviews.

Table 2
Information table for informant (Islamic Scholar)

Informant	Education Level	Field of Expertise	Experience in the Field
I1	PhD	*Usuluddin*	16 years and above
I2	PhD	Shariah	16 years and above
I3	PhD	*Dakwah*	16 years and above
I4	PhD	Shariah	16 years and above
I5	PhD	*Usuluddin*	16 years and above
I6	PhD	Al-Quran & Sunnah	16 years and above
I7	PhD	Shariah	16 years and above
I8	PhD	Shariah	16 years and above
I9	PhD	Al-Quran & Sunnah	16 years and above
I10	Master	Al-Quran & Sunnah	12 years and above
I11	Master	*Akidah*	16 years and above

In Figure 8, a screenshot of coding in Atlas.ti software is displayed. The interface shows a dataset similar to the provided table, with columns representing informant attributes such as "Education Level," "Field of Expertise," and "Experience in the Field." A pane for creating codes is visible on the right side of the interface, with codes generated to categorize informants based on their attributes. Each informant's entry is coded accordingly, allowing for systematic organization and analysis of the data. Additionally, the interface may feature tools for creating memos to provide context or insights for coded segments. The screenshot illustrates the process of coding and organizing data within Atlas.ti for practical analysis and interpretation.
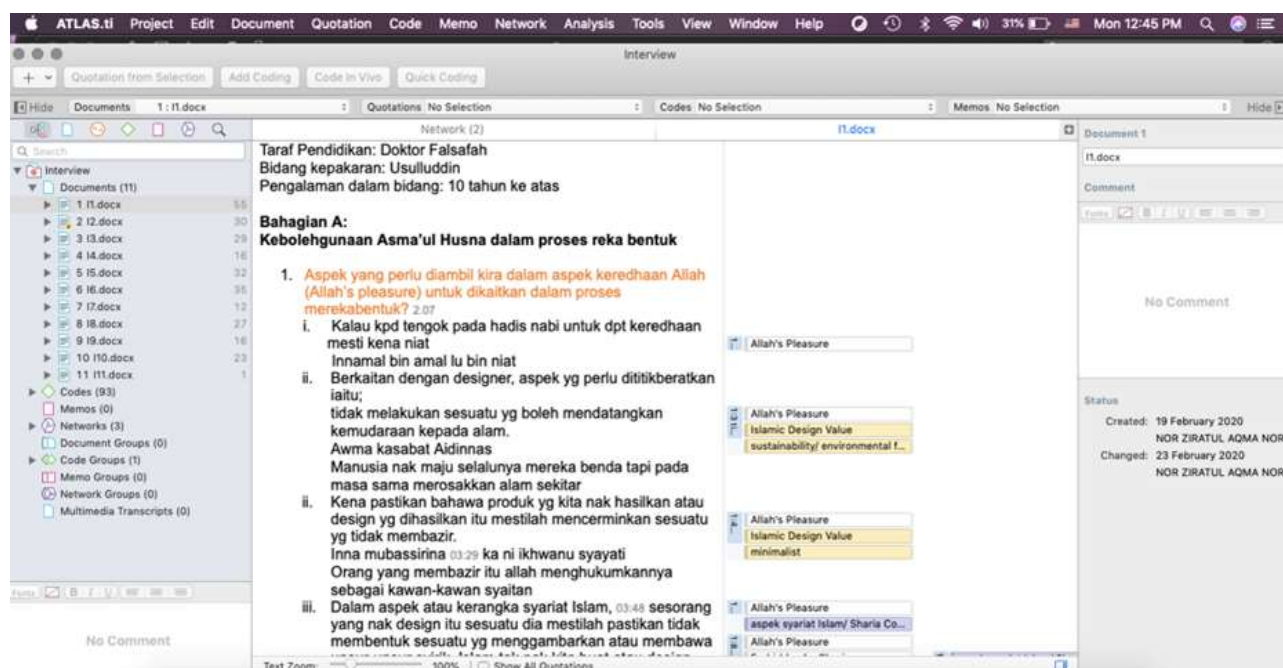
Fig. 8. Screenshot of coding in Atlas.ti

Meanwhile, the data collection involved eleven (11) experts in Islamic studies. The sample size was adequate and limited explicitly to eleven as it reached the saturation goal and redundancy across relevant characteristics and concepts. According to Dworkin [21], most references recommend 5 to 50 persons as an adequate sample size for qualitative research, especially when conducting in-depth expert interviews. This requires a smaller sample size than quantitative research.

3. Result and Discussion

Figure 9 shows that the criteria of Islamic design, which refers to "excellent design", are based on Islamic perspectives. In this sense, when designing, designers should consider the following aspects, i.e., sustainability, ergonomics, aesthetics, ibadah-friendly and shariah-compliant.

3.1 Sustainability or Environmentally Friendly

Figure 10 shows the linkages between sustainability and environmentally friendly criteria based on Islamic perspectives. Receiving the pleasure of Allah SWT through design requires a designer to design products that will not harm the environment [1]. This aligns with the views of I5 and I2, who stated that when designing, a designer, for example, should consider and foresee the environmental effects and whether the design can cause pollution, which is the opposite of Allah SWT's pleasure. I2 also proposed that a designer can use materials from natural sources. In this sense, this is related to the concept of *al-musowwir* [13], which refers to "creativity and innovation". In other words, it means that knowledge in design is not limited to design knowledge. According to informants I3 and I5, integrating knowledge, skills and talent can create innovation. These elements offer a creative boost or inspiration to the designer through his or her observation of Allah SWT's creations. Informants I2, I5 and I7 emphasized the potential for designers to draw inspiration from nature, including plants, animals and or any other His creations. This is related to individuals' positive attitude (*tasawuf*) or humility. An informant from I5 also explained that if a designer truly understands *al-mussowir*, he or she will not feel arrogant (*takbur*) since they understand that every inspiration (*ilham*) is a divine gift by Allah SWT.
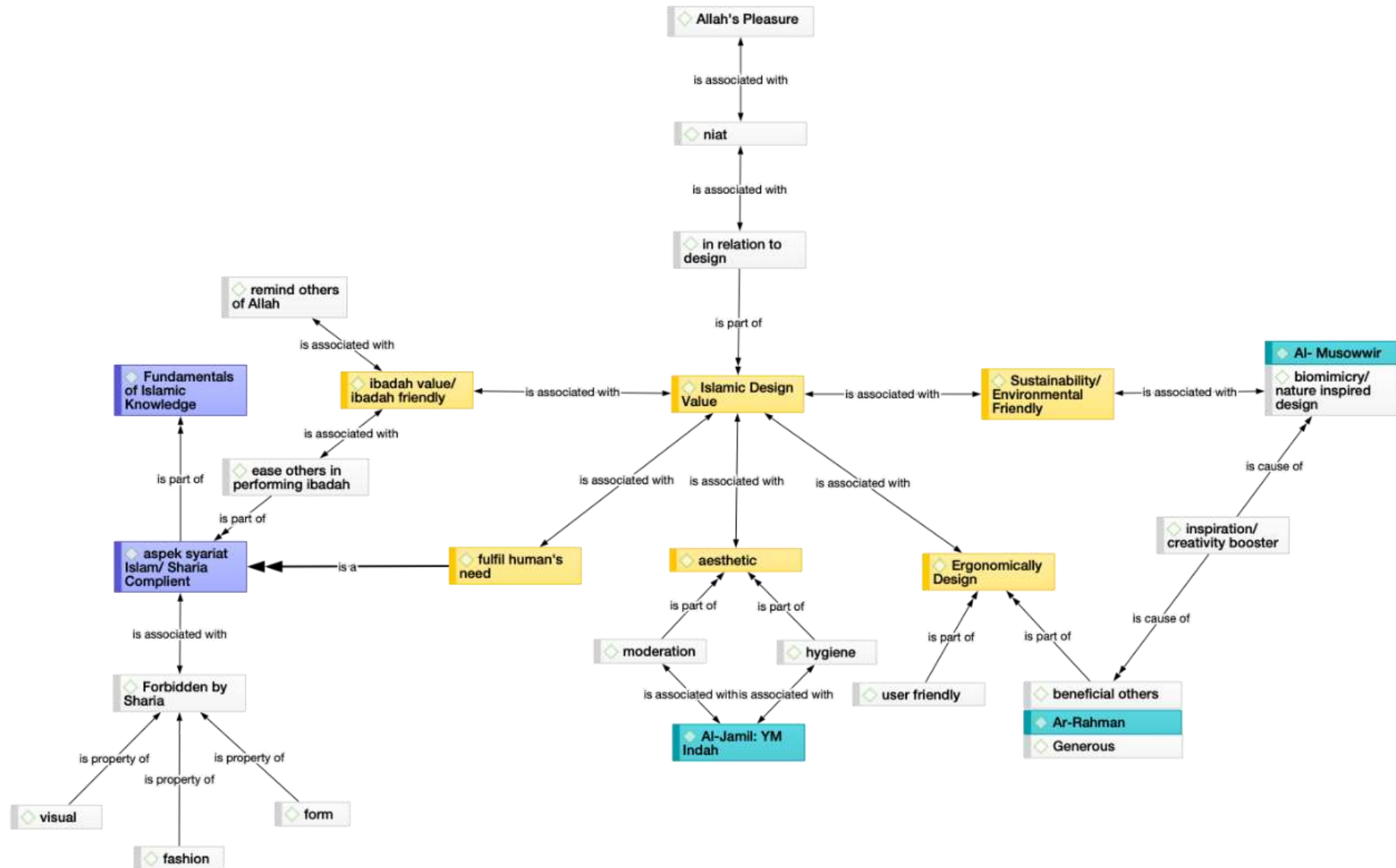
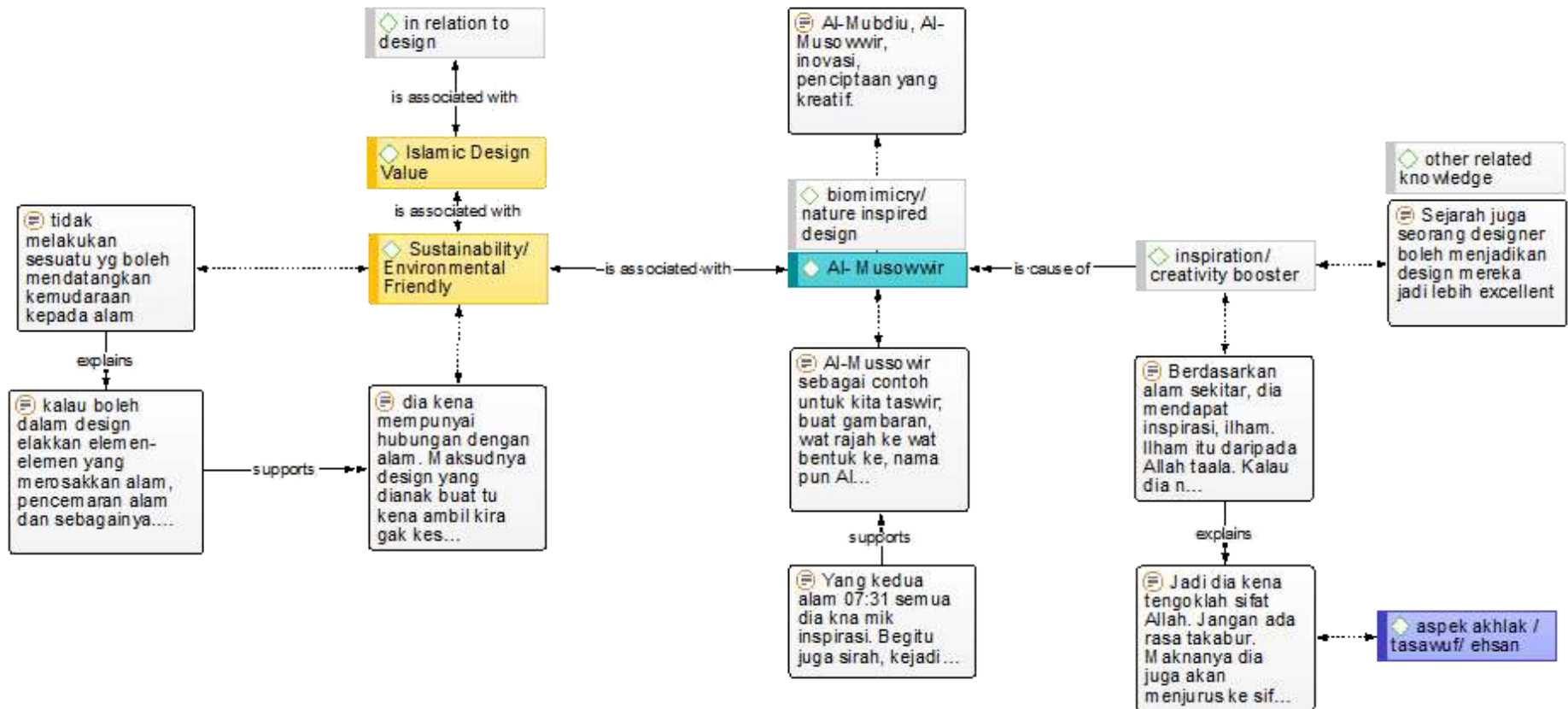**Fig. 9.** Linkages of the criteria of Islamic design and values

Fig. 10. Linkages between sustainability and environmentally friendly criteria

3.2 Ergonomic

Figure 11 displays the ergonomic criteria based on Islamic perspectives, which include user-friendliness, safety and benefits to others. Designers should consider designing products that ease the users [12]. A pilot study by Azman *et al.,* [4] *posited that designers should consider safety and, at the same time, comply with Shariah* law. Ibn Taimiyah defined a fair price as the amount paid for the same item at the location and time of delivery based on the worth of the commodities donated [22]. The believers must strive for equilibrium between the two, comparable to the *wasatiyyah* notion with the perspective on religiosity [23]. Designers need to apply *ar-rahman* qualities in their works to balance the needs of this world and the hereafter (*duniawi* and *ukhrawi*). For example, based on what is illustrated in Figure 11, it is possible that the informant from I1 could have explained that the designer might intend to design a chair that functions as a seat. However, it is unclear whether the users will use the chair as a tool to perform ibadah. Therefore, both actions can be valued as ibadah, which leads to gaining *pahala* (rewards from Allah SWT) because one eases sitting and the other eases the performance of ibadah.

3.3 Shariah Compliance Design

In contemporary discourse, the significance of *akhlak* is often overlooked and it is rarely recognized as an essential component of *Shariʿah* [24]. Not to mentioned developing good manners is essential for everyone as it foster positive interactions and social harmony [25]. This principle is also reflected in *Shariʿah*-compliant design, where ethical considerations are deeply intertwined with religious values. As illustrated in Figure 12 shows the linkages of Shariah compliance design. Regarding Figure 4, the informant from I9 defines the Shariah law as closely related to practices, where it can make a design Muslim-friendly. I5 mentions that if a designer designs an item for profit maximisation and fulfilling customer satisfaction, it is a fallacious concept that Islam opposes. According to an informant from I1, a designer is responsible for avoiding the element of non-beliefs (*shirk*), an unforgivable sin in Islam. Furthermore, it is essential to note that in terms of "visual", Islam forbids a designer from painting or drawing something that will expose *aib*, for example, a person's private part. Next, in terms of "form", according to informants from I6 and I1, Islam forbids a designer from designing a doll or sculpting a human, which was also explained by informant from I4. Finally, in terms of "fashion". Whereas informants from I11 and I3 expressed concern about *aurah* when discussing about attire. As stated by an informant from I4, if a designer designs sexy attire, he or she will also share the sin. By integrating ethical values with *Shariʿah*-compliant design, designers are encouraged to uphold moral responsibilities that go beyond aesthetics and functionality, ensuring that their creations align with Islamic principles. This reinforces the idea that *Shariʿah* is not just about legal enforcement but also about nurturing ethical awareness and self-discipline in all aspects of life, including design.
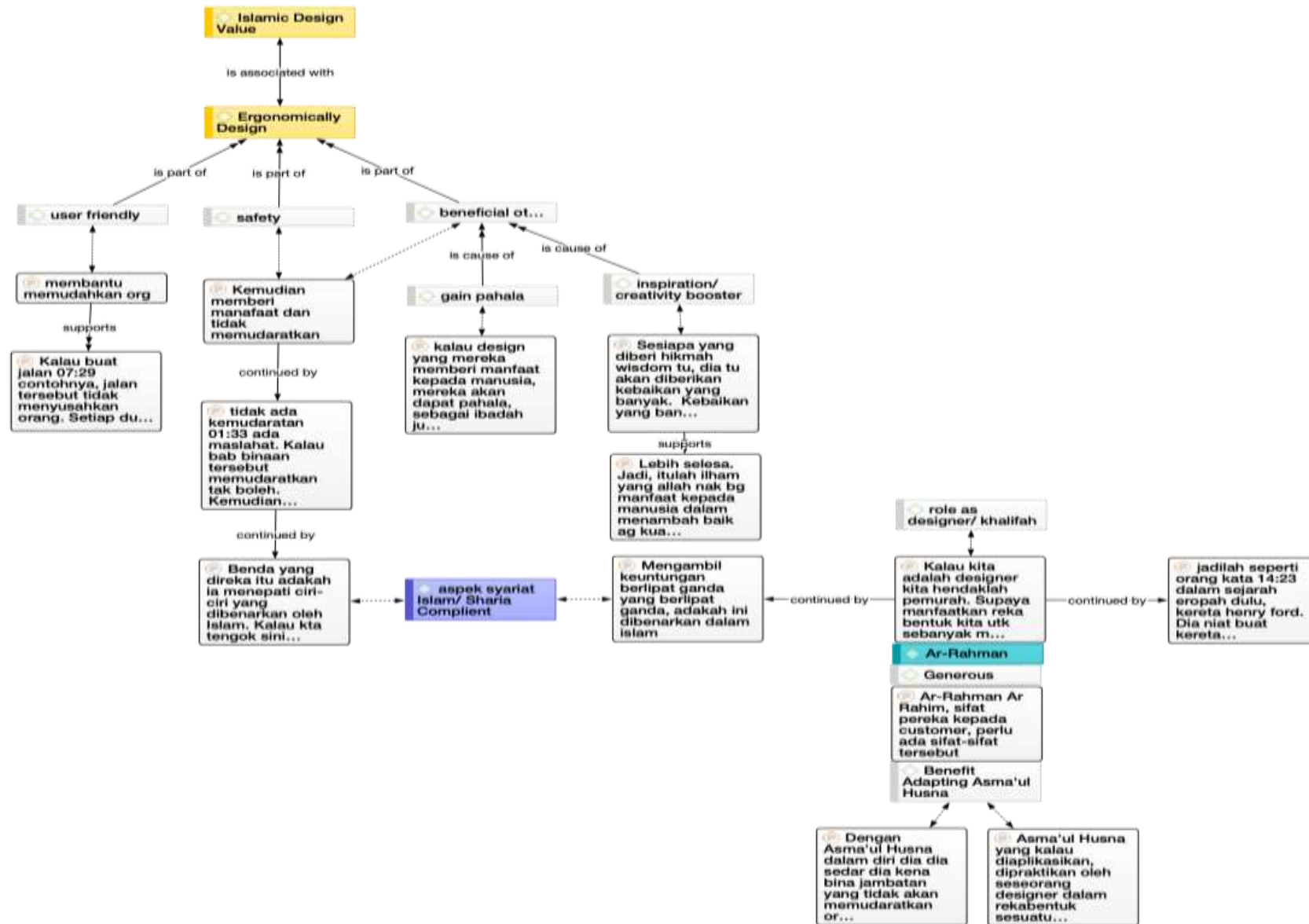
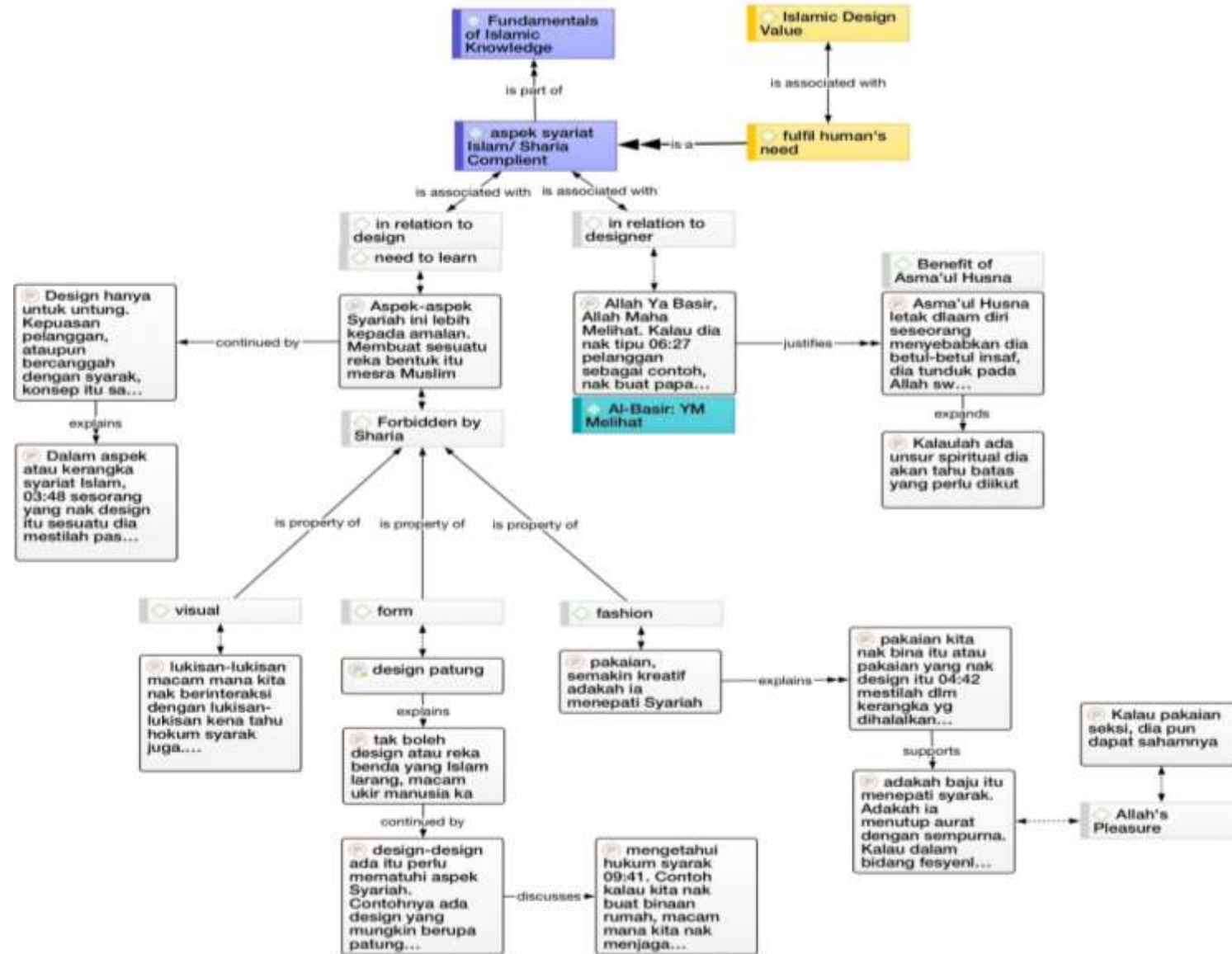**Fig. 11.** Ergonomically design criteria

Fig. 12. Linkages of Sharia-compliant design criteria

Islam always welcomes and celebrates creativity but must adhere to the Shariah law. Based on the name of Allah SWT, *Al-Basir* (the all-noticing), an informant from I5 mentioned that if designers truly understand *Al-Basir*, they will always be honest about their work. They will not cheat their clients as Allah SWT is always watching. In addition to honesty, an informant from I8 believes that designers who have Al-Basir in them will look at themselves as Abdul (the one who submits and obeys Allah). Furthermore, the informant from I6 added that the designers who possess this spiritual element will know their limit and what is permissible and prohibited in Islam according to Shariah law. This is particularly important for Muslim designers. In visual terms, the informant from I8 mentioned the need-to-know Shariah law about painting or drawing. Informant I1 expanded form in a way that in Islam, Muslims are not allowed to design and sell sculptures like statues, dolls and others, as supported by I6. Moreover, designing or sculpting living things must not expose AIB, for example, the private parts (genitals). Informant I4 also emphasised that Islam forbids designers from sculpting humans. Informant I4 believed that individuals who create revealing attire bear the same responsibility for the sins as the wearers. According to I4, if a Muslim seeks to obtain Allah SWT's pleasure, they must take such matters seriously, emphasizing that designers should ensure that the attire they create covers the *aurah*. On the other hand, informants from I1 and I3 maintained that it is not inherently wrong to design creative attire as long as it adheres to the framework legitimized by Islam, also known as Shariah compliance.

3.4 Fulfilling Human Needs

In Figure 13, informant I5 referred to designs meant for customer satisfaction and profit-making only, stating this is a fallacious concept from an Islamic perspective. According to informant I2, fulfilling human wants and needs are different. The former refers to customer satisfaction, while the latter relates to customer needs. Supposedly, a designer should design a product that fulfils human needs and complies with the Shariah law.
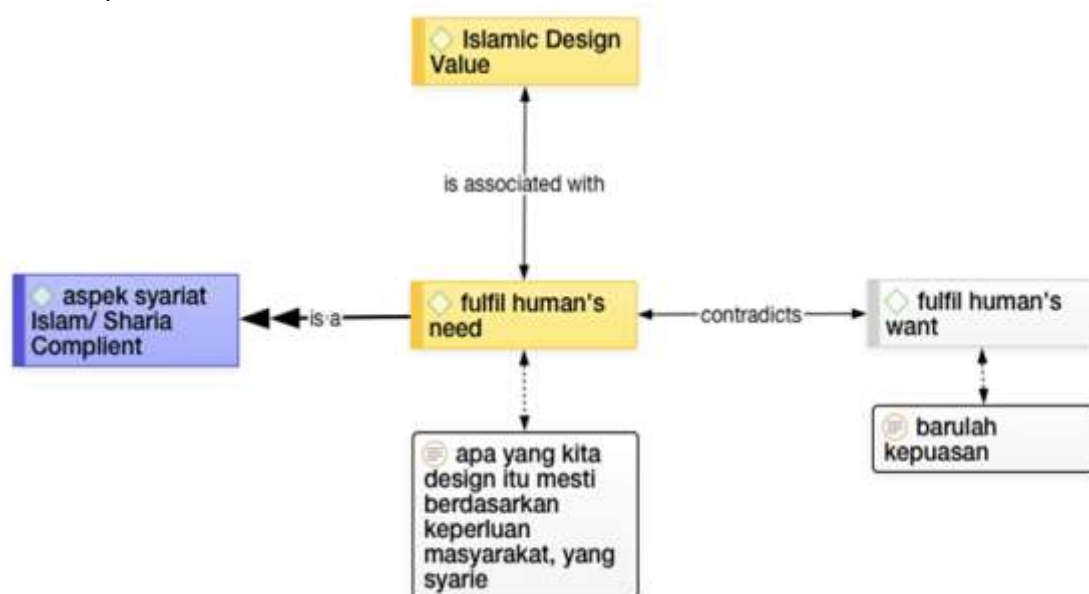
Fig. 13. Linkages of fulfil human's need criteria

3.5 Ibadah Friendly

Figure 14 indicates linkages of ibadah value or *ibadah*-friendly criteria. In this sense, designers should design products that ease others to perform *ibadah* while simultaneously reminding others of Allah SWT. Furthermore, an informant from I6 stated that designers should reorient every action and intention towards Allah. This view was supported by informant I5, who noted that this is closely interrelated with the role of designers as caliphs in this world. A designer who focuses on *Asma'ul Husna* can also consider their job a form of *ibadah*. I5 stated that adopting *Asma'ul Husna* in the design process will benefit this world and the hereafter. A design can be categorised into two aspects: easing others in performing *ibadah* and reminding others of Allah SWT. Based on informant I9's opinion, adopting *Asma'ul Husna* in a design can help remind others of the oneness and greatness of Allah SWT. Informant I4 further suggested that this is better, given the ability to design something and enhance faith towards Allah SWT. It is highly important to highlight the values of *ibadah* in designing and, as informant I6 added, designers will gain *pahala* if they can remind others of Allah and Islam through design.

Another aspect is to help others perform *ibadah*. Informant I9 stated that helping others when performing *ibadah* is a part of the shariah, while I8 specifically gave the example that when designing a toilet, it should not face the qibla and the ablution place should be separated from the toilet area to protect the sanctity of the house. I5 continued by stating that designing a house facing the qibla and considering a space or room where the owner can perform *solat* will also contribute *pahala* to the designer. This was supported by I1, who stated that ibadah-oriented designs can be rewarding to the designers in this world and the hereafter.

3.6 Aesthetic: Moderation and Hygiene

Figure 15 shows further criteria of Islamic design values: moderation and hygiene. I8 stated that a design should not involve any exaggeration element, as supported by I1. I8 explained that moderation is the basic principle in Islam. These criteria are like the *Asma'ul Husna* values. Next, aesthetics can be defined as hygiene and moderate. As I8 stated, aesthetic beauty is allowed in Islam but not luxury. Designers should emphasise the hygiene aspect of design. As argued by informant I5, Islam places great emphasis on hygiene. Islam is open to creativity, but consciousness is necessary for a Muslim designer. I8 elaborated on this and gave the example of an architect designing a house with a separate toilet for hygiene purposes and to protect the sanitary aspect of the house. It is also part of the Shariah, which requires a designer to learn and apply fundamental Islamic knowledge. As for the discussion, it is found that the information obtained from the Islamic scholars provides more explicit and reliable criteria for the designer to use compared to the existing criteria or notion of good design.
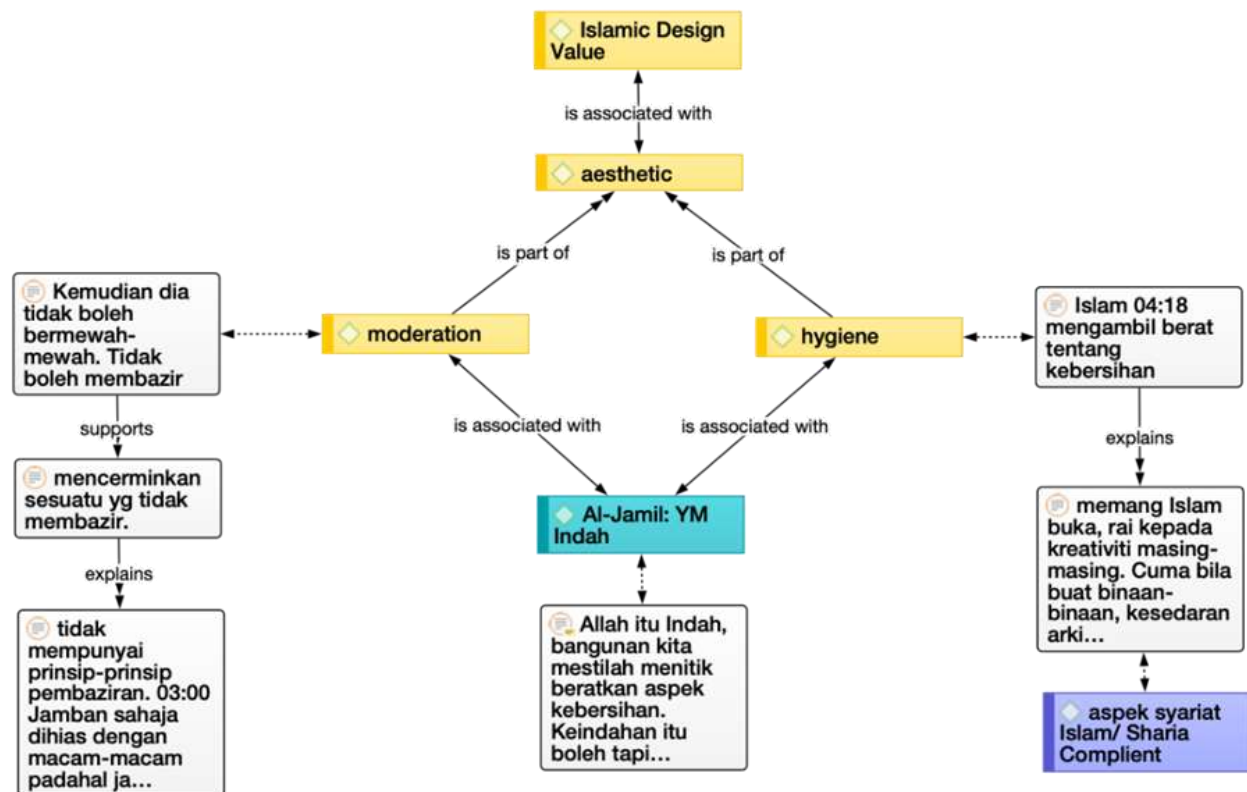
Fig. 14. Linkages of Ibadah Friendly criteria

Fig. 15. Linkages of Islamic Design value

Table 2 compares the existing criteria or the notion of a good design with the interview findings.

Table 2

Comparison of the existing criteria (good design) with Islamic design value (excellent design)

Findings from the interviews			Findings from the literature review		
Islamic Design Values / Excellent Design Criteria	Good Design Criteria [26]	Good Design Criteria [27]	Superior Design Criteria [27]	GOOD DESIGN® Award criteria [14,26]	What is Good Design? [14]
• Sustainability, environmentally friendly • Ergonomic, user friendly, safety, benefit others • Aesthetic, moderation, hygiene • Fulfilling human needs • Sharia compliant • *6. Ibadah* friendly	• Environmentally friendly • Make product useful • Make product understandable • Aesthetic • As little design as possible (less but better) • Innovative • Unobtrusive • Long-lasting • Honest	• Environmental effects • Ease of use • Health and safety • Aesthetic • Meeting the needs of the users • Functionality • Honesty and sincerity • Novelty and distinctiveness • Economy	• Notable environmental merit • Functional superiority • Innovation • Aesthetic superiority • Sensitivity to users • Contribution to the development of industry • Contribution to the working	Highest aesthetic in terms of innovative design, new technology, form, material, construction, concept, function, utility, energy efficiency, sensitivity to the environment	• Customer-related: Aesthetic, functional, customer awareness or experience, emotional bond • Company-related: Business profits or results, innovative, creative, differentiated, brand,

		environment and brand	appropriate, environmentally ethical
• 10. Through, down to the last detail	• 10. Design quality for manufacture	• Adding significant value to society's culture and identity	

4. Conclusion

The findings from the interview sessions are significant. Figure 16 illustrates the criteria of Islamic design value, which refers to the "excellent design criteria" based on Islamic perspectives. Designers should consider the following aspects in their designs, i.e., sustainability, ergonomics, aesthetics, ibadah friendly and fulfilling the human needs that comply with Shariah. The themes and categories portray interesting and potential values Muslim designers can embed in their designs. Moreover, a clear design guideline helps designers create excellent design products following Islamic perspectives. This simultaneously boosts the designers' creativity and allows them to perform good deeds (*pahala*) for the hereafter through their works. This study aims to prioritise Allah SWT as the centre of every designer's practice, especially among Muslim designers. Excellent design criteria encourage designers to reflect and revise their intentions in design and to propose that seeking Allah SWT's pleasure should always be the priority of all Muslim designers instead of solely focusing on the consumers' needs and wants.
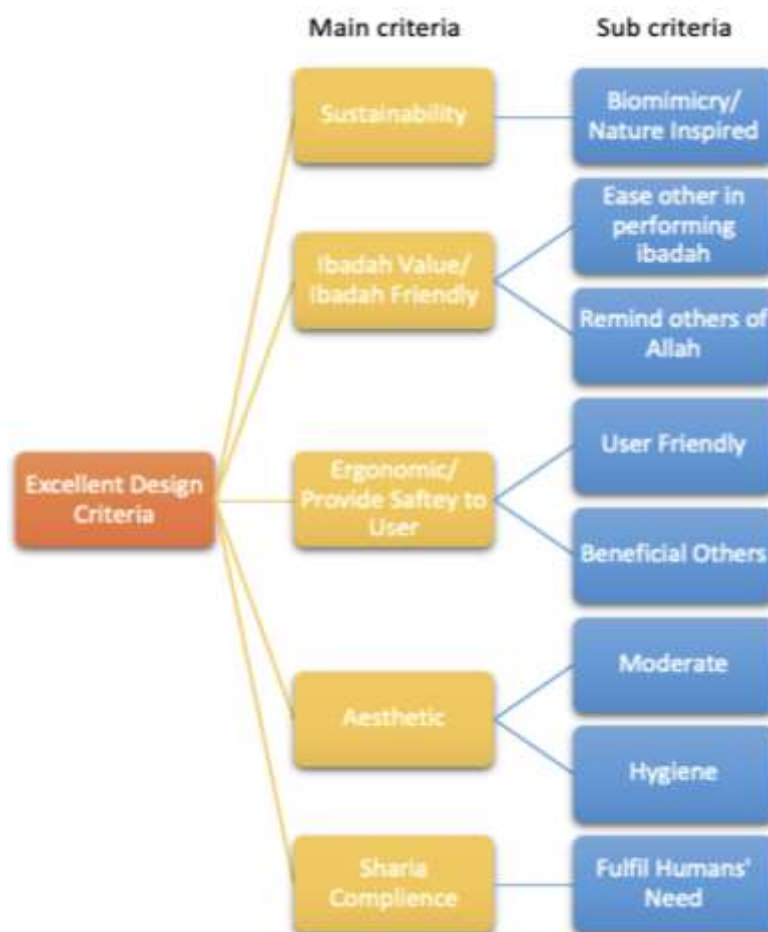
Fig. 16. Criteria of Islamic design value (excellent design)

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