



Exploring the self-presentation of female Muslims, who wear the hijab, on the social networking site 'Instagram.'

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ABSTRACT

Although there is literature on the experiences generated from social media usage, it's scope is limited and has failed to account for the varying experiences which can be generated for different users. Previous literature has adopted a quantitative approach, using self-report measures. The present study aimed to explore the self-presentation of hijabis on the social networking site Instagram, using semi-structured interviews. To gain an in-depth understanding of individuals experienced, 5 women aged 18+ were recruited using volunteer sampling. Upon conduction of the interviews, they were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Four themes were highlighted amongst the interviews: *What to Represent, Multiple Audiences, Controlling the Parameters of Representation and Negotiating the Boundaries*. These findings suggest that Instagram does not function in the same way that previous literature has found with western samples; Instagram functions to allow others i.e. the audience, to regulate the behaviour of the user in line with cultural expectations. This therefore contradicts the findings that social media allows users to experiment with their self-presentation techniques (Smith and Sanderson, 2015). Limitations and implications for future research are discussed in full.

KEY WORDS:	SELF- PRESENTATION	SOCIAL MEDIA	HIJABI	THEMATIC ANALYSIS	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH
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Abstract

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Introduction

Traditionally and even more recently, research around social media, particularly Instagram, has been myopic as the focal phenomena has been the exploration of body image and self-esteem on social media (Bessenoff, 2006; Wang et al, 2017; Grogan et al, 2018; Jurdi and Smith, 2018). This research highlights how Instagram becomes a platform whereby females, predominantly, engage in self-comparison and this consequently leads to low self-esteem. However, with samples of western women, previous literature falls into the trap of being culturally myopic by researching issues relevant to the western culture. Although issues of self-esteem and body image are universally relevant to some extent, Instagram creates varying personal experiences away from ones of body image and self-esteem. The present study challenges the myopic focus of previous literature by delving beyond what has been established and into the realms of the self-presentation techniques of hijabis (Muslim women who wear the headscarf).

The abundance of social media has grown exponentially (O'Keeffe et al, 2011; Mount and Martinez, 2014) yet literature has failed to keep up with the various experiences generated from its usage. This is surprising considering its popularity amongst young adults (Pew Research Centre, 2018). With over 1 billion active users monthly and 500 million daily, Instagram is the 2nd most popular social media

platform (Instagram Press News, 2018; Pew Research Centre, 2018) and the most popular image features platform. Instagram has greatly increased in popularity since its founding in 2010 therefore its mechanisms of usage should be deemed important to explore.

Through Instagram, users can create and share “selfies” for immediate feedback from others (Chua and Chang, 2016) through likes and comments. The word “selfie” refers to photographs taken of the self with a smartphone. In light of the rapid growth of social networking sites, the term selfie, which entered the Oxford Dictionary in 2013, is a key behavioural phenomena in this investigation. Its entrance into the mainstream English language is a key signifier of its importance. Previous literature has researched social networking sites such as Bebo and Tumblr (Tiidenberg and Cruz, 2014). However, Tumblr would not typically be classified as a selfie-posting platform as it is generally used for art aesthetics and social quotes. Similarly, research on Bebo (Ringrose, 2011) is outdated as the social networking platform is practically non-existent in 2019.

Traditionally, historians of photography have argued photographs in a specific regime of truth (Foucault, 1988), resulted in them being seen as a reflection of reality (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). However, due to technological developments, which were historically non-existent, the regime of truth no longer exists amongst scholars of photography; photos are viewed as a “negotiated version of reality” (Pink, 2005), and serve as tools for identity formation and social interaction (Sung et al, 2016).

Instagram allows users to negotiate “reality” by experimenting with ways of presenting themselves by creating self-descriptive profiles (Rosenber and Egbert, 2011). Users post pictures they feel are their most flattering and beautiful as defined by societal norms (Grogan et al, 2018). This therefore involves careful negotiations of what individuals wish to present to their ‘followers’ i.e. audience. Goffman’s (1959) ‘Self-Presentation Theory’ best explains this behaviour, whereby people behave as performers, expressing themselves through verbal and non-verbal messages, i.e. selfie posting on Instagram, with the aim to present their most credible image.

Traditionally, boundaries were placed on a person’s capacity of self-presentation due to the face-to-face nature of communication. However, with the advent of growth in social media, self-presentation capabilities have only been enhanced (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011; Vitak, 2012). People are afforded more control with the ability to engage in impression management virtually without an audience being physically present to counteract self-presentation claims (Smith and Sanderson (2015). However, this fails to consider that individuals are not the only providers of information about themselves. Their followers also contribute to their profile page, for example, by commenting on posts and photo tagging. These additions can be made at any time without the permission of the account owner and can thus pose as a threat in the pursuit of idealised self-presentation; the information may be

inconsistent with the strategic image-based goals of the profile owner (Ramirez and Walther, 2009; Rui and Stefanone, 2013).

There seems to be a preconceived notion on Instagram which reduces individuals to their personal image and fails to consider narratives behind what is simply perceived as just a picture. However, selfies have also, been researched as more than just isolated images; they are communicative objects embedded in personal narratives that surround social media (Vivienne and Burgess, 2013; Fallon, 2014). We live in a storied world (Riessmann, 2008) and many of these stories are told in images or with the help of images. Selfies include social and conversational features when they are shared on social media such as Instagram; users stay connected with friends through continuously updated feeds, organised in chronological order, and are presented with opportunities to like or comment on posts (Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014). The “like” and “comment” features allow users to effortlessly provide feedback and virtual validation on others content at the click of a button.

These conversational features create perceptions of Instagram as a public platform whereby users are able to interact with an array of users worldwide. This attitude is reflected in the analytical focus of previous research in which hashtags and publicly searchable profiles have been researched (Hall et al, 2012; Kapidzic and Herring, 2015). Consequently, the function of privacy has been neglected. Creating a private account provides new opportunities for expression (Leavitt, 2015), giving the user great control over the information they choose to share about themselves and allowing for a discussion of the personal nature behind the social platform. This is greatly contrasting to the public image of Instagram whereby the presumption is that a user’s account is openly available for viewing. Private accounts on the other hand require approval of the owner before account activity can be accessed. Central to this multidimensional construct is the desire to keep information out of the hands of ‘undesirable’ others (Cho et al, 2009).

Privacy is a multifaceted and prominent value which touches upon various aspects of behaviour from how people dress to their interactions in physical and online environments (Abokhodair et al, 2016). Previous research has indicated females tend to be more concerned about their online privacy than males. They also tend to be more restrained about their personal information and take action to protect their privacy i.e. creating private profiles (Child, 2007; Lewis et al, 2008; Abokhodair et al, 2016). Although the reasons for this have not been exclusively researched, Hall and Hearn (2017) found women regulate their social media more due to concerns of their images being used by undesired audiences, for example revenge pornography. However, research surrounding privacy concerns have derived from western discussions of behaviour. There is no evidence to suggest the issue of revenge pornography is equally relevant outside of the western society. Hence the present study aims to explore this in relation to a Muslim, female community.

Grogan et al (2018) found, through semi-structured interviews, that posting behaviours were restricted by postfeminist notions of what was deemed socially appropriate to post. However, the present study proposes the influence of religion is of greater interest and exerts greater forms of constraints than that of feminism. Muslim women are first seen in terms of their religious identity, with everything else (age, job, nationality) coming second (Cooke, 2007). Islamic values, as stated in the Quran, are far more protective of women's rights and status than is the case with recent social practices (Nydell, 2006). The key mechanisms underlying these values is the protection of one's *awrah* (modesty) and *izzat* (honour) (Kandari et al, 2016). Once a woman's honour is tarnished, it is viewed as near impossible to restore. Posting personal images may convey the female as having a playful, unrestrained character which can provide an opportunity for unfounded gossip and consequently bring shame to the family (Kandari et al, 2016). Social media is therefore a complex platform for hijabis due to its contradictory nature with Islamic values. Women are required to dress modestly, by covering their body, in a society where exposure to nudity, especially on Instagram, is at its greatest. However, there is no research to date which has explored how Muslims negotiate modesty and honour on an online platform. Additionally, although peer judgments have been researched in a wider social context (Mascheroni et al, 2015; Meier and Gray, 2014), its interplay with social media on a photo based platform is limited .

Furthermore, the general knowledge base on the specific societal experiences of the Muslim population has been lacking hence it comes as no surprise at the neglect of literature on hijabis. In the sparse research examples of hijabis on social media, the focus has been restricted to fashion choices (Beta, 2014; Hassan and Harun, 2016; El-Bassiouny, 2018). Though this shows a slow progression, it was conducted in Malaysian and Middle Eastern cultures therefore extending the literature to South-Asian hijabis in a western culture would be speculative.

Present Study

In this context, it is important to understand how hijabis use social media to represent themselves on online platforms; Instagram enables women to choose how and when to present images themselves to others online. Originally, a gap was identified in literature concerning self-presentation on social networking site media. Although this method of identifying gaps in literature to develop a research question is most commonly used, it is considered problematic as it reinforces existing research instead of challenging it (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2010). However, the present study attempted to use problematisation to identify and challenge existing assumptions in the existing body of literature. As current research generally uses quantitative methods, the present study conducted semi structured interviews to explore the self-presentation of hijabis on the social networking site 'Instagram.'

Research Questions:

“What practices are employed to maintain an online profile?”

“What is the relationship between the perceived online self and the “real” self?”

‘How do religious beliefs influence online decision making?’

Methodology**Design**

As previous literature has used quantitative methodology, a qualitative approach was used to provide insight into the self-presentation of hijabis on ‘Instagram.’ This allows participants to offer a wide range of reflexive responses (Willig, 2013) therefore presenting a multifaceted picture of their experience. Participants are able to provide an account of their thoughts and emotions (Quinlan, 2011) as opposed to quantitative methodologies; they provide no more than closed answer responses. This places boundaries on the participant’s personal experiences as the depth of information they can provide is restricted (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research however is rich in content and places the participant at the centre of their experiences allowing them to engage their personal agency. Therefore semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 45 minutes, were conducted. This interview technique is “the most widely used method of data collection” in qualitative psychology (Willig, 2013:29). It allows more flexibility than structured interviews but is more reliable than unstructured interviews due to the list of pre-set questions, for example, “Do you feel you have great responsibility over your posts?”

Participants

A total of 5 participants were recruited through the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) research participation pool. There is a general consensus for the use of 6 participants (Morse, 1994) however Fusch and Ness (2015) claim there is no “one-fits-all-method” (1409); the main factor is to reach data saturation which was reached. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, using a small sample, who have first-hand experience of the phenomena being investigated, is useful. It allows for a clearer, relevant understanding and the collection of in-depth data.

The participants were aged 18+ which was deemed appropriate as this category has been found to largely use social media in the UK (ONS, 2017). Also this was sufficient to meet ethical guidelines. Previous findings suggest women are more likely to consciously manage their strategies of self-presentation on social media (Grogan et al, 2018) however the present study went beyond previous establishments to use hijabis as an inclusion criteria and fill the gap in literature. There was no specific exclusion criteria but it was essential for participants to be 18+, a hijabi and have an Instagram account.

Data Collection

An ethical approval form was submitted by the researcher (Appendix 1) and approved by Manchester Metropolitan University before any data could be collected. Once approval was granted, data was collected via semi-structured interviews with the aim to allow the participants flexibility in their responses and openly provide rich narratives related to the phenomena being explored.

An interview schedule (Appendix 2) was devised upon analysis of previous literature (e.g. Grogan et al, 2018) to focus on the self-presentation techniques of hijabis. Before providing their informed consent (Appendix 3), all participants received a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 4) which contained full details of the study. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions and were also informed of their right to refuse answering; they only needed to provide information they were comfortable sharing (Knox and Burkard, 2009). Their right to withdraw at any time was also made explicit. Once informed consent was gained, the interviews were conducted in a quiet room at Manchester Metropolitan University in the Brooks Building. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were recorded using a password protected audio recording device. Participants were informed their data would be destroyed after the final data analysis. The interview schedule deliberately started with simple, general questions relating to the history of their Instagram account, allowing rapport to be established, before delving into more complexities about being a hijabi and having an Instagram account. Upon conducting the interview, participants were debriefed and provided an information sheet which contained contact details for further enquiries and also contact details of health organisations, though sensitive topics were avoided.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, participant's interviews were ascribed pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and were then transcribed verbatim. However, this method of transcription is subject to human error (MacLean et al, 2014) therefore the transcriptions were cross-checked several times to ensure the quality of data remained intact. The data was then subjected to Thematic Analysis as a method of data analysis. Thematic Analysis is an effective analytical method due to its flexibility and simplicity; it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective unlike many qualitative methodologies, nor is there a standardised procedure on how it should be conducted. However, the 6 step guidelines (Braun and Clarke, 2006) which provide instructions on how to analyse data from interviews were followed. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) claim the 6 step framework is the most influential approach in the social sciences as it offers a clear and flexible framework. The steps begin with familiarising oneself with the data before generating initial codes and

searching for themes to reduce large data into meaningful chunks. Themes are then reviewed, defined and a write up of the results is conducted. Although the 6 step guidelines are presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) as linear, it is a reflective process which develops over time and involves constantly moving back and forward between phases. This is because data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Creswell, 2007) therefore the codes and themes generated are constantly revised.

There are however contrasting views on this method. While flexibility is seen as an advantage, it can also lead to inconsistencies and a lack of clarity when developing themes derived from the data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Nevertheless, consistency and clarity can be promoted by applying and making an explicit epistemological position that can underpin the study's empirical claims (Holloway and Todres, 2003). The present's study's epistemological stance is explicitly rooted in social constructionism, which is concerned with how people construct versions of reality through language (Willig, 2013).

Nevertheless, the present study used the qualitative method of thematic analysis in its own right and contributed to the production of additional literature regarding self-presentation on Instagram.

Analysis

What to represent

Participants felt a responsibility to represent their religion as they wore the hijab and were thus visual emblems of Islam (Farhatullah et al, 2014). This responsibility carried to also be reflected in their online behaviour.

"I do have some sort of responsibility...automatically when I put the hijab on it's my identity as a Muslim..I got that responsibility of not destroying that identity as a Muslim or giving it a bad name." (Layla, 19-21)

"As a hijabi its my duty not to post any kind of pictures that will kind of not go well with the...image of being a hijabi" (Layla, 60-62)

"I wear the hijab there's like this mental label of how we should behave." (Uzma, 28-29)

Despite the potential for experimenting with ones self-presentation, as Instagram diminishes traditional boundaries of face-to-face communication, participants felt they must adhere to cultural expectations of how hijabis should present themselves (Skeggs, 2011). An individual's self-concept is largely influenced by the cultural context in which they develop (Poran, 2002). This suggests hijabis feel a responsibility to present themselves in a manner which positively reflects their religion and which also meets everyone's expectations of their behaviour (Rutledge,

2013). This responsibility is reinforced by individual's reasons for wearing the hijab as motivations include: attaining identity, gaining respect and as part of cultural and religious duties (Groogsma, 2007; Williams and Vashi, 2007).

Self-presentation behaviours are therefore not only limited to the individual but extend out to their religious practices. This implies the notion of self-presentation for a Muslim woman is located much deeper than what appears to be the surface of simply posting pictures. Posting behaviours should reflect ones practices and beliefs and thus conversation flowed to the criteria of their responsibility. What posts are uploaded which convey this religious responsibility? This touched explicitly on Islamic values and consequently morals.

"I need to make sure it's the right picture...obviously nothing tight where you can see my body shape, my skin, or under my clothes...just modest clothing." (Hana, 88-89).

"You need to choose...you're wearing the right outfit...I don't know how you would put it but...halal." (Momena, 34-37).

Traditionally the words "halal" and "haram" refer to categories of food in which the food is "halal" (permissible to eat) or "haram" (forbidden) (Mejova et al, 2017). This terminology has however entered mainstream Muslim conversations of clothing whereby everyday actions are labelled as halal or haram and therefore enters the discourse of morals; posting behaviours are categorised as principles of right or wrong. This implication is striking for research on Instagram due to the casual and simplistic nature of photo-sharing; reference to morals has never been suggested.

Farhatullah et al (2014) states the hijab portrays Muslim women as pure and chaste, setting them apart from the immoral behaviour associated with women who dress immodestly. There was no reference to "haram" clothing not being worn therefore the implication is that those images are prohibited from being posted online. This may be a protective strategy due to the potential danger involved in posting images online (Lewis et al, 2008). The assumption of social media as dangerous is reinforced through Instagram's use of terminology, such as 'followers' and 'following.' These words are associated with stalking behaviours. This therefore serves as a justification for protective Instagram behaviours.

"Anybody can save your picture online...what if you die tomorrow...and your photos stay on there...even if you delete it's still somewhere on the internet...could end up anywhere..." (Layla, 376-390)

What also emerged was a discussion that not only are hijabis responsible for their own behaviour but also for others. Anisa touched on this in regards to clothing:

“you wanna be fully covered...male wouldn't even dare look at you...they see a part of a woman's figure that they really like...they shouldn't be looking...that's for you to cover up especially if you're wearing a headscarf”(84-87)

This implies an element of blame is involved. Appearance culture encourages women to police the behaviours of other women in line with cultural norms of how they should present themselves (Jeffreys, 2014; Jones et al, 2014).

Bartky (1990, as cited in Luke, 2005:99) applied the notion of surveillance to subjectification whereby women become subjects of Foucault's Panopticons:

“Women who practice this discipline...checks her make-up...dozen times...monitors everything she eats, has become...the inmate of the Panopticon...a relentless surveillance.”

Surveillance of behaviour seems to be a common behavioural regulation of all women however the topic of policing differs; with hijabis it is concerned with modesty whereas in western norms the policing of appearance is due to idealised beauty standards.

Hijabi's are therefore not only responsible for the way they choose to dress but also for others thoughts and intentions towards them. The final statement *“especially if you're wearing a hijab”* highlights an additional commonality in the interviews: hijabis are more likely to be criticised than females who do not wear the hijab. So whereby self-presentation behaviours on Instagram are regulated internally by ones religious beliefs and hence relationship with God, they are also externally regulated by one's relationship with others in a wider social context. Leadbeater (1999) found women are more vulnerable to criticism, however the present study goes beyond previous vague establishments to specify that hijabis are particularly susceptible to this.

Furthermore, this challenges the notion of Instagram as a means of connectedness and communication as previously found by van Dijck (2008). For hijabis, Instagram serves to add pressure to their already complex and societal multifaceted experiences as they are placed under a microscope for scrutinization and judgement by others.

Controlling the parameters of representations

Instagram allows users much control over how they use their account and thus allows for effective self-presentation. Hijabis selectively choose whom they wish to view their posts therefore this serves as a technique of self-presentation. This control is only afforded via private Instagram accounts, which is something all the participants had.

“I didn't want loads and loads of people...I just felt too violated” (Momena, 110-111)

“Though I’ve got 438 followers I know they’re all my friends and family...” (Anisa, 215)

“I cleared my account...only family and friends...I made my account private” (Hana, 120-121)

This strategy of exclusively following people known in real life contradicts Smith and Sanderson’s (2015) findings that social media allows for self-presentation to be enhanced due to the absence of an audience to physically counteract claims. Although traditional face-to-face contact is diminished, participants preferred having an audience known in real-life despite the potential for claims to be counteracted. Nevertheless, hijabis carefully consider the implications of their behaviour. The function of an Instagram account, with a known audience, does not operate in the same way that it has been outlined by Smith and Sanderson (2015). Private accounts allow hijabis to choose their audience and thus affords them control and safety. This does not only serve as a protective factor towards who can view their posts but also serves as a technique which eliminates the potential for online negativity. All participants stated they had never received negative comments on their Instagram posts. This is a smart strategy, which allows for effective self-presentation, as social media is a highly critical medium (Leadbeater, 1999). Followers will refrain from posting negative comments due to the implication this can have on real life interactions, away from the virtual realm i.e. real life conflict due to a negative comment.

Multiple Audiences

While women seem to suggest they have control under their selfie-taking and posting processes, as they can decide what and when to post, they are paradoxically not entirely free to choose any selfie. (Grogan et al, 2018).

Instagram facilitates to the needs of the user through the “privacy function;” they can choose who ‘follows’ them by accepting a friend request. However, users still experience problems. Presenting to multiple audiences poses as a threat to ones self-presentation due to the need to meet the expectations of each audience. All participants recalled having “family and friends”; they also distinguished their male followers from female. When asked if their posting content would change if certain groups could not view their posts, all participants agreed which clearly demonstrated their techniques of self-presentation differ between their different ‘follower’ groups. Previous research has been indicative of this (Lenhart, 2015). The most influential audience on self-presentation techniques was family.

“I wouldn’t post something that I took with my male friends...or something at night-time...so they (family) don’t know I go out at night...so that they know I’m ok and on the right tracks” (Momena, 45-48)

“I need to make sure it’s the right picture...right clothes...right place...if my auntie sees or something” (Hana, 81-83)

This suggests there is a conscious decision-making process of what to post as Instagram feeds are regulated by family. This therefore poses a problem as the goal is to present the best version of yourself for your family.

Parenting practices are rooted in culture and can therefore differ contextually, so although the influence of religion is salient, culture is also largely important; linguistic discourses of culture override that of religion (Aslan, 2017) in family narratives. Religious and cultural discourses are commonly interchanged and misunderstood for one another when in reality they are different. Cultural values are socially constructed whereas religious practices are standardised and rigid (Aslan, 2017); set by one whose power, knowledge and word is above that of humans. Human beings on the other hand are prone to mistakes and are constantly changing their ideals of what is classed as right and wrong thus making it more complex and in a sense, selfish to suit their personal beliefs.

“If I was in the library at night and I post something, the fact that religiously I’m not doing anything wrong but culturally I’m out late at night and that would be wrong” (Momena, 293-295)

This conveys the idea of culture being restrictive. Being out late at night can raise questions regarding a woman’s honour (Kandari et al, 2016) due to the connotations of late night with “wrong” and immoral behaviour such as clubbing.

Along with posting culturally appropriate selfies, hijabis must regulate their Instagram accounts to maintain their online representation through the function of commenting. Different followers have different expectations of what is considered a socially acceptable comment. Comments can be posted on a profile by any of the users followers and thus raises the issue of a lack of control. Instagram has however afforded control over this as individuals can delete comments made on their account or in extreme cases report them to prevent harassment.

“I wanted to get rid of straight away...delete their comments myself...one of my guy friends wrote something on one of my pictures...as soon as he posted it I deleted it cos if someone saw they’d misunderstand” (Hafsa, 293-294)

“I could always delete them...there was a comment from my cousins friend...the comment...was quite funny but also was a bit uncomfortable as well” (Momena, 241-244).

A lack of control would have serious implications as comments can pose as a threat to one's self-presentation if they do not reflect the user's idealised image. Of importance is the observation that many of these deleted comments came from male followers and could cause a woman's honour to be questioned if the context of the comment was misunderstood. This is due to the emphasis on hijab as a symbol of modesty; modesty relating to not only appearance but also behaviour whereby male interactions are avoided due to the potential of impermissible male desires (Riyani, 2016).

Despite the overt display of self-presentation strategies, participants all greatly contradicted themselves with a common statement which ran throughout interviews:

"I'm not bothered what people think of me" (Layla, 395)

To speak of the irrelevancy of others' opinions yet regulate your account to please your followers, are two conflicting behaviours. However, perhaps these are not seen as methods of self-presentation as these are values embedded within an individual. Family and religion serve as two large factors in a hijabi's life, online and offline, and are therefore part of their everyday mundane routines. This draws on Schafer's (1968) work on reflective self-presentation; there is no self-presentation without self-reflection and thus requires the individual to reflect on their embedded cultural and religious values. Their self-presentation techniques differ from what has been traditionally researched for example, seeking validation in the form of comments and likes (Grogan et al, 2018). Instead they are presented in the form of meeting religious and cultural expectations.

Negotiating the boundaries

Self-presentation techniques were found to be more complex for hijabis than the previously researched samples i.e. non-hijabis. Due to this complexity, ambiguity arises and consequently the issue of boundaries. What are the boundaries of one's actions? Are boundaries ever crossed? How much leniency do individuals grant themselves?

An example of this is posting non-hijab pictures. Although participants did take pictures without their hijab, they are not posted on social media when there is the potential of a male viewing. This male viewing relates to *non-mehrams* (men which can be married), beyond the age of puberty and hence does not include brothers and other male family members. (Farhatullah et al, 2014).

“Sometimes...I’m like oh this is a really good picture...would be great if I could post it...it’s a decision I made long ago that I’m wearing my hijab I need to protect my modesty...” (Momena, 128-32)

“What if you die tomorrow...non hijab photos stay on there (internet)...since then I’ve never felt comfortable...to post non-hijabi photos...” (Layla, 383-391)

Not only is this an issue of covering one’s modesty but it runs deeper into the issue of protecting oneself from the dangers of the outside world; a world in which others motives can never be truly known. However, hijabis can find themselves in dilemmas in which boundaries are negotiated.

In relation to the question ‘do you ever post pictures without your hijab’ Momena said: *“probably snapchat cos it’s a lot... all of its female” (126)*

The ambiguity of this statement implies that perhaps non-hijab photos are posted. In pursuit of exploring religious factors, personal desires should also be considered. Bunt (2009) believes the internet has changed Islamic practices as well as self-perceptions. For heterosexual women, seeking male attention is not unusual and thus it is understandable to want to present ones best image. In this context that could mean with or without a hijab. Selfies are presented in controlled and selective ways, emphasising what they perceive are their best pictures and avoid presenting themselves as less attractive (Grogan et al, 2018). This therefore involves a negotiation of ones beliefs for their personal motives.

Although this referred to ‘Snapchat’ there are practical implications that perhaps selfie posting behaviours on Snapchat differ to those of Instagram. This may be due to the difference in features; snapchat is much more momentary as ‘snaps’ i.e. pictures, do not remain for longer than 24 hours.

Negotiations of boundaries was also implied in relation to editing pictures. Photo editing broadly refers to making enhancements to change the appearance of an image (Grogan et al, 2018). Participants disagreed with the concept of editing their pictures however spoke of making enhancements. Their justifications for doing so is what leads to a discussion of negotiating boundaries.

“The basic filter..that clears your skin out..” (Momena, 183-184)

“The one that smooths your skin out...the natural one” (Uzma, 111)

Regardless of the degree to which a photo is edited, altering ones appearance with a photo-editing tool is classified as editing. However, participants were reluctant to speak about editing and denied doing so but instead spoke in terms of using natural methods to enhance their pictures; this was not deemed a method of photo-editing. This may be due to the overriding power and respect for religion. Overtly framing the discussion in terms of editing would contradict their religious beliefs. It would impl

you are dissatisfied with an area of your face and may therefore reflect a dissatisfaction with God's creation. This can have serious religious implications of disrespect and challenging God's creation.

Limitations

Despite the present study adding valued content to the study of social media, it is important to comprehend the findings in light of its criticisms.

Although the study did not aim to solely explore the experiences of South Asian females, this was the sample produced. The importance of culture on Instagram selfie-posting behaviours was described explicitly therefore the research was limited to studying only one cultural group. Experiences of middle eastern participants, for example, may be greatly varied hence in this sense the scope of research was limiting. However, as this study was exploratory it allowed for a specific group and their experiences to be researched.

Also, this research attempted to implement photo-elicitation in order to verify the claims made in relation to online behaviour and thus tackle a common limitation with previous literature. However, although specified in the Participant Information Sheet, participants were reluctant to share details of their Instagram profiles and allow the researcher to view images on their accounts, with their permission. They instead verbally spoke of experiences therefore the researcher failed to tackle the issue of verifying claims made by participants.

Furthermore, the researcher attempted to follow the guidelines of thematic analysis as devised by Braun and Clarke (2006), however it has its own limitations. Firstly, it requires a careful and thorough analysis of the data and a subjective interpretation. As the researcher was solely involved in both collecting and analysing the data this may have resulted in them to becoming intimately familiar with the data but also may have negatively affected the interpretation and data analysis process. Nevertheless, before conducting the data analysis the researcher acknowledged that thematic analysis, and qualitative research in general, is interpretative in its nature (Willig, 2013).

Practical Implications

This research was conducted as an attempt to compensate for the lack of research surrounding hijabis and their specific societal experiences but to also add more dimension to the previously established research base on social media. A new foundational base of knowledge has been provided which can further be researched in light of these findings.

Furthermore, this research can be practically implied to help the development of Instagram, where new updates are frequently being made. As described by this study explicitly, Instagram users make conscious efforts to self-present to multiple audiences. Perhaps a new feature could be introduced whereby users can selectively choose which posts can be accessed by their following through the creation of private posts. This would operate similarly to accepting friend requests whereby users can select which of their followers are able to view their individual posts. This will further afford users more safety and their desired privacy.

Concluding remarks from the present study reinforce the notion that previous research has been culturally myopic as hijabis self-presentation experiences on Instagram have been highly contrasting to previous establishments in western samples; although they do exhibit self-presentation techniques, they do not operate in the traditional manner of seeking validation through likes and comments. Instead they are implemented to maintain ones offline behaviour of modesty, online. Four key themes emerged: 'What to represent,' 'Controlling the parameters of representations,' 'Multiple audiences' and 'Negotiating the boundaries.' These themes affirmed literature on the Muslim population relating to the responsibility of posting and the importance of privacy on online platforms, particularly for women. The present study allowed for a further dimension to be captured to the current one-dimensional nature of research which has remained in the field of self-esteem and body image. More importantly, it provided a new foundation for research on hijabi's experiences of social media which was previously neglected.

Although the present study aimed to exclusively explore religious factors in self-presentation techniques, as this was as a missing construct in previous literature, culture emerged as more regulatory in the sense that familial opinions were of much importance and value. For future research it would therefore be of interest to explore the nature of culture and religion; does culture, a concept based on social constructions, hold more importance than religion?

Reflexivity

When adopting a qualitative approach, it is important to understand the researcher's actions and observations are subjective forms of data; they are also part of the interpretation (Flick, 2014). Reflexivity allows for critical self-evaluation of the researcher's position and how this influenced the research outcomes (Berger, 2015).

Willig (2013) states, there are two types of reflexivity that should be acknowledged by a qualitative researcher: personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity.

As a woman of a similar age to the participants and an Instagram user myself participants felt I could relate to their experiences. This enhanced self-disclosure as they spoke colloquially. The meaning around self-presentation techniques on Instagram could have been lost without a researcher who has first-hand experience of the explored phenomena. I had a strong insight into the attitudes and pressures associated with posting in regards to external regulation on behaviour. However, I maintained the balance as I refrained from drawing upon my own experiences, which could have influenced my participants responses to favour my beliefs. Despite this, upon discussion of more complex topics such as negotiating boundaries, participants withheld their responses. This could stem from the idea that because I could relate to their experiences, due to a similar background i.e South Asian hijabi, they were afraid of judgement as religious topics were being discussed.

Epistemologically, my limitations as a researcher are more salient due to my inexperience with research, in particular qualitative research. During the interview process I found myself ignoring opportunities for probing participants further. As a hijabi, I am aware of the stigma attached to certain behaviours, for example, close relationships with males. Investigating this further may have added a further dimension to self-presentation techniques with multiple audiences. However, due to my awareness of the stigma, I found myself refraining from asking further questions. I held a preconceived notion that participants would answer dishonestly, due to their fear of judgement from a fellow hijabi therefore I refrained from asking.

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