

**PERFORMING THE SELF IN NEW MEDIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH AFRICAN MUSLIM WOMEN
INFLUENCERS ON INSTAGRAM**

by

ZARA SCHROEDER

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Supervisor: Dr. Patricia Hamilton

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how South African Muslim women influencers negotiate the self on Instagram. Drawing from interviews with South African influencers, this research argues that Muslim women influencers perform an “authentic” identity on Instagram in order to find a sense of belonging in society. In this study, Instagram is considered as a new public sphere, where interactions and communication take place in the current era of globalisation. Modesty, piety, hijab and fashion are considered as modes of self-expression that help the participants perform “authenticity”. These will be explored in relation to how the participants use these aspects to curate and portray an “authentic” online identity. The data for this research study has found that the participants commodify their “authentic” identities in order to fit into society, and to make a profit from it, thus enabling them to resist Western stereotypes that depict them as submissive, docile women. Furthermore, their role as influencers requires them to appear as “relatable” and “authentic” as possible, in order to attract an audience, so that they may gain paid collaborations with bigger brands. By portraying their “authentic” religious identity, they are able to appeal to a niche audience of Muslim women, which distinguishes them from other influencers and makes them unique. At the same time, by depicting themselves online as fashionable, modern women, they are able to remain relevant and interesting to their followers. This in turn allows them to assimilate into the new digital public sphere, since Western secular society is understood by minority groups, such as Muslim women, as being the hegemonic culture which they should comply with. Lastly, there is not much existing literature on this topic, especially in the South African context. Therefore, this research can provide insights into the new ways South African Muslim women craft, negotiate, navigate and perform their “authentic” identities in the new public sphere.

Key Words: South Africa, Muslim women, Instagram, influencers, authenticity, performance, identity, modesty, fashion, hijab.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Since it was founded in 2010, social media service Instagram's popularity has grown exponentially with a total of 100 million users in 2013 and a record of 75 million users uploading pictures daily (Ting, Ming, De Run, Choo, 2015: 18). Muslim women influencers are becoming increasingly popular on social media, especially in advertisements for big brands such as Adidas, Woolworths, MAC, Dior and others. Their presence is greatly acknowledged and followed by thousands of Instagram users, thus making these women micro-celebrities (Abidin, 2016: 2).

Internationally renowned Instagram influencers Dina Tokio and Ascia Al-Faraj are the inspiration behind this research project. Al-Faraj stands out from other Muslim fashion influencers, both due to her streetwear-inflected modest style and her armful of tattoos (Bauck, 2018). Much like Al-Faraj, Tokio also brands herself as a Muslim fashion influencer that started doing YouTube tutorials on how to style hijab¹.

In 2018 and 2019 Tokio and Al-Faraj decided to remove their hijab, creating an uproar of disapproval from their followers. Al-Faraj and Tokio's popularity led me to question the role religious identity plays in the way these women portray and brand themselves on social media. Furthermore, the controversy these women garner from Instagram raises questions about the different ways in which they capture the contradiction between the traditional Islamic notion of "modesty" and the overtly visual nature of Instagram. Additionally, there has been research on Muslim women's use of Instagram (Pramiyanti, 2019; Waninger, 2015), but it has not focused on

¹ A headscarf.

influencers as such and, also more specifically, on female Muslim influencers in South Africa. This research thus provides a unique perspective of negotiating identity in a post-apartheid context. The study raises the following question: how do these women, and other Muslim influencers, negotiate modesty on Instagram?

1.1 Authenticity

The work of Erving Goffman and Stuart Hall will be used to explore “authenticity”. This thesis argues that “authenticity” plays a crucial role in this negotiation. Umbach and Humphrey (2018:1) state that when an individual is “authentic”, they are able to accept a narrative of self-expression through a sense of selfhood that is original to them. “Authenticity” is an abstract concept which is not concretely defined; therefore, the performance of an “authentic” identity is one that is constantly changing and differs from person to person. This research argues that portraying an “authentic” version of the self is integral to fitting into society and finding a sense of belonging. Drawing from the experiences of Muslim influencers on Instagram, this thesis examines how Muslim women navigate identity and “authenticity” online. These women's experiences are framed by Western secular society, which deems certain types of behaviour as acceptable for Muslims, women and Muslim women. As a new public sphere, Instagram provides the participants with the opportunity to perform “authentic” versions of their identities through the content they share. Habermas (1961: 28) defines the public sphere as a space where one is able to share one’s opinions in order to bring about necessary change within society. This relates to the work influencers do, whose portrayal of an “authentic” online persona enables them to gain monetarily from this activity.

Furthermore, it takes into consideration the fluidity and flexibility of identity. The performance of a specific identity is a norm in society ever since the concept of society was touted. The performance of such identity has now shifted with the emergence of the digital sphere to an online persona. According to Waninger (2015:24), performing an “authentic” persona is a necessity for branding on Instagram. However, the performance of an online persona is also undertaken by the ordinary Instagram user, since this is a requirement for assimilating and becoming popular in this new public sphere. Through the curation of an “authentic” persona, the participants are able to find a sense of belonging and navigate their identity in the digital sphere.

“Authenticity” therefore explains how Muslim women influencers are able to negotiate their holistic identities on Instagram. Additionally, through images, videos and other forms of digital media, these influencers are able to appropriate certain aspects of Islamic religion when meeting Western fashion and makeup trends. Influencers are able to produce narratives of the self on Instagram. With this research I explore how influencers interpret the ways in which Western trends and discourses restrict them, but also enable their conscious choices and actions.

Muslims in South Africa constitute 1.09% of the total population. As a minority, their rights to freedom of religious expression are limited (Goodsell, 2017:116). Consequently, many of these Muslim women turn to digital platforms such as Instagram to express themselves. By acting as a new public sphere, Instagram affords these women an alternate opportunity of self-expression. Furthermore, this research suggests that social media is an important site for religious mobilisation and the creation of a pious religious identity (Hamayotsu, 2013: 659; Lengauer, 2013: 1).

It is evident that the experiences of Muslim identity by individuals around South Africa are distinct from one another. “There is no fundamental identity that any South African clings to in common. Thus, these numerous identities of South African Muslims can be perceived as being crosscutting in that each overlaps a range of contexts, or a common context may contain many identities within it” (Thornton, 1996:137). Therefore, this dissertation aims to explore the different ways Muslim women in Cape Town experience their religious identity. When considering the Muslim population in South Africa, it is evident that Indian Muslims contribute to one of the largest sub-groups within the heterogenous Muslim population, whereas, the other consists of Malay Muslims (Vahed, 2000: 44). Additionally, Vahed (2000:44) states that a significant number of Indian Muslims populate areas such as KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, whereas, the majority of Malay Muslims are confined to the Western Cape. Thus, there is minimum contact between the two, which means their Muslim identities and cultures do not integrate with one another. The intentional choice of narrowing down the participants to Capetonian Muslim women Influencers makes their experiences of performing “authenticity” unique from other South African women. This is due to the fact that Malay Muslims have a history, culture and tradition that vastly juxtaposes that of Indian Muslims (Vahed, 2000:44).

According to Vahed (2000:45), Muslims in South Africa accept numerous identities, and their religious identity is constantly being influenced by aspects such as “language, class, gender and region”. This is largely a result of apartheid, where all South Africans grew accustomed to adopting a ‘hybrid’ identity (Vahed, 2000: 49). This draws into the argument this thesis makes of identity being multi-faceted. Furthermore, it is evident that Muslim women in Cape Town experience and project their religious identity differently from other Muslim women around South Africa. Therefore, their portrayal of authenticity on Instagram is an experience that is unique not only to their religious identity, but to their interpretation of their cultural identity as well.

1.2 Agency

This thesis draws on Saba Mahmood’s theory of Islamic feminism to examine Muslim women influencers’ experiences on Instagram. Mahmood (2001: 207) advocates for liberated spaces, where women are able to discover actual emancipatory possibilities; such spaces should be ones where the influence of men and their intimidating presence does not feature and that women can claim as being their own. I suggest that Instagram is one of these spaces, offering Muslim women influencers the opportunity to negotiate their religious identity and express their own unique interpretation of modesty.

Agency is commonly perceived as free will and showing resistance to what is considered the norm, thus creating an antagonistic relationship of resistance between the actor (South African Muslim women Influencers) and the structure (Western culture). This insinuates that there is a nexus between compliance and resistance (Davids and Willemse, 2014: 2). These women are able to resist Western stereotypes of what and how they should be by displaying their identities on Instagram and portraying themselves as agentic, fashionable, empowered individuals (Bilge, 2010: 10). Furthermore, agency is the beginning of representation, with regards to becoming known and belonging in society. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the relation between these aspects and the role it plays in the negotiation and performance of an “authentic” religious identity on Instagram. Moreover, the role agency plays in this research is important, for not only does agency disrupt the norm, it also reinforces it (Davids and Willemse, 2014: 2).

1.3 Modesty and piety

The negotiation of modesty and piety by South African Muslim women influencers on Instagram is explored in this research. According to Penman (2018:13), photos and videos have become key social currencies online and social media have thus emerged as an important site for the negotiation of piety for Muslim women. In this study, piety is understood as an internal level of spirituality that is personal to an individual, whereas modesty is understood as an outward projection of piety which is depicted through means of dress and conduct. Some of the influencers portray modesty through dress and wearing hijab, whereas others do not. Additionally, being “modest” is something that is often attributed to Muslim women only but not to Muslim men; this research explores how female influencers navigate and negotiate this. The research also investigates the meaning attached to wearing hijab and dressing modestly for those who do, posing the question whether there are religious motivations behind wearing hijab or whether the reasons are cultural.

The concept of modesty in relation to piety is examined and what this means for female Muslim Instagram influencers. Many of these influencers brand themselves as modest, which implies a religious connotation, hence the reasoning behind exploring the aspect of piety in relation to how these women construct and portray their Muslim identity on Instagram with regards to modesty. Additionally, I explore what “modesty” and “piety” mean for the participants. The performance of modesty and piety on Instagram is essential to the portrayal of an “authentic” online persona. Davids and Willemse (2014:2) argue that the effort that is put in by individuals to assimilate into dominant discourses is part of their agency.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter explores literature related to themes which have emerged in this research. This study argues that portraying an “authentic” version of the self is integral to fitting into society, particularly as a Muslim woman influencer on Instagram. This particular group of women navigate their sense of self through their success as influencers on Instagram. Instagram acts as a new public sphere which provides a new type of platform where female Muslim influencers are able to perform their identities by conforming to cultural norms that have been perpetuated by Western secular society. The desire to belong and to fit into society is a natural instinct for any human, therefore, the performance of an identity that is deemed acceptable by the hegemonic culture is a habitual behavior for individuals who belong to minority groups such as Muslim women. The theories that will be drawn upon in this section will contextualise how Muslim women attempt to assimilate into society by portraying and performing “authenticity” online.

This research study is informed by existing literature that focuses on the construction and negotiation of religious and cultural identities for Muslim women. It also draws on scholarly research around the politics of modesty, dress and hijab in Muslim women’s fashion and beauty. It is important to acknowledge that there is a gap in existing literature on how Muslim women influencers perform “authenticity” online in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, this study is even more significant, as it will provide some insight into how an “authentic” identity is curated, negotiated and performed online in this specific context. Moreover, this research will explore how influencers curate online personas that are meant to appear as “authentic” as possible in order to attract an online community and build a digital brand.

This chapter begins with a section defining Instagram and influencing and its particular significance in the post-apartheid South African context. An explanation is provided on how these two aspects contribute to the performance of an “authentic” online persona. Following this, reference is made to literature that addresses Muslim women’s performance of an “authentic” online persona in order to assimilate into the digital public sphere, building an online brand and

attracting followers. Thereafter a definition for religious and cultural identities will be sought and the nexus between these identities will be explored. Lastly, the research will explore how modesty, piety, hijab and fashion contribute to the crafting and performance of an “authentic” online identity.

2.1 Defining concepts

2.1.1 Instagram as a new platform of digital media

This section addresses Instagram’s role as a digital platform that offers a new type of public sphere to its participants in which they are able to negotiate, create and perform their “authentic” identities in ways that have not been done before. According to Veissi (2017:4), since its launch in 2010, Instagram has gained 700 hundred million users globally as of April 26, 2017. Instagram’s popularity has grown exponentially with a total of 100 million users in 2013 and a record of 75 million users uploading pictures daily (Ting, Ming, De Run, Choo, 2015: 18). Instagram has recently been described as the most influential social media platform as its levels of engagement are acknowledged as being 10 times higher than platforms such as Facebook, 84 times higher than Twitter and 54 times higher than Pinterest” (Penman, 2018: 26). This explains my choice of Instagram as the specific social media platform for this research.

Instagram is a social media platform where individuals capture and share their instant life moments with friends and family globally (Hu, Manikonda and Kambhampati, 2014:595). It “offers its users a way to take pictures and videos, apply different manipulation tools (filters) to transform the appearance of an image and share it instantly with the user’s friends on the application” (Hochman et al., 2012: 6). Instagram’s countless editing and photo manipulation features enable influencers to craft their content in a way that allows them to appear “authentic” to their audiences in the most relatable way possible. Instagram’s aim is to enhance interaction between users by having them share their experiences via images and videos, thus contributing to the prominent visual-affordance Instagram has (Pramiyanti, 2019: 53).

Foucault (1988:21) defines “technologies of the self” as methods that enable people to control their “bodies, minds, souls, and lifestyle” on their own accord. Therefore, by being able to do so, Foucault (1988: 2) argues that this allows the individuals to reshape themselves so that they may

achieve a particular quality of life that meets their desired standards. Instagram fits Foucault's (1988) description of technologies of the self, as it provides a platform for individuals to transform and display their "authentic" identities in any way they wish. Furthermore Bastani (2001:5) states that social media platforms have become a new form of communication which have transformed human interaction and relations in the way they communicate our "authentic" identities. According to Cadirci and Güngör, it has created a new form of socialisation (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019: 269).

Selfies, for example, are one of the most popular types of image on Instagram and used by the influencers in this study to communicate their digital brands. Selfies are often taken to portray who we think we are (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019: 270) and are defined as "a photographic object that initiate the transmission of human feeling in the form of a relationship (between photographer and photographed, between viewer and viewed etc.)" (Senft and Baym, 2015: 1589). Selfies are also described as a type of practice where gestures are used to communicate various messages to numerous audiences (Senft and Baym, 2015: 1589). Therefore, it is suggested that various sides to identity may be portrayed in a single selfie. Senft and Baym (2015: 1588) also describe a selfie as a "cultural artefact and social practice... a way of speaking and an object to which actors respond". This was also found in research conducted by Piela (2010:102), where she states that pictures create "religious identity narratives of powerful, direct, serious, but also funny, poetic, subversive, and intimate women which thereby challenge the label of the Other, a stranger, a threat, a religious fundamentalist, a victim of patriarchy". This suggests why Muslim women have chosen Instagram as their specific site to portray their religious identity. By sharing selfies and videos of themselves on Instagram, they are able to resist nuances of the Other yet comply with them at the same time by conforming to Western cultural notions of fashion and beauty.

According to Penman (2018:3), photos and videos have become key social currencies online and thus emerge as an important site for the negotiation of religious and cultural identity for Muslim women. Selfies combine various means of existence into a single image, thus, enabling an individual to explore and display numerous sides of their identity. This also suggests that identity is ever-changing in that it is fluid and multi-faceted. Moreover, this is how influencers create a narrative of their "authentic" sense of self through the images and videos they share on Instagram.

Instagram is known as being a platform that encourages innovation and artistry, thus making it the ideal space for “authentic” self-representation through digital media (Penman, 2018:3). For these women, the visually mediated self-expressions they share via images are commodities which become digital possessions which they can capitalise on (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019:272). This notion is supported by a study conducted by Kavakci and Kraeplin (2016:101), which suggests that the motive behind Muslim women influencers sharing their personal lives on Instagram is to capitalise from the online brand they create.

Individuals have an innate desire to communicate and express their “authentic” identity to others, however this desire is continuous. Social media platforms such as Instagram are “continuous and dynamic”, thus becoming a medium through which “authentic” self-expression can take place on a daily basis, according to Çadirci and Güngör (2019:268). These new forms of communication have become even more prevalent with the relationships that have been forged between influencers and ordinary Instagram users.

This research explores how Muslim women influencers use Instagram as a platform to portray their “authentically” curated identities. Additionally, Instagram is not only a platform where information and communication can occur, but it also forges a bond between “authentic” self-expression and self-representation (Pramiyanti, 2019: 54). This enables these two functions to be performed in a public sphere by Muslim women in a way that has not been done before in post-apartheid South Africa.

Serafinelli (2017:53) argues that “Instagram as a visual-based media platform, affords extensive visual connection and interaction between its users”. This contributes to the brand and online community that influencers create in order for them to generate an income from influencing. According to Waninger (2015:62), Instagram has emerged as a new sphere for advertising and networking for Muslim women influencers. Since Instagram is a social media platform that is accessible to anyone, everyone who uses the platform is able to manage the curation of their “authentic” identity, especially minority groups such as Muslim women (Waninger, 2015: 62). Banet-Weiser (2012:210) argues that a brand is central to all products, however, this brand can be applied to the self as well. It is evident that influencers make themselves brandable and relevant to

a niche market of Muslim women by using their religious identity. Therefore, they use Instagram as a platform to reach thousands of other Muslim women by portraying themselves as being relatable, “authentic” Muslim women.

2.1.2 Becoming an influencer by portraying an “authentic” self and gaining cultural capital on Instagram

It is evident that Instagram has provided individuals with a platform where they can explore their identities in a new way, but besides navigating and performing their identities online, individuals can now profit from their “authentic” online personas by being influencers. An influencer can be defined as a microcelebrity; influencing is “a new style of online performance that involves people ‘amping up’ their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites” (Abidin 2016:2). According to Marwick (2015: 114), these individuals are different from mainstream entertainment industry celebrities, but are also able to become public icons with large-scale followings.

According to Abidin (2016:2), a micro-celebrity entails “being famous to a niche group of people” as well as the curation of a persona that followers can feel they can relate to. This explains the reasoning for selecting Muslim women as participants in this study: I wanted to examine the way many Muslim women influencers started branding themselves according to their religious identities on Instagram. They would define their brand as “modest and Muslim”, therefore making themselves appealing to a niche market of other Muslim women such as myself. This research questions the role religious identity plays in crafting an online persona and how users of certain social media platforms are able to monetise that curated identity.

Social media influencers gain an income through content creation with the aim of promoting a particular brand with the goal of acquiring a following as well as brand recognition (Glucksman 2017:78). What makes influencers useful as a unique form of marketing strategy for brands is the fact that they are able to promote brands through their personal lives, thus making them appealing to the average consumer (Glucksman, 2017: 78). In addition to this, their candidness and “openness” with their followers causes them to appear more credible, thus more likeable and

trustworthy. By engaging with their followers, they are able to make themselves brandable and they therefore influence the purchasing power of their online community. The essence of influencing is a new form of work that has recently emerged with the rise of digital media. However, the significance behind this lies in the fact that these influencers are able to gain a profit from curating and sharing an “authentic” online persona.

It is evident that the advancement of technology has contributed to new ways of expressing an “authentic” identity (Fealy and White, 2008: 43). Weintraub (2011: 1) argues that “[s]ince new media and communication technologies have entered into Muslims’ everyday lives, they are increasing their expression of religiosity in various ways and generating new ideas about Islam through Islamic popular culture in the form of “film, music, fashion, magazines and cyberculture”. This suggests that Instagram has emerged as a tool through which Muslim women influencers are able to negotiate their religious identities. Muslim women are using their roles as influencers as a strategy to “navigate the market and engage the modalities of consumer capitalism (endorsing brands and creating their own) in order to assert their role as “Western consumers”” (Waninger, 2015: 28). Furthermore, through the images they share, they can communicate their opinions and express their multi-faceted “authentic” identities. Selfies are understood as being a new form of self-expression that allows the sharing of behaviour and depicts life as an object of “politicized discourses” (Senft and Baym, 2015: 1589).

According to Waninger (2015:26), “branding is much more than just assigning a name or face to an object; it requires long term commitment and involvement, high levels of resourcing and also skill”. A brand is essentially a marketing tool that is embedded in capitalist logic, the purpose of which is to earn a profit. This suggests that the participants are engaging in neoliberalism through commodifying their identities by being influencers. Therefore, in order for branding to be successful, it is important to communicate a particular message which is relatable to the target audience that will be consuming the product. This is why the participants brand themselves as being Muslim and modest; they hope to appear relatable to Muslim women.

Branding is a process of creating a product that is different, where this particular product is meant to appear more appealing to a certain niche market (Waninger, 2015: 26). This lies in the belief

that “certain demographics” have particular preferences with regards to taste and values which distinguish them from other consumers (Waninger, 2015: 26). By being Instagram influencers, these participants need to distinguish themselves from their peers in the industry, therefore, by branding themselves as Muslim they are portrayed as unique and appealing. Furthermore, they are engaging in capitalism by being producers and consumers of Western beauty and fashion trends. All of this is done through the curation of an “authentic” online identity, where they are able to engage in the process of navigating, curating and performing their multi-faceted identity.

2.2 Authenticity

This section explains how the women perform “authentic” online personas on Instagram in order to find a sense of belonging in the new public sphere and to make a profit from their online identities. Being an influencer enables these participants to perform an identity that is “authentic” and relatable, therefore they are able to build a brand around their identity. As mentioned previously, being relatable allows them to make themselves appealing to a niche audience, which translates into paid collaborations with other bigger brands such as Urban Decay, Airbnb, Netflix and others. Vannini and Franzese (2008: 1621) define the quality of being “authentic” as “genuine, natural, or sincere, truthful, original, and the practice of being true to one’s self or others”. Umbach and Humphrey (2018:1) state that when an individual is “authentic”, they are able to accept a narrative of self-expression through a sense of selfhood that is original to them. Erving Goffman (1959) suggests an ideology of the construction of identity through performance. This performance includes the concept of the front stage and the backstage. The front stage consists of aspects such as “racial characteristics, clothing, sex, age, size and looks, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, bodily gestures and the like” (Goffman, 1959: 34). When individuals are in the front stage, their performance is dependent on the values, preferences, and norms of their audience (Goffman, 1959: 34). For the participants of this study, the “front stage” is online. Furthermore, while attempting to display an “authentic” identity, the Influencers are searching for cues from their followers’ preferences to guide them in the curation of an “authentic” identity to portray on Instagram.

Goffman’s theory is mainly based on the notion of dramaturgy, “as a metaphor for all social interaction - with each player taking the role of either performer, audience, or outsider” (Gonzales

and Hancock: 2008: 169). Prior to the theory proposed by Goffman, researchers suggested that identity is moulded by social interaction, since individuals are constantly self-reflexive in relation to the Other (Gonzales and Hancock: 2008: 169). Research has found that public self-expression is closely related to the curation of identity, more so than that which is performed privately. Originating from an innate desire to belong, people often adopt public behaviour and social norms from hegemonic Western culture (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008: 170). The habit of sharing the self online is a deliberate one; however, it engages in a process of creativity and expressiveness (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008: 170).

Goffman (1959:112) states that “a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course”, thus suggesting the front stage is a place where the idealised version of the self is portrayed; whereas, the back stage consists of the input necessary to maintain appearances in the front stage (Hogan, 2010: 378). This is evident in how the participants spend hours filming, editing, and planning content to share on Instagram. Their content needs to portray a narrative of their “authentic” sense of self to their followers. This therefore illustrates that individuals are required to perform their identities as convincingly as possible, which entails a lot of effort being put into the backstage aspect of the performance (Hogan, 2010: 378).

Since influencers are constantly and carefully examined by their audience on Instagram, they need to be continuously aware of how they depict their “authenticity” as modest Muslim women (Waninger, 2015: 29). However, it is challenging to portray Islamic fashion in an “authentic” way, this would entail that the identities of these participants are embedded in Islam, which would contradict the modern selves they display on Instagram. This suggests that identity is not something that is fixed, rather that it is fluid and multi-faceted. According to Waninger (2015: 29), “‘authenticity’ arises by “blending a variety of semiotic resources, some of which are sufficient to produce a particular targeted ‘authentic’ identity, and consequently enables others to identify us as ‘authentic’ members of social groups within different ‘micro-hegemonies’”. By depicting themselves as religious women, the influencers are marketing themselves to a specific niche market of Muslim women, therefore, they are creating online communities of cultural capital, where they are able to capitalise on the purchasing power of their followers. However, Gonzales and Hancock (2008:168) argue that the self that is presented online is a type of “public

commitment” which means that the “authentic” online-persona becomes one that individuals become committed to since it is one that they are constantly performing.

Hitherto it was understood that being an influencer entails the creation of a brand to attract followers. However, this brand is embedded in the identity of the influencer. All the influencers in this research try and reach out to a specific niche – that of Muslim women. They are therefore required to create a brand that is based on their religious identities in order to portray themselves as being relatable to their target market. Banet-Weiser (2012:36) argues that the surge in self-branding that is occurring on social media as a new public sphere, is a new form of self-expression of “authenticity”. Moreover, Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons (2002:4) argue that research has found that people are able to express their “authentic” identities better online rather than offline. This suggests that the online identity that is presented is often a reflection and expansion of one’s offline identity (Schau and Gilly, 2003: 12). This contributes to a new form of self-expression and self-representation that has not occurred prior to the emergence of social media platforms.

Waninger (2015:21) describes branding as the “conscious construction of a self or product (or both) that becomes distinctive through this idea of “authenticity”, in which an equally constructed sense of style is presented as natural and therefore, “authentic”. Thus, Instagram provides a platform for this framework to materialise. It also allows individuals to discover various aspects of the self (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008: 171). Furthermore, it provides individuals with a space to curate and display one’s perception of “authenticity” (Waninger, 2015: 21). Once they depict themselves as sharing the same religious beliefs and values as their followers, they become likeable and trustworthy. They are required to do this, even if they do not necessarily identify with their religious identities, it is necessary for their success as influencers. It is therefore crucial that they appear as “authentic” as possible.

In this study Goffman’s theory is used as a framework to explore how the participants perform an “authentic” online persona in order to find a sense of belonging in the new digital public sphere. Once influencers build a sense of trust amongst their followers, they are able to influence their followers’ purchasing preferences and therefore are able to profit from their content on Instagram. Goffman (1959: 52) argues “that the identity performance can be affected by two things: the appearance (physical look) and the manner (behaviour)”. Goffman’s theory is still relevant to

understanding the way individuals portray themselves online today, especially influencers on Instagram. The theory helps to interpret how female Muslim influencers utilise the visual affordances of Instagram for self-expression and self-representation. It is evident from the content they share on Instagram that they try and portray themselves as modern, fashionable women. Goffman's work helps to make sense of how their virtual identities are expressed in "authentic" ways through an Islamic-themed corporeal aesthetic. By incorporating religious identity through dress, influencers engage in a form of communication about their "authentic" identities, with their followers (Zevallos, 2007:1).

According to Goffman (1959:26), it is normal for an individual to attempt to control the impression others will have of him or her, therefore they put up a performance of what they perceive as being accepted by the other party. Goffman (1959:366) elaborates on this further:

When interacting, people always engage in 'impression management' and provide others with information or cues about their own identity. These include 'cues given' (information that is deliberately or even strategically communicated) as well as 'cues given off' (which are provided unconsciously). This impression management is not always conscious and reflected, but often habitualized and based on social scripts that include certain routines of behaviour in specific situations.

When considering the above quote vis-à-vis the research participants, it is evident that when they engage in "impression management", they try and portray the most "authentic" version of their identity that they think their audience would want to see. This is done subconsciously since Goffman (1959:50) argues that the performance of an "authentic"-self that individuals engage in is often done in accordance with context and audience. "Goffman's analysis points to a complicated cycle of interaction between an individual's unique sense of self, other people's understanding of who they think we are, and public discourses about what constitute acceptable and unacceptable ways of representing our identities" (Zevallos, 2007: 1). Moreover, it has become a norm for performing identity by engaging in expected behaviours and attitudes in order to belong to a particular society. In this case, the participants seek to find a sense of belonging in Western secular society on Instagram, since the West is deemed as the homogenous culture and Muslim women are considered as belonging to the minority. In addition, the "cues" influencers give off

encompass a range of aspects which include the hijab and promoting modest fashion to best portray their “authentic” religious identities, whereas, their “authentic” cultural identity is portrayed by using “cues” such as depicting themselves as modern, fashionable women who comply with beauty and fashion trends from the West. Furthermore, by engaging in an era of post feminism through the performance of themselves as being beautiful, model-like women, the influencers are participating in the “contemporary cultural obsession with the authentic” (Peterson, 2016a: 16). Therefore, through this constant curation of an “authentic” self, the nexus and opposition between the modern and traditional self emerges.

Other “cues” that aid in the portrayal of an “authentic” identity include the selfies, videos and captions the influencers use to depict themselves as being relatable and likeable to their followers. According to Senft and Baym (2015:71) and Iqani and Schroeder (2016:9), selfies have been acknowledged as an extension of “visibility, identity, agency, permission, authenticity and empowerment”. Çadirci and Güngör (2019:274) argue that people who are active on social media platforms are masters of self-presentation, as they can portray themselves as they wish. Moreover, they can express their own identity as well as experiment with other identities (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019: 274). They are able to define and redefine themselves in ways which were never accessible and possible for them before, especially in the post-apartheid context.

The selfie is also considered as a new form of communication and reaction where interaction with the self has now transformed into likes, comments, views and shares². Moreover, the way in which selfies are taken and retaken are essentially staged performances of the self. It reinforces real life experiences in a virtual way which creates a narrative of the self online. Gye (2007:282) argues that self-expression through selfies is not a permanent representation of self, rather, the self is continuously being constructed. “What people attempt to present through their selfies is based on who they think they are and who they want to be and is shaped by their social interactions with others” (Kwon and Kwon, 2014: 302). Inquiring into the ways South African Muslim women influencers engage in creating, performing and understanding their “authentic” identities via digital media on Instagram and how this action is dependent on consumerism is deserving of

² There are various responses available on Instagram to images and videos that are shared. These including liking, and commenting on the post, or viewing and reposting the post.

research. This research will therefore explore the extent of “authentic” self as it is performed on Instagram through the self-expression of the participants.

2.3 Theories of religious and cultural identities

Hitherto, it is understood that Instagram provides a platform for identity to be explored and portrayed, and that influencing enables the performance of an “authentic” identity to be performed online in order to fit into society and make a profit. This section explores which types of identities are navigated, negotiated and depicted online in order to achieve a sense of belonging in the new public sphere, and how the promotion of certain identities allows influencers to capitalise on their “authentic” online personas.

Storey (1999:135) defines identity as a complex concept that consists of influences that are personal and social. Individuals are continuously trying to construct a sense of self by absorbing norms and practices from particular aspects in their environment in order to consciously and even unconsciously reiterate their identity to others (Pramiyanti, 2019: 51). “Identity is not fixed, individuals are constantly trying to find a place between the state of “being” (actual self) and “becoming” (ideal self)” (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019: 274). This suggests that the construction of identity is dependent on the environment one finds oneself in, as well as one’s audience (Çadirci and Güngör, 2019: 274). By being influencers on Instagram, Muslim women are able to learn fashion and beauty trends from the West and then appropriate it according to their personal preference in a way that they believe best portrays their “authentic” identity. This therefore indicates that identity is not only constructed in the real world but is also done “in the digitally mediated online world” (Pramiyanti, 2019: 51).

As this research indicates, Muslim influencers prefer being identified as modern and fashionable women, rather than being classified as traditional. This is because traditional Muslim women are commonly misconceived as docile, submissive and oppressed. “Traditional discourses of Islam... are often pitted against Western traditions of consumerism, making the modern fashion world seem at odds with the religion’s moral codes” (Waninger, 2015: 2). These women want to challenge these stereotypes by portraying themselves as Western and modern. By doing so, these women are resisting Western stereotypes of how and what they are, yet at the same time they are conforming to Western culture and trends by adopting their norms. Sairin (2011:6) argues that the West is

acknowledged by minority groups with antipathy. The West is constantly the forerunner with regards to “developing concepts of liberalism, neo-capitalism, and secularism”. While the influencers consciously oppose Western stereotypes of Muslim women, they subconsciously adopt the “good values” of modernisation such as being educated, opinionated and independent (Sairin, 2001: 6), all of which have been transmitted to them via Westernisation which they have observed on social media. Therefore, social media is both a source of Westernisation and a means to push back against it.

Sairin (2011:6) explains that “the Western world is ‘longed for’ and at the same time, hated”, which alludes to the reasoning behind the participants’ desire to resist and comply with Western secular society. The West is often perceived as the hegemonic culture that all minority groups are expected to conform to (Eide, 2010:69) Additionally, adopting Western trends is crucial to their success as influencers, since their Western sense of fashion makes them attract followers and become popular on Instagram. By performing their cultural identities, these women are able to assimilate into society as well and find a sense of belonging.

Waninger (2015:2) states that the definition of what a Muslim woman means is constantly reconstructed vis-à-vis how neoliberal society defines Muslim womanhood. Waninger (2015:2) argues that traditional discourses of Islam are constantly measured against Western notions of consumerism, thus framing Islamic religion as antagonistic against modern fashion. However, Muslim women are navigating this by incorporating modern Westernised fashion trends into Islamic codes of dress through digital media. They integrate expressions of piety into their online identities, and by doing so they develop an Islamic consumer culture that enables religious belief to correspond with consumerism (Waninger, 2015: 3). This also allows the women to curate an “authentic” religious identity that is relatable to their niche audience. Additionally, the power these women have in being able to influence and negotiate in the neoliberal market elucidates their desire for their sense of belonging to the West.

Theories of Islamic feminism are applied to interpret the ways the participants challenge stereotypical Western representations of Muslim women. Islamic feminism is a new genre of feminism that is comprised of women from majority and minority countries (Badran, 2008: 39). According to Mir-Hosseini (2006:639), Islamic feminism creates a sphere for Muslim women to

restore their faith and identity by resisting Western perceptions of Muslim womanhood. Peterson (2016b:63) suggests that Muslim women influencers challenge Western culture by creating content that is stylish and trendy in order to challenge the stereotype that they are “oppressed”, thus allowing them to portray themselves as “authentic” devoted Muslim women to their followers and by doing so, building a sense of relatability. Piela (2012: 133) argues that “Muslim women constantly attempt to reclaim their rights in Islam by defying a patriarchy that was made to trap them in a very negative stereotype of marginalisation and oppression in the Western psyche”.

This is reiterated by Rinaldo (2010a:594), who argues that Muslim women possess a unique form of agency which allows them to curate their religious identities in a way that makes them culturally relevant and modern, yet still remain true to their perceptions of traditional Muslim womanhood. Furthermore, by participating in the public sphere of Instagram, these women portray themselves as symbols of morality and modernity since they are actively challenging stereotypes about Muslim women. The conventional public space has always been known to be occupied by male authorities, however, since the emergence of social media platforms, everyone and anyone is able to voice their opinions and display their sense of self in ways that have not been done before. Moreover, the fact that Muslim women influencers are able to obtain a profit from doing so is also a substantial development that has not been researched previously. Badran (2008:106) argues that Muslim women are able to be advocates for Islamic feminism because their stance is grounded in their religion. According to Badran (2008:106), secular feminism and Islamic feminism are identical in the sense that they are mutually exclusive in the essence of what they stand for. “These paradigms are characterized by fluidity and relationality” (Badran, 2008: 106). This suggests that the cultural and religious identities of these influencers are embedded in an Islamic discourse that is fluid in the sense that it changes with time and context, thus again demonstrating that identity is multi-faceted. Additionally, with the progression of technology and shift of the public sphere to digital media, these women are now able to negotiate and navigate their “authentic” religious identities in different ways.

Gökariksel and McLarney (2010:7) state that “Muslim identities are increasingly constructed through consumption practices that lead to transregional and transnational ‘Muslim networks’”. This nexus led to the emergence of a market that is specific to Muslim women. By participating in

consumerism and neoliberalism, these women are resisting Western stereotypes of themselves and are navigating their religious sense of self in a way that allows them to curate an “authentic” identity. Furthermore, by choosing to portray their “authentic” cultural and religious identities visually via self-portraits on Instagram, they are able to control their self-representation (Piela, 2013: 783). By publicly sharing images of themselves on social media these women challenge notions of modest women being associated with passivity and submission (Piela, 2013: 785). They can alter the narrative that constantly depicts them as docile subjects into one that portrays them as active political agents. Hitherto, it is evident that there is a nexus between the religious and cultural identities of these women; not only does it contribute to the curation of an “authentic” identity, but it also allows the women to perform their “authenticity” in order for them to find a sense of belonging in the digital public sphere. This relates to the complexities of doing this type of research in the post-apartheid South African context. The participants have been exposed to a diverse society that has contributed to the “authentic” multi-faceted identities they have curated online.

2.4 Modesty, fashion and hijab as modes of performance of “authenticity”

Based on the literature from the previous section, it is evident that the women portray their religious identity through their online personas in an “authentic” manner to attract a niche audience. This section elaborates on how modesty, fashion and hijab contribute to the portrayal of “authenticity” on Instagram, as well as the negotiation of both cultural and religious identities. Schielke and Orient (2010:1) state that Islam is a discursive tradition which “informs the attempts of Muslims to live pious and moral lives”. Such terms are often closely associated with Muslim women and frame the way that influencers present their “authentic” religious identity online. Research on piety, ethics and tradition has found that the engagement Muslims have with their religion is an active process of interaction with perceptions of good character (Schielke and Orient, 2010: 5). This is echoed by Tong and Turner (2008:57), they state that pietisation is an individualistic process that engages in personal commitment and experiences.

This has informed my perception of “piety” as an internal level of spirituality and modesty as an outward projection of “piety” which is depicted through aspects such as dress and behaviour. “Modesty is defined as the acts involved in self-control and bodily practices concerning attitudes,

and clothing” (Tong and Turner, 2008: 43). Rinaldo (2010a:584) defined piety as “religious or spiritual devotion”. The performance of either the cultural identity or the religious identity raises the theme of “authenticity” in the online public sphere. Tong and Turner (2008:44) argue that the self-expression of the pious self in certain contexts may be perceived as “ambiguous or contradictory”. When applying Goffman’s theory to this particular context, we may assume that “these forms of interaction between the pious and the impious (traditional believers or secular persons) constitute what he calls ‘strategic interaction’” (Tong and Turner, 2008: 44). Goffman implies that actions of piety are more than projections of religious identity, instead they are a means for the further curation of a multi-faceted identity that is comprised of various aspects (Tong and Turner, 2008: 51). Tong and Turner (2008:42) argue that the participation in religious experiences has deteriorated in the secular sphere since globalisation has emerged. Instagram is a secular space, and it is best fitted for the promotion of Western secular culture. Therefore, it is challenging for Muslim women to find a sense of belonging on the platform. Inevitably, these women are forced to conform to fashion and beauty trends that are perpetuated by the West in order to assimilate into the new digital public sphere.

Fashion is one area where the politics of piety and modesty are expressed. Simmel (1904: 557) defines fashion as a tension between “how to become similar with others and simultaneously, how to become unique with personal preference”. A Muslim bourgeoisie has emerged in the fashion industry in the past decade; they have become consumers and producers of fashion globally (Waninger, 2015: 4). By engaging in the fashion industry, the participants have managed to forge a connection between religiosity and consumer practices, thus illustrating how these women have been able to gain cultural capital in the fashion and influencing industry through their religious identities. Deniz (2014:243) states that the global Muslim fashion industry is burgeoning, and it is estimated to be worth \$96bn, thus indicating the amount of purchasing power Muslim women have in the Islamic fashion industry.

Therefore, becoming a Muslim woman influencer who promotes fashion and beauty on Instagram has become a popular career path since there is a large niche market that demands content for Islamic fashion trends. “Fashion emblemizes and enacts multiple neoliberal freedoms, including the freedom to consume and [engage] [in] freedoms of self-expression and self-determination” (Pham, 2011: 386). This demonstrates how the influencers use fashion as a means of self-

expression of both their “authentic” cultural and religious identities. Moreover, it affords them the opportunity to engage in neoliberalism by commodifying their identities, and capitalising on it. This was reiterated by Nef-Saluz (2007:1), who states that modest dress and hijab have become incorporated into fashion trends, and they do not stand in opposition to consumer culture any longer. This indicates how Islamic practices for women through clothing have become commodified and allow Muslim women to have the opportunity to capitalise on their religious identities. Therefore, this would encourage them to present their Muslim identities in the most “authentic” way possible, in public spaces such as Instagram, and more frequently.

Since the influencers I interviewed specialise in fashion and/or makeup, these elements have become crucial to the way these women construct and perform their “authentic” religious and cultural identities online. “[T]he voices of Muslim women are often unheard in public discussion, then they find opportunities to express themselves visually through their fashion” (Peterson, 2016a: 5). Thus, it is evident that fashion and beauty play a crucial role in affording influencers an opportunity of “authentic” self-representation and self-expression on Instagram (Pramiyanti, 2019: 46).

In addition, combining Islamic fashion and Western trends is based on the presumption that fashion is something that is reserved for the West, and that Muslims are unable to experience it, since they do not belong to Western culture (Lewis, 2015: 12). This implies that Muslim women negotiate their religious identities in order to be perceived as modern, fashionable women. Moors (2007: 329) argues the reason why Muslim women influencers strive to be perceived as fashionable is because their social circles encourage them to aim for a sense of individuality and uniqueness, as well as to gain a sense of belonging to the dominant culture. As mentioned previously, the dominant culture is known to be the West, which has infiltrated Instagram. Moreover, Instagram provides the influencers with the “social script” where they consume Western fashion trends and conform to them. This suggests that fashion is a combination of conformity and individuality where the subject is expected to conform to popular fashion trends, yet create their own unique style (Pramiyanti, 2019: 46). This illustrates that the women use fashion as a means to construct and express both their “authentic” religious and cultural identities.

Simmel's (1904:2) framework of conformity and individuality can be used to understand the nexus between fashion and identity. Simmel's ideology can be used to interpret how South African Muslim women influencers portray their "authentic" religious identities, while concurrently displaying themselves as being fashionable. By doing so they are conforming to Western notions of femininity, and at the same time challenging stereotypes of Muslim women being submissive, oppressed and traditional (Entwistle, 2015: 2). This new form of beauty allows these women to overtly perform their "authentic" religious identity through dress, while simultaneously portraying their "authentic" cultural identities by conforming to Western beauty and fashion trends, thus illustrating the nexus between the two. Furthermore, the way these women navigate and consume Islamic fashion and Western fashion is part of their embodied performance of an "authentic" identity.

Barnard (2002:43) explains that fashion has allowed individuals to discover and express their sense of self. It is essentially a means of self-expression through a non-verbal communicative tool (Entwistle, 2000: 8). "Fashion has given a chance for Muslim women to share their cultures, values, and identities globally" (Entwistle, 2000: 66). It has allowed them to assimilate into the hegemonic Western culture not only on Instagram, but in the non-digital public sphere as well. Moreover, by dressing modestly, the influencers can use this to their advantage since it distinguishes them from ordinary influencers, thus making them more brandable. This research contributes to a gap in the scholarship on the nexus between Islamic fashion and the development and self-expression on Instagram, especially in the post-apartheid context.

By portraying themselves as modestly fashionable women, these women are combining their religious and cultural identities, thus suggesting a nexus between the two (Kulenović, 2006: 44). For example, some female Muslim influencers dress 'modestly' and wear the hijab. Thus, implying that the construction of an "authentic" religious identity is communicated through Islamic forms of dress and hijab; these items make the women appealing to their niche market and ensure their success as influencers. As I've suggested above, the hijab in particular is a form of expression of modesty and piety. But more than these characteristics, it may also operate as a tool for the performance of an "authentic" religious identity. Deniz (2014:240) defines hijab as a symbol that holds immense religious value, it is not only a garment that is meant to be worn, but it is also meant

to be upheld through certain behaviours that are outlined by Islam, therefore alluding to its connection with modesty and “piety”.

Williams and Nasir (2017:204) argue that the hijab has recently encountered a prominent popularisation which is partly due to consumerism on digital media platforms such as Instagram. The emergence and hype around hijab-wearing Muslim micro-celebrities on Instagram has motivated many international clothing companies, such as H&M, to start offering modest wear in 2015. (Williams and Nasir, 2017:207): “The scarf no longer only represents supporters of conservative Islam, but rather functions as part of a more complex process of contemporary identity politics” (Williams and Nasir, 2017: 204). This suggests that the commodification of hijab has allowed the participants to capitalise off it through branding themselves as “modest, hijab-wearing Muslim women”. By negotiating their cultural identities, the women are able to perform their “authentic” religious identities through wearing hijab.

This literature review has demonstrated how portraying an “authentic” online persona enables individuals to find a sense of belonging in the new public sphere. It also sheds light on the fact that individuals are now able to profit from the curation and performance of an online identity.

The following chapter explains the questions that emerge from the literature in this section and it sets out the research methodology that was used to answer these questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Approach

As a Muslim woman who is an active Instagrammer myself, I noticed that other ordinary South African Muslim women Instagrammers were advertising for brands such as Elizabeth Arden, MAC, and Adidas. Besides this, they were sharing high quality pictures and videos of themselves and they would post more frequently than the average Instagram user. In addition to this, the brands that they were promoting, were sending them free gifts from their range of products. These women started to refer to themselves as influencers and began attracting a large following on Instagram. This was when I began to question the role the religious identity of these women played in their success, since the women would brand themselves as Muslim influencers in their bios.³ Furthermore, I was interested in how they portrayed themselves as modest, modern women and how they carefully curated their identities in such a way that made them appealing to other Muslim women in a manner that appeared “authentic”.

I chose “authenticity” as the frame through which to examine these women’s religious identities. Rinaldo (2010a:584) defined piety as “religious or spiritual devotion”. I have also contextualised the curation of their “authentic” online identities in post-apartheid South Africa. This leads to the primary research question: how do South African Muslim women influencers perform “authenticity” on Instagram?

By making use of sociological notions of identity curation and performance, this question seeks to explore the social aspects involved in portraying an “authentic” identity online. This would elaborate how this contributes to the curation of identity in the new public sphere in order to find a sense of belonging. In order to fully understand influencing it is important to consider the following subsidiary questions:

³ A summary about yourself and/or your business on Instagram.

1. How does Instagram serve as a specific site for the construction of religious and cultural identities?
2. How do the women construct their religious and cultural identities?
3. How does portraying an “authentic” identity online help the influencers in curating their own identities?
4. What role, if any, does fashion and hijab play in the women’s construction of themselves as influencers and as Muslim women?

In order to gain insight into how the influencers craft an “authentic” identity online, an inductive, exploratory approach using qualitative research methods was used (Bryman, 2012: 24 & 41). This research is inductive because it is based on empirical observations that I made as the researcher. Furthermore, patterns have been extracted from the data, which has allowed me to theorise how the influencers articulate their sense of selves on Instagram in an “authentic” manner. The intentional use of a qualitative approach enabled me to understand what it means to be a Muslim woman influencer in the post-apartheid context, due to the qualitative approach providing more descriptive and conceptual data (Bryman, 2012: 41). Silva (2019:4) also describes qualitative research as a method that allows an in-depth understanding of a particular group of individuals, which provides insight into nuances of social contexts and meaning-making processes that contribute to the construction of the self. Its results are not meant to be generalised, rather it is meant to provide knowledge on a particular topic, and act as a basis for further research (Silva, 2019:5). Thus, this research method provided an opportunity for a much more significant evaluation of digital identity curation. Because of its focus on depth rather than breadth, the qualitative approach allowed me to explore the subjective experiences of these participants. This is especially relevant since the influencers are curating their “authentic” identities on a digital media platform, and they are able to make a profit off the narratives they portray online (Anderson et al., 2016: 2; Fuchs, 2014: 17). Therefore, each of their experiences and performance of “authenticity” is unique.

3.1.1 Selection of participants

This research study engaged with eight women Muslim Instagram influencers in South Africa. The ages of these women ranged from 19 to 29 years of age. The women vary in terms of the amount

of promotional work they do, their income, years of experience in the influencing industry, followers and religiosity. The criteria for this study consisted of women who currently work in the influencing industry, even if it has been only for one year. Participants had to be South African and be based in Cape Town. I had initially hoped to use influencers around South Africa, however, due to the difficulty I experienced in recruiting participants, I was only able to find Capetonian Muslim women influencers who were willing and available to participate in my research. Being an Instagram user myself helped me find and approach my interviewees because I had already followed a number of them on Instagram. Furthermore, by being familiar with Instagram's tools such as "search, follow, DM⁴", I could easily pinpoint the influencers who fitted the criteria for this research. The sampling method used for this study was convenience sampling.

The following criteria had to apply when recruiting the participants:

- They constantly endorse and advertise products for brands on their Instagram page.
- The commonly held definition of an influencer is someone who has a following of 1 000 (Abidin, 2016: 3). However, for the purpose of this research, only influencers who had a following of over 5 000 were selected to participate. I chose influencers with over 5 000 followers, as the number of followers corresponds directly to the amount of influence an influencer has over their followers and these participants would attract paid collaborations with bigger brands.
- They constantly share their daily activities and personal lives on Instagram hourly or every few hours, throughout each day.

The recruitment process involved contacting the participants who matched the criteria via their profiles on Instagram, through DM. I sent a standard message to the influencers inviting them to participate in the study. Thereafter, I arranged a time and place to meet with them in Cape Town. It was very challenging finding participants who were willing to participate, as I discovered that these women lead very busy lives and that they do not have much spare time to meet with a researcher for an interview.

⁴ This stands for "Direct Message", a tool on Instagram that allows users to send private messages to one another on the platform.

Another challenge was that a lot of the influencers have exceptionally large amounts of followers, therefore they are inundated with DM messages which causes them to be overwhelmed, consequently they are unable to respond or even read all the messages they receive. Additionally, I had a few influencers who agreed to participate but when the time came to arrange a meeting, they could not follow through. In order to overcome this and to accommodate two participants who were willing to participate but were unable to physically meet, I arranged an email-based interview with them.

Liamputtong (2007) in Cook (2011:1331) states that online research methods such as email-based interviews have contributed to making research “user -friendly” by enhancing their “comfort and control”. As the email interview was the most convenient option for these participants, I sent them the questions from the interview, as well as some guiding questions for the PhotoVoice activity. A week was provided to these participants to respond to the questions and the PhotoVoice activity. One of the main reasons why I decided on using email interviews instead of phone-based interviews was because I considered emails to be a better option, as they could respond in their own time and at their leisure. Through this medium, the participants do not face the same time constraints as they would in a face-to-face interview, where they would be expected to give an immediate response to the questions that are posed to them.

Additionally, I believed this form of interview to be within their comfort zone, since it was an interview via a digital medium. This is relevant to these participants, since emails form part of their daily digital interaction (Abidin, 2016: 3). Besides this, emails have become part of newly emerged forms of communication such as Instagram, therefore making it even more relevant to this particular research.

3.1.2 Participant profile

The following section provides a brief summary of each of the eight participants.

Table 1: Summary of the influencers' background

| Participants | Age | Number of followers | Brand focus | Year(s) of experience | Form of payment |
|--|-----|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Camilla ⁵ Interviewed: 23/07/19 | 24 | 13.9K | Fitness and lifestyle | 2 | Mostly receives free gifts ⁶ , rarely gets paid |
| Nala Interviewed: 10/09/19 | 23 | 38.3K | Beauty and lifestyle | 6 | Paid and gifted |
| Alia Interviewed: 24/09/19 | 19 | 32.7K | Fashion and lifestyle | 1 | Monetary payment fluctuates (depending on the number of campaigns ⁷ she does) and gifted |
| Rihanna Interviewed: 21/10/19 | 27 | 118K | Fashion, beauty and comedy | 3 | Paid |
| Dania Interviewed: 25/10/19 | 23 | 7,456 | Modest Fashion | 4 | Varies between money and gifts |
| Amelia Interviewed: 30/10/19 | 29 | 68.2K | Modest fashion, beauty and travel | 10 | Paid |
| Nadine Interviewed: 29/12/19 | 25 | 27.1K | Fashion and beauty | 3 | Mostly gifted, most of her income is from modelling |
| Sofia Interviewed: 23/06/20 | 23 | 46.3K | Fashion | 2 | Paid |

⁵ All the names used are pseudonyms.

⁶ Based on the interviews with the influencers, I have come to understand that another form of payment that the participants receive is through receiving gifts from the brands they advertise for. This gifting exchange is currently the most popular form of payment in exchange for influencing.

⁷ These are paid collaborations with big brands such as Nike, where they pay the Influencers to wear their product and advertise it for them through posting images and videos on Instagram.

3.2 Research methods and techniques

The methods used to collect data were PhotoVoice method, semi-structured in-depth interviews and email-based interviews. First, I used PhotoVoice, where I asked each participant to bring five pictures they felt best expresses their identity as a Muslim female in South Africa and their sense of self in general. These are pictures that have already been uploaded on Instagram and provided important insights into the different and possibly similar spatialities of these young women's lives, as well as the ways in which they construct and portray their "authentic" identities on this platform. I adapted PhotoVoice in this way because I had assumed that the participants only shared images on Instagram that were a true reflection of their "authentic" identities. Therefore, instead of asking them to take new pictures, I thought it would be easier to select pictures that have already been shared on Instagram, since those images have contributed to the "authentic" narrative they are curating of themselves.

3.2.1 PhotoVoice

Sutton-Brown (2015:169) describes PhotoVoice as a form of participatory action research strategy which is most commonly used with groups that are marginalised. This methodology seemed most applicable to this research therefore as it deals with Muslim women, a marginalised group in South Africa. Sutton-Brown (2015:169) explains the significance of PhotoVoice by stating, "[u]sing ethnographic techniques that combine photography, critical dialogue and experiential knowledge, participants reflect on and communicate their culture, expose social problems, and to ignite social change". It is evident from this research that images play a crucial role in communicating what words cannot. PhotoVoice has offered these participants an opportunity to express their sense of selves; it has allowed me to observe how the participants construct and perform their "authentic" identities online as a means of assimilating into the digital public sphere.

The use of PhotoVoice was intentional because photographs, as argued by Piela (2010:102), are visual self-expressions through narratives of religious identity. Instagram has provided a new digital sphere for Muslim women where they have the opportunity to visually express themselves. Furthermore, PhotoVoice provided me with an opportunity to engage with the participants in a visual way, which made the interview more interesting and interactive, thus allowing me to answer the primary research question in a manner that was visually representative.

The six in-person interviews commenced with PhotoVoice; I anticipated that the participants would experience PhotoVoice with ease, however most of them struggled with the activity. I think the biggest challenge was selecting five images that best represented them out of the thousands of pictures they have on Instagram. It therefore suggests that this particular method is not equally applicable to all young people, such as my participants, since they are inundated with thousands of choices. Additionally, many of the participants expressed the fact that their images are often not a true reflection of their “authentic” identities.

Most of the time the responses I received from the participants was not the sort of dialogue I had hoped for. I came to learn that most of the time the images they shared on Instagram were not done according to their personal preference, nor would they be the ones choosing the images they post. Instead, it would be the brands they work with, or their managers and stylists who choreograph the image in a way that would appeal best to niche audiences. I had assumed that each picture contributed to the narrative these women were constructing of their sense of self. This illustrates that their identities are constantly being constructed in a way that is deemed acceptable by their audiences in order for them to fit into the digital public sphere. The PhotoVoice activity lasted thirty minutes, during which I refrained from posing leading questions in order to give participants space to feel free to lead the conversation.

3.2.2 Semi-structured and email-based interviews

Once I understood the critical dialogue that was generated from the discussion with the influencers that emerged from the PhotoVoice (Sutton-Brown, 2015: 170), I conducted an in-depth interview with each of them which lasted 30 minutes. In the interviews, I asked more in-depth questions that allowed them to elaborate on certain topics that were raised during the PhotoVoice activity. I chose to use this research method alongside PhotoVoice, because it allowed me to address specific topics related to modesty, piety, hijab and fashion, which I had identified as aspects which contribute to the construction of an “authentic” online identity (see Appendix I). Moreover, there was a possibility that the participants would not address all the core issues I hoped to attend to during the PhotoVoice activity. In-depth interviews provided the participants with the opportunity to be active agents in the research process, where they were able to express themselves freely.

There were a few concerns about in-depth interviews however that I had to bear in mind. The first one was that the participants might have been apprehensive about speaking about their religious beliefs, as it is a sensitive topic. To address this, I tried to make the interview comfortable by making it more conversational and relaxed. I noticed that questions pertaining to religious practices were mostly answered swiftly and briefly. These included questions about daily prayers, fasting, and romantic relationships. However, questions relating to modesty, piety and hijab were answered in great detail. This suggests that the women felt more comfortable expressing what their religious identities meant to them as Muslim women. The hesitance in answering more specific religious questions, however, implies that the women were concerned about being judged, as they explained that they often receive criticism on those matters from their followers. Religion is thus a sensitive topic to discuss as it is often perceived as being a private matter.

Additionally, I did not want to lead the participants into articulating issues in a manner that did not correlate with the way they construct their religious identity online or in real life. However, this appeared to be the case for many participants, especially the youngest one. There would be times where I would find the participant contradicting herself throughout the interview, thus, suggesting that my presence as the researcher would motivate the participant to provide certain responses, hoping that it would be “the right answer” or the answer she believed I was expecting. Moreover, she was not the only participant who contradicted herself in the interview, almost all the participants portrayed themselves as devoted Muslim women, who crafted their identities in relation to their religion in every aspect of their lives, especially online. When this was not the case in reality, they would portray themselves as modern, fashionable women online, whose content was not solely focused on religion. I address this seeming contradiction in the findings chapter.

These discrepancies in representation made me question the “authenticity” of these women, and the way they presented themselves to me as the researcher in juxtaposition with how they portrayed themselves online. Furthermore, I have assumed that the informed consent form influenced their perception of the responses they believed I would expect from them. The title and summary I provided about the research and PhotoVoice activity suggested that I was investigating religiosity and traditional Muslim womanhood, which might suggest why the participants portrayed themselves as devoted Muslim women to me.

Although the once-off email-based interviews were convenient given the circumstances, they posed limitations vis-à-vis the depth of the responses I received from the participants. It was also challenging to interpret some of their responses, especially regarding the PhotoVoice, and since it was not done face-to-face, I could not ask the participants to elaborate on their answers. Despite this obstacle, the images these two participants chose were very useful in illustrating my argument in the findings chapter, since they highlighted my key themes. The participants were able to answer the questions in a manner that was mostly straight forward. This research method was particularly conducive to the situation since my presence did not impact their responses in the same negative way it did with the other interviews.

3.3. Data Analysis

The in-depth interviews and the PhotoVoice activity were audio recorded with the consent of each participant, after which they were transcribed. Transcription helped gain a more accurate account of each interview, thus helping in the process of analysis. Thereafter, transcripts were analysed using thematic coding. This entails a line-by-line coding system that is based on the themes which emerged from the data (Bryman, 2012: 22). The reason behind selecting this specific type of analysis is because it enabled me to identify the main themes this research study aims to explore: “authenticity”, identity, compliance and resistance (Smith and Sanderson, 2015: 154). By arranging the data in this specific format, I was able to identify recurring themes that were evident in all eight interviews easily (Bryman, 2012: 33). The most common theme throughout the interviews was that of “authenticity”.

The benefits of this type of analysis are that it explores the role of discourse in the constitution of subjectivity of selfhood (Smith and Sanderson, 2015: 154). In order to make the analysis simpler, the themes were first grouped into various categories. These themes included cultural and religious identities, Instagram and influencing, authenticity, modesty and hijab. These themes were systematically categorised and synthesised based on similar quotes that were found in all the interviews. Thereafter, the themes were reviewed and defined. Once I had narrowed down the themes, I realised that the main theme was “authenticity”. It was central to answering the primary research question and it best explained how and why the participants negotiated their religious identity on Instagram.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The Departmental Ethics Committee and the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University provided ethical approval for this research study. In conducting this research, I abided by the guidelines that were set out by the International Sociological Association (ISA). Participants were made aware of my intentions as a researcher as someone who aimed to conduct research; this was done by means of the informed consent forms, where I provided details about the purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks of participating in the research (see Appendix II). Informed consent was obtained from the research participants before the interviews commenced. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants, I made use of pseudonyms, and personal information which might allude to their true identities has been left out in my descriptions of them.

Using PhotoVoice risks exposing the identity of the participants since their faces will be shown in the images. To avoid this risk, I intended to blur the faces of the participants. However, since PhotoVoice is a research method where participants are able to lead research, I decided to ask the participants whether they would prefer me to blur their faces; none of them preferred this option. By opting to have their faces visible, it implied that the participants truly felt empowered by this research and it provided them with an opportunity to express how they articulate their self-expression online.

Additionally, data from the interview transcripts were stored as anonymised non-identifiable data. Paper data is stored in a locked drawer. Electronic data is kept on a password-protected computer, accessible to me only. Data will be kept securely for five years following the study, given the possibility of further longitudinal studies in the future. I take primary responsibility for the maintenance and eventual destruction of the data. After conducting the interviews, I asked each participant how they experienced the interview. All of them said they found it very interesting and useful, since it allowed them to articulate how Instagram has allowed them to express their “authentic” sense of self in post-apartheid South Africa.

One of the aims of the research was to provide an opportunity for the participants to speak about how they articulate and express their “authentic” identities, in a supportive context through this study. I believe my presence as a South African/Saudi Muslim woman played a role in allowing

the participants to feel comfortable opening up about the way they construct and portray their perceptions of Muslim womanhood on Instagram. Additionally, by being a similar age as the women, I think they believed I was able to relate to their experiences, which contributed to creating a relaxed, conversational type of setting for the participants. Moreover, the fact that I am an Instagram user myself allowed a sort of bond to form between us, since I was familiar with the platform and I knew the terminology they used, which made communication easier between us. Since I grew up in Saudi Arabia, and moved to Cape Town five years ago, I became interested in the way religious identity was articulated and performed in a society that is as diverse as South African society.

3.5 Conceptual Framework

Saba Mahmood (2001) and Stuart Hall (1996) are the key theorists that frame my analysis. Mahmood's approach to Islamic feminism will inform key themes which I explore relating to the construction of a religious identity in the post-apartheid context, while Hall will frame my approach to curation of an "authentic" identity on Instagram. Hall (1996:275) argues that one's identity is a crucial aspect of the self. Hall (1996:276) states, "[i]dentity, in the sociological conception, bridges the gap between the personal and the public worlds". This implies that identity is a mediator between creating and communicating the self. The crux of our existence lies in developing a sense of belonging; therefore, the portrayal of identity allows connections and interactions to take place between people. Hall (1996: 276) explains this as us projecting ourselves into cultural identities, and by doing so, we are adopting values and beliefs that essentially become a part of our existence. Consequently, the acceptance and adoption of this cultural identity enables us to find a place within the social and cultural world (Hall, 1996: 276), which suggests that the cultural identities that influencers adopt is their way of assimilating into society and finding a sense of belonging. This is due to the West being the hegemonic, dominant culture that minority groups are expected to conform to.

Hall (1996: 276-277) describes identity as multi-faceted: "[t]he subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities". This implies that the online identity influencers portray are a synthesised version of themselves, where they try and amalgamate their religious and cultural

identity into one. It is evident that they identify with both versions of their identities, however, since identity is fluid, it is constantly changing and developing. It is evident that influencers are constantly crafting their identities on Instagram: through every product-promotion, video and photograph the women are curating a new aspect of their identity.

Hall (1996:277) argues that “identity is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us”. Therefore, individuals are constantly adopting various identities at different times of their existence, additionally, these new identities are usually not necessarily merged into a rational self (Hall, 1996: 277). This implies that each and every one of us are conflicted with multiple versions of the self, which ultimately contradict one another. This relates to the instances during the interview where participants would contradict themselves, thus suggesting that the interview itself was a site where identity curation and performance occurred. Furthermore, this is evident in the way influencers brand themselves as modern modest Muslim women who try and amalgamate their religious and cultural identities to portray a type of hybrid identity. By conforming to a Western cultural identity, the women are resisting the stereotype of them being classified as docile, submissive, oppressed beings. However, by depicting themselves as modest Muslim women, they are abiding by Islamic practices and portray their “authentic” religious identities to their followers.

Saba Mahmood (2001) supports Hall’s theory of identity formation from an Islamic feminist perspective, which would provide insight into the ways the participants construct their religious identities in the digital public sphere. Mahmood (2001: 206) advocates for specific spaces that are liberated where women are able to discover actual emancipatory possibilities. She claims that these spaces should be ones where the influence of men and their intimidating presence does not feature and where women can claim as being their own (Mahmood, 2001: 207). I suggest that Instagram might be one of these spaces, offering Muslim women influencers the opportunity to navigate their religious identity and express their interpretation of modesty.

In “Politics of piety”, Mahmood (2005: 23) argues that the self is created in relation to social norms, thus suggesting that the women of this study are crafting their identity vis-à-vis the predominant cultural norms that they are exposed to, both in South Africa and on Instagram. Moreover, according to Mahmood (2005:12) and Göle (2002:8), Muslim women who engage in

pious practices are trying to resist secularised norms of society and identity, thereby suggesting that they are complying with their religious identities and that they are negotiating their cultural identities, therefore allowing them to appear relatable and “authentic” to their audience on Instagram.

Mahmood (2005:11) explains that these women use aspects such as modesty and hijab as a means of portraying their religious identity, which relates to the way the participants use Islamic dress as a portrayal of their “authentic” religious identity online. However, by incorporating contemporary Western fashion trends into their modest dress, they modernise it and comply with their cultural identities, and essentiality contribute to their assimilation into society.

According to Mahmood (2005: 21), the self that Muslim women portray is not independent from the social world, rather, it is a result of the interchange with its norms. It suggests that the self that the participants construct is a mixture of the diverse cultures that exist in the post-apartheid context and on Instagram. Mahmood’s argument also corresponds with Hall’s in that identity is constructed in relation to the individual’s context and audience. Therefore, this research study aims to investigate how the participants construct and perform their “authentic” identities on Instagram in relation to the Other.

This methodology section has illustrated that identity is performed in relation to its audience. This was evident in the interviews I conducted with the participants, where they would contradict themselves in an attempt to portray themselves as “authentic” Muslim women, which supports the theories that Hall and Mahmood explain above. Furthermore, it is evident that identity is multi-faceted since the women are able to portray their religious and cultural identities in various ways through fashion and hijab.

The following chapter comprises a discussion of how the participants curate and perform “authenticity” online in order to find a sense of belonging. These findings will be unpacked in terms of the themes of Instagram, influencing, “authenticity”, religious and cultural identities and the role modesty, piety, hijab and fashion play in contributing to the curation and portrayal of “authenticity” on Instagram.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Portraying an “authentic” version of the self is integral to fitting into society and finding a sense of belonging. The following chapter will address the ways in which participants navigate identity and “authenticity” online. I will also examine how participants’ understanding of how they are meant to be is framed by norms and trends that are perpetuated by Western secular society. The chapter begins with a section that explains how Instagram and influencing are used as a means of self-expression.

This section elaborates on how the participants are able to use Instagram as a new public sphere where they are able to perform and display the negotiation, fluidity and flexibility of their “authentic” identities. I will show how the platform affords them the opportunity to curate their identity in an “authentic” way in relation to the Other, thus providing insight into the nexus between religious and cultural identities the women use in order to be seen as “authentic” Muslim women online by their brand and their followers. This section will also explain how the participants are able to resist Western stereotypes, which would determine what and how they are expected to be, by sharing their content online.

The second section elaborates on the curation of an “authentic” persona online; this section discusses how and why being “authentic” and relatable on Instagram is essential to being successful on Instagram and becoming an influencer. Through the curation and performance of an “authentic” online identity, these participants are also able to negotiate and navigate their true religious and cultural identities.

The final section of this chapter explains the creation of the self and the relation between religious and cultural identities. The intersection between religious and cultural identities fuels the curation of an “authentic” persona, thus, implying that identity is fluid and multifaceted. This section elaborates on how the integration of Islamic fashion, modesty and hijab enable these participants to curate and perform a religious online identity that is relatable and “authentic”. In addition, the

participants appropriate Western fashion trends and incorporate them into Islamic forms of dress; by doing so the women are able to make themselves appealing and interesting to their followers as they are able to be trendy and fashionable, whilst still remaining modest.

4.1 Using Instagram and influencing as modes of identity expression

The following section examines the significance that Instagram and influencing has in contributing to the creation and expression of an “authentic” identity. Instagram acts as a new public sphere which provides its participants a platform where they can engage in the self-expression of identity. Influencing affords Muslim women the opportunity to forge “authentic” personas online. In addition to this, Instagram provides them with a space where they can comply with, but also resist, Western cultural norms, thereby contributing to the curation, negotiation and performance of an “authentic” identity.

Pramiyanti (2019:62) argues that “[t]he accessibility of Instagram allows users to manage identity-making, specifically among marginalized groups like Muslim women”. Instagram has emerged as a new sphere for Muslim women influencers to market products and to network. It provides these women with an opportunity to create narratives of themselves online through sharing images and videos with their followers (Waninger, 2015: 6). This is evident in the way Sofia described the platform: “Instagram has actually made the world one”, thus suggesting that Instagram has become an extension of the non-virtual public, where individuals feel comfortable enough to express themselves through the digital content they share. According to Marwick (2015: 3), Instagram poses as a new resource through which identity can be constructed online. Additionally, Instagram allows a connection between users and influencers in an extensively interactive virtual manner. This is substantial, since words allow us to express our thoughts and feelings, whereas images allow us to communicate what words cannot (Pramiyanti, 2019: 53).

Besides being a space where the performance of an “authentic” identity occurs, Instagram is also a platform where Influencers can create their own businesses. Their business is based on their brand, which is based on the curation of an “authentic” identity that they perform. As Nala and Nadine explain:

My Instagram page is my personal brand and it correlates with who I am. Instagram [has] adapted in a way that it became a platform where creatives could showcase [their] talent online (Nala).

I feel like my Instagram is more for business, it's where I share my work (Nadine).

This indicates that their Instagram profiles are curated specifically for business, where they can generate collaborative work with bigger brands such as Adidas, Dior or Woolworths, resulting in paid partnerships. According to Belk (2014:57), the practice of self-consumption, as used by the influencers, develops a microcelebrity or a “global phenomenon” where ordinary individuals such as these women are able to use their Instagram platforms to create a large following among niche audiences. Once these influencers gain a large following, they attract collaborations which allow them to gain an income, suggesting that their success on Instagram lies in the “authenticity” they portray online.

Besides having a substantial number of followers, another aspect that differentiates influencers from ordinary Instagram users is the fact that influencers invest a lot of time, effort and planning into the content they curate: “I have a specific layout and feed planner that I use ahead of time before I actually post a picture. My feed needs to look a certain way so that I can attract brands” (Dania). This quote illustrates that the content that influencers share on Instagram is carefully planned and curated with the aim of making themselves appear as “authentic” and relatable to their followers as possible. Followers of influencers need to desire to be like these women and this becomes achievable by purchasing the same products that are advertised by the influencers.

Since influencers are aware of this, they are constantly attempting to make themselves appealing by using performative strategies that portray an “authentic” version of the self to their followers (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016). These women are able to bridge the gap between their followers and themselves by forging a relatable persona of themselves; this enables them to create a relationship with their followers. Pramiyanti (2019:63) argues that this is necessary in order for the women “to be accepted as global and cosmopolitan”, which allows them to gain cultural and financial capital.

Piela (2012:136) states that the development of an online space is vital for Muslim women to virtually engage with other women in order to find a better understanding and interpretation of Islam. Through the creation of this trust, the Influencers are able to convince their followers to adopt the same opinions they have, especially regarding Islam. According to Gonzales and Hancock (2008:52), Instagram allows “identity formation, presentation, and distribution”. This is evident in how the participants choose to present themselves online in order to make themselves relatable (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008: 52). Alia’s statement supports this: “I find that I have more engagement from my followers when I share real photos; when I post pictures that are styled and where I’m wearing makeup it doesn’t have much of an impact. I guess it’s because people can’t really relate to it”. Therefore, by monitoring which images and videos are popular amongst followers, influencers can determine how to curate their content in a manner that makes them appear most relatable and “authentic”.

This form of digital self-presentation online has the ability to impact the self-concept of users, which in turn impacts the nexus between their true identity and their “authentic” online persona (Gonzales and Hancock, 2008: 52). Furthermore, they make themselves brandable by creating a sense of relatability through their religious and cultural identities which enables them to advertise products through Instagram. This is evident in the following image Nala presented to me:



Figure 1: Advertisement through Eid

This image demonstrates that through sharing images via Instagram, the creation of a certain form of religious self is made easier through the intentional and strategic manipulation of a certain way of being (Pramiyanti, 2019: 53). Vis-à-vis the emergence of Instagram, digital media have proven to be a significant aspect of contemporary culture, indeed, they have become a way young people communicate with one another. Through this image, Nala is able to encourage individuals of a particular niche market (Muslim women) to purchase the product that is being advertised (the dress), since her followers would strive to look like her. Moreover, Nala makes the image look casual and natural by posing in her Eid outfit, as most young Muslim women tend to share images of their Eid outfits on the day, thus making herself relatable via visual content. However, the quality of the image is highly professional, which alludes to the marketing aspect behind the image.

⁸ *Shukran*: is Arabic for “thank you”.

This image illustrates how influencer's branding power operates by using Instagram as a marketing tool. Through this image it is evident that Nala uses her religious identity as a Muslim woman who is observing the celebration of Eid through the tradition of wearing new clothing on the day. However, she uses her religious identity as a marketing tactic to appeal to her niche audience by persuading them to purchase the garment she is wearing in the image she has shared on Instagram. In addition, she also portrays herself as being "authentic" in her religious identity by celebrating and observing the Islamic celebration, whilst still remaining compliant with her cultural identity in her fashionable dress, makeup and hairstyle.

4.1.1 Resisting stereotypes from Western secular society on Instagram

This section explains how the participants resist patriarchy and stereotypes that are perpetuated by Western secular society. The portrayal of an "authentic" religious identity is the means by which these participants resist the common misconceptions of how they are expected to appear in the public sphere. This section also elaborates on the implication the post-apartheid context has for the identity curation of the participants. Mahmood (2005:18) defines agency as: "not simply a synonym (equal) for resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable". Islamic feminism has been identified as "a new consciousness, a new way of thinking, a gender discourse that was feminist in its aspiration and demands, yet Islamic in its language and source of legitimacy" (Mir-Hosseini, 2006: 640). This new way of thinking about gender discourses is relevant to the approach the participants take when they address gender inequalities.

Badran (2008:4) describes Islamic feminism as: "a new paradigm in terms of approaching women's roles from women's perspectives, and it means that Islam and feminism cannot be viewed as an oxymoron". However, according to the West, Muslim women are commonly misinterpreted as docile beings who lack empowerment and agency over their existence (Eide, 2010: 1). The plight these participants have taken on in resisting Western stereotypes through the content they share and the way they portray themselves on Instagram, illustrates how they depict themselves as being "authentically" religious women, thus enabling them to make themselves appealing to a niche audience of Muslim women. This is illustrated in the way the participants use

their cultural, religious, and gendered identities as influencers to criticise patriarchal discourses, through Instagram:

A lot of people think that Muslim women are locked up somewhere and they don't have a voice. So, I like to show that you can be a good Muslim and you can also have a good life. I try and show people that you can be balanced and be a Muslim at the same time (Rihanna).

I think it's cool to have a platform to share who you are and to show that being Muslim doesn't mean [you're] not normal, it doesn't restrict you. I think there's still this stereotype where people think that Muslim women are so restricted, like we're shackled up and we have no rights in Islam (Camilla).

Rihanna distinguishes between her religious and cultural identities in the above quote, where she refers to her cultural identity as her being “balanced” while being “Muslim” is her reference to her religious identity. She insinuates that being Western or modern is something that is not achievable if you are Muslim. It is evident that being religious and being modern are concepts that cannot be interrelated. Moreover, Rihanna and Camilla resist being perceived as docile, submissive women. They understand the negative stereotypes made by the West; thus, they use their platform as a means of resistance.

South African society, much like the identities of the participants, is one that is multi-faceted, in that it has been moulded by the histories of colonialism and apartheid (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013: 71). According to Hoel and Shaikh (2013:72), “[t]he effects of racism and colonialism on Muslim communities in South Africa were compounded by the formal establishment of apartheid in 1948”. Muslims were exposed to various degrees of political oppression and ostracisation, much like other non-white people during apartheid (Hoel and Shaikh, 2013: 72). Due to the multicultural diversity of South African society, it is important to note that these women are exposed to a multitude of cultures, although it is evident that these women appear to identify mainly with the Western cultural norms of South Africa. This could be due to the colonial past of the country.

Vis-à-vis the participants of this study, they understand the implications that apartheid and colonisation has had on them, additionally, they realise the significance a platform such as Instagram holds for them. Not only were Muslims marginalised during apartheid, but Muslim women especially; therefore, the participants try to optimise the opportunities Instagram holds for them, as Amelia states: “[c]ombined with technological development, being a woman in post-apartheid South Africa means I have opportunities”. Amelia is aware of the possibilities Instagram offers with regards to social capital, especially as a South African Muslim woman. This means that in order for these women to fit into society, they need to adopt cultural trends from the dominant culture (the West). This process has become normalised, even for ordinary people in society who are not influencers on social media.

The West commonly enforces its culture on minority groups, since it is deemed as the hegemonic culture which can be adopted by all ethnicities, nationalities and cultures. Binaries of superiority and inferiority are usually promoted by essentialist studies of race and gender, where women are deemed as inferior, and men as being superior. Discourses such as these are crucial for upholding the perseverance of patriarchal and colonial hegemony (Eide, 2016: 1). Hoel and Shaikh (2013: 72) argue that “contemporary South African Muslims have inherited a history of patriarchal religious narratives that continue to dominate many of the discourses of Islam”. The complexity of the identities of the participants suggests that their cultural identity is encompassed by more than just Western culture in that they also have a South African cultural identity that has, in turn, been influenced by its African and Asian counterparts. Therefore, their identities are a lot more complex and multi-faceted than expected. It is difficult to clearly distinguish between their various identities, and to demarcate which is their cultural identity and which is their religious identity, since the two often overlap and are interchanged by the women.

Based on the argument made by Hoel and Shaikh (2013:72), it is evident that South African society has posed constraints on the freedom of Muslim women with regards to their freedom of expression of their “authentic” identities. Therefore, the social dynamic of South African society presents obstacles for gender equality for Muslim women, which sets the landscape for the context of this study. Furthermore, the participants are aware of the patriarchal discourses which frame their behaviour expected from South African society. Moreover, the resistance these women

demonstrate towards patriarchy is evident in the ways they articulate themselves on Instagram: “I feel like women are still in the same position they were in under apartheid, we are still supposed to be submissive” (Dania). Dania is aware of the restrictions apartheid held for women like herself. By acknowledging the impediment that is still in place for Muslim women during post-apartheid, Dania is illustrating a form of resistance towards patriarchy. Thus, she uses her Instagram platform as a means to portray her “authentic” religious identity by challenging Western secular society and patriarchal discourses of how she is meant to be.

4.2 Curating an “authentic” version of the self online

This section argues that portraying an “authentic” online persona is what ensures the success of the influencers. These women need to appear as relatable and transparent as possible to their followers in order to build their brand and create a sense of trust within their online community; this ensures their success in the industry. This section also explores what “authenticity” means to these women. The performance of an “authentic” online persona allows the participants to commodify their identity and profit from it. Additionally, the performance of “authenticity” allows the women to find a sense of belonging in the new public sphere, known as Instagram. Moreover, the performance of an “authentic” identity online also provides the participants with the opportunity to explore the nexus between their religious and cultural identities in the ways that they negotiate and navigate them on Instagram. Besides being a space where interaction and advertising can occur, Instagram also serves as a new platform where the self-expression and representation of identity can transpire (Pramiyanti, 2019: 54). This is evident in the way the influencers consciously choose to portray themselves in a certain manner when they are online. As Amelia argues, “‘authenticity’ in personality is key”.

The curation of an online persona is imperative in building a brand and attracting followers on Instagram: this is the reason these influencers are selective in the content they create for their platform. The way they portray themselves impacts the amount of people they attract to their brand, which correlates with the number of paid collaborations they would gain in turn. However, they cannot display any identity online, it has to be one that is perceived by outsiders as one that is “authentic” and relatable. “I feel like it’s all about being real and being relatable with your followers” (Sofia). This was reiterated by Nadine who argued that “influencers just need to seem

very real when they're online". And, also by Alia, who explained that "influencing is creating a way for someone else to relate to you, it's not something fake, it's very 'authentic'". It is evident that "being real" and "relatable" are integral aspects that contribute to being an influencer. These phrases imply that crafting an online identity that is "authentic" is a key aspect in building a brand as well.

Goffman's (1959) framework of *The Presentation of Self* helps to interpret how the participants curate and perform their identities on Instagram, particularly with regards to the way they present the self online via the images they share on Instagram (Smith and Sanderson, 2015: 8; Geurin-Eagleman and Burch, 2016:3). This relates to Banet-Wesier's (2012:55) argument where she states that the internet has provided girls and young women with the chance to express themselves in a new way, and it has made it easier for them to maintain their "authenticity" "through self-branding". The authentic self-brand is described by Banet-Weiser (2012: 73) as "innovation, production, and consumption charged with producing a unique, 'authentic' self". This makes the selfie culture one that is explicit to a particular age and gender group, since it provides them with a new platform to display the "authentic" self. This is illustrated in Camilla's response:

I think it depends on who you are marketing to, if it's millennials, then they want the perfect image. But I think the new generation coming up want something more relatable. But even with a perfectly curated feed, it can't be too perfect, you need to show them you are human. There needs to be something people can buy into; you can't only sell an aspirational lifestyle.

This quote suggests that influencers curate their feed according to their target audience, which reflects Goffman's theory of performance of the self being curated in relation to a particular audience. It is evident that identity for these participants is something that is carefully crafted in a way that makes it appear "authentic", even if it is not so in reality. They intentionally share certain images and videos to depict their lives in a particular manner, however, there are certain instances where they need to make themselves appear more vulnerable in order to allow their followers to "buy into" their online persona. Moreover, these influencers have to carefully create an identity that appears "authentic", to attract followers and design a brand that is relatable, however, it needs

to be realistic. The performance of an online identity has recently emerged in this era; this is especially substantial since these women are able to profit from the identities they perform online. Banet-Weiser (2012: 56) defines “media-savvy girls and young women as an interactive subject, who actively engage with the production and circulation of digital media content”. By being media-savvy, they have the knowledge of how to use digital media and digital culture as a tool to discover and showcase a version of the self.

When applying Goffman’s (1959) framework to this research, it is evident that the internet has broadened opportunities for the creation of the self. Sundén (2003:13) refers to this as “typing oneself into being”, suggesting that performative behavior of the self and the curation of identity has shifted to the digital space, where identity is portrayed through images and videos. Çadirci and Güngör (2016:57) state that images portray the perfect picture of “facial impressions, physical appearances, and environmental settings [which] are parts of backstage that compose the performance at the front stage”. As Amelia explains, “Relatable images are a great way to attract followers”. This was reiterated by Nala: “I just try and create appealing content for my followers, people don’t really want to see perfection anymore, I feel like people want to see more real stuff”. According to Hogan (2010:54), adjusting representation of the self on social media platforms is made easier when it is done in accordance to the reactions and interactions with audiences online.

Hogan’s theory reiterates Goffman’s framework as well, since both argue that the performance and representation of the self is dependent on the audience and context. This is evident when Sofia says: “Like I might have to censor a few of my clothing choices at times, because my followers are mostly conservative Muslims and they would not connect with what I’m wearing, they would think it’s inappropriate”. This illustrates how Sofia is forced to negotiate her cultural identity online since the niche audience she attracts is more religious, therefore implying that Sofia would need to portray more of her religious identity in order to make herself more appealing to her audience.

According to Goffman (1959:77), the portrayal of identity can be managed and maintained. With regards to influencing, influencers are able to manage the way they present themselves online by “posing in particular styles, using editing applications for their pictures, specific wording of captions etc.” (Pramiyanti, 2019: 55). This is depicted in the following image Alia presented:

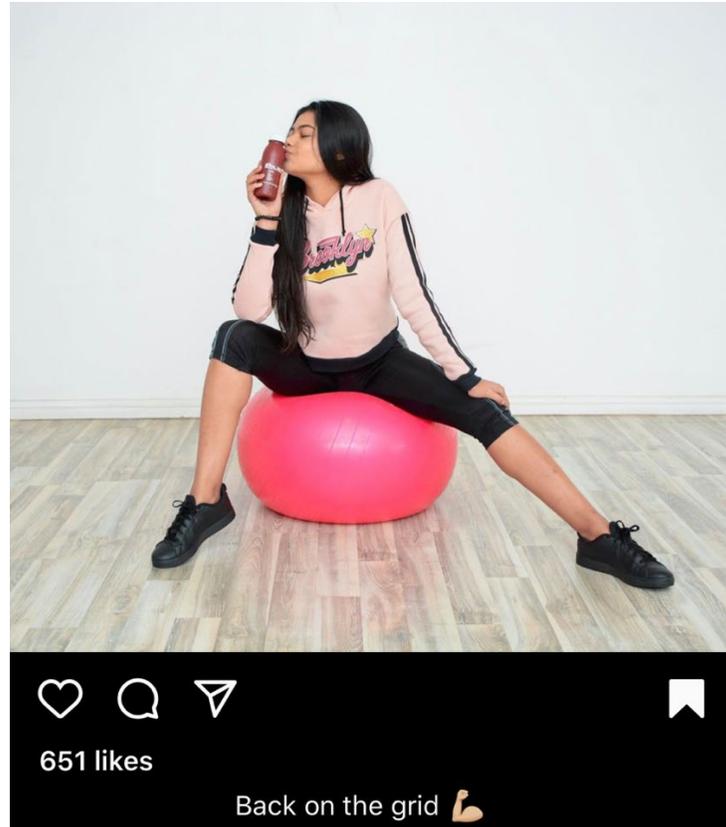


Figure 2: Candid on Instagram

[T]his was actually a paid campaign. It was for a juice company, that I had to promote. The picture was very planned, my manager said sit on a ball and he wanted it styled a certain way, like the outfit was from Adidas and H&M. I had a stylist and a photographer. And Nick⁹ was like that's a good picture, post that. So, yeah there's a lot of work that goes into it.

The candidness of the image, the caption, and the attire of the participant suggests that the picture was taken effortlessly and on the spur of the moment. However, it is evident from the quote Alia provides that every aspect of the shot was carefully planned and curated to portray a certain aesthetic and to appear as “authentic” as possible. When considering Goffman’s concept of the front stage, it is evident that this concept is apparent in the use of images, captions and hashtags that the influencers engage in as part of their online performance, as seen in the above image

⁹ Her manager (the name used is a Pseudonym).

(Pramiyanti, 2019:54). The backstage space is where influencers are able to decide how to present themselves online in a manner that they deem suitable. This includes “choosing, editing, censoring, changing or deleting posts” (Sas et al., 2009: 77). This suggests that the “authentic” online persona that the women refer to, is in fact carefully planned, curated and performed. It is not a true reflection of their “authentic” identities, rather it has become essential for their assimilation into the new public sphere, and also for their success in the influencing industry.

This is also depicted in the way the influencers carefully select aspects of their personal lives to include in the identity they portray online: “I still value my privacy. I don’t show much of my family or my marriage” (Amelia). The rare occasions when Amelia does show snippets of her personal life online, she is able to make herself more relatable to her followers, which is a strategic way of building a relationship and a connection with her followers. This suggests that the identity and persona Amelia portrays online is not a true reflection of herself, since she does not fully divulge her personal life. This also suggests that since influencing is a source of income for Amelia, she perceives it as a business first and foremost, and that she prefers keeping it professional and separate from her personal life. Moreover, this portrays Amelia as a Muslim woman who attributes her private life as a personal aspect, thus suggesting that she is practicing a form of modesty.

The other participants reiterated this by stating:

I have limits, I don’t post everything from my life online (Nadine).

I don’t show a lot of my life on Instagram. I’ll show the creative aspect, and I share some of my life on Instagram, but most of my personal life no one really knows. I’m relatively private (Nala).

I don’t show my personal life. Things I do after hours I don’t think people need to know. My Instagram account is more of a business for me, so you’ll never really know who I am (Alia).

This is ironic since the influencers constantly emphasise the importance of being authentic with their followers, however, their quotes suggest that the identity that is displayed online is a façade. Furthermore, the snippets of their ‘true’ identity that they share online depicts how multi-faceted their identities truly are, since they can choose when and how they want to show either their religious or cultural identities or some combination of the two. As Rihanna explains, “I would say that any Influencer only posts what they want you to know. So, people think they know everything about you and your life, but they don’t. They know some part of you, but they don’t know all of you”. It is evident that influencers are very cautious about what they share with their online community. Although they want to appear as relatable, ordinary people, they do not share their true identities online.

According to Zevallos (2007:86), influencers are able to consciously and cautiously arrange the images they post online to create a favorable version of themselves to portray to their followers. “Social actors still need to balance, readjust, and reflexively reconstruct their identities as a consequence of their social interactions with other people” (Zevallos, 2007: 86). For influencers, their niche market is what determines the persona they put forth online. This is evident in the way Dania defines an influencer as a “big Instagram personality”. This suggests that the online persona many influencers portray is in fact not “authentic”: “[w]hen you are an influencer, you become a personality, you are not really that way, you become a certain type of person. Once you attract a large following you act different. Instagram personas are not real” (Dania). This definition of an online persona is one that needs to be crafted according to the interests of the influencers’ followers. This is an important aspect of becoming popular and relatable online. Additionally, by constantly attempting to appear as “authentic”, these influencers need to make themselves vulnerable at times and share personal aspects of their lives to make them seem relatable. This is illustrated in the following image Nala shared on Instagram:



Figure 3: Relatability through anxiety

The above image and caption encapsulate how Nala is able to use her feelings of anxiety as a strategic tactic to make herself relatable and use it as an opportunity to engage with her followers by sharing her experience with them. She specifically chose this high-quality, beautifully shot image since it still complies with her feed and the aesthetic she is aiming for. The particular aesthetic Nala aspires to for her carefully crafted content is one that is light-hearted, fun, and positive. She has also emphasised the importance of high-quality images and videos, hence the reason for selecting this specific image. Additionally, Nala makes use of her caption to portray herself as an ordinary person who also has bad days, thus making herself relatable to her followers. Nala is able to navigate and perform her cultural identity in this particular post on Instagram. However, this performance is not something that is always done consciously, it is an element that is expected of us so that we may find a sense of belonging in society. Social media users, such as influencers cannot fully control the message that is conveyed via the images they share on Instagram through “gestures, posture and facial-expressions” (Pramiyanti, 2019: 55).

According to Vannini and Williams (2009: 57), “authenticity” is something that is difficult to determine as we all have our standards of sincerity. However, “authenticity” is a concept that is complex, and it varies depending on contexts and situations where “authenticity” is asserted (Bloustien and Wood, 2013; Umbach and Humphrey, 2018). It is easy to assume that the front and back stage that Goffman refers to are two different entities, where the “front stage” is perceived as being one where a public mask is portrayed, and the latter being one where their real self is divulged (Tseëlon, 2015: 157). One stage of Goffman is not more “authentic” than the other, both are unlike the other, with varying expectations, and they are performed in different contexts (Tseëlon, 2015: 157). Therefore, it is evident that the self is being presented to the public both consciously and subconsciously.

Zevallos (2007:86) argues that “Goffman’s concept shows a complicated cycle of interactions between an individual’s unique sense of self, other people’s understandings of who they think they are, and public discourses about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable ways of representing our identities”. This means that individuals usually maintain their conduct and appearance in a way that portrays them as displaying their most “authentic” self, even when it is not. This is depicted in the following quote, where Rihanna states:

[T]here are days where I really don’t feel like interacting with anyone, but when I’m out in public my followers expect to see the person they see online. So, even if on that particular day I’m not feeling so great, I need to step into my online persona.

This was supported by Alia: “On social media you can act as nice as you want, but in real life it’s hard being nice all the time”. These quotes suggest that having two personas is something that is ordinary for these women, thus indicating how normalised the performance of an online identity has become with the emergence of the new sphere. It is evident that Instagram affords the participants the opportunity to negotiate, navigate and articulate their “authentic” identity. This was mentioned by Dania, who stated that it was difficult maintaining the persona she has portrayed on Instagram: “This is my sixth year wearing hijab, but I’m not feeling it anymore, I don’t really want to post pictures on Instagram with hijab, but I need to continue wearing it because my brand is about modest wear and hijab, and if I don’t, it’ll be an issue”. This quote illustrates that despite

her feeling distanced from her hijab in reality, she needs to continue with the image she has portrayed online in order to stay true to her brand and the identity she has shown her followers. Additionally, Dania suggests that she needs to negotiate her cultural identity, since she has already branded herself as being a modest Muslim woman who wears hijab.

This was reiterated by Alia:

[F]itting into this industry is really difficult, especially being Muslim, you are limited to certain things, but in a way, it also makes you stay “authentic” because you know you mustn’t go off the right track for likes and popularity. Like I’ve said, I can’t or rather, I shouldn’t, be posting underwear and bikini photos or anything that is too revealing. I need to be true to myself.

These quotes from Alia and Dania suggest that they are struggling with the fact that they need to negotiate their cultural identity to accommodate their religious identity. However, it is evident that they navigate both their identities in a way that allows them to succeed as influencers. By portraying themselves as practicing Muslims, they are able to appeal to a niche market of Muslim women who fuel their popularity on Instagram. Furthermore, it is evident that Instagram provides these women with a platform where they can negotiate and navigate their identities through the digital content they carefully select and share. Additionally, these quotes illustrate how “authenticity” can frame the negotiation of a Western cultural identity, in order to accommodate a religious one. The influencers are obligated to engage in this negotiation since they have consciously branded themselves as Muslim women on Instagram, therefore, there are certain Islamic practices they need to comply with in order to remain “authentic” to their followers. By not sharing revealing images and by remaining true to their hijab, Alia and Dania are depicting themselves as “authentic” Muslim women. Moreover, the use of Instagram as the specific platform where the performance of an “authentic” religious identity is performed, is especially substantial since it has not been done before. Therefore, it is evident that Instagram acts as a new public sphere where these women can draw on many influences that shape their identity and allow the performance of it.

4.3 The curation of self and the nexus between religious and cultural identities

The following section explores how the participants express their religious and cultural identities on Instagram. Furthermore, the nexus between the religious and cultural identities acts as the basis for the creation of the self in relation to the “other”. This section also explains how religious and cultural identities contribute to the curation of an “authentic” online persona, thus suggesting that identity is fluid and multi-faceted; our construction of the self is constantly changing in relation to “the other”, especially if we belong to minority groups. Eide (2016: 1) describes individuals from minority groups, such as Muslim women, as being misinterpreted as docile, disempowered beings. This section will also explore what hijab means to these women, and how it encompasses both their religious and cultural identities. The incorporation of Western fashion and beauty trends in Islamic dress, contributes to the “authentic” portrayal and performance of both a religious and cultural identity, therefore, making the women appealing and relatable to a niche audience. They are deemed as religious, because they are still dressed modestly; and they are considered to be Western, because they appear fashionable and trendy. However, it is evident that the participants do experience a sense of fulfillment from being Muslim, which was echoed through the following images of Amelia and Nadine.



Figure 4: Depiction of religious identity through Bo-Kaap and Turkey

Islam is an integral part of my life, even if it's not the focus of my content. One of the images is shot in Bo-Kaap and the other in Turkey. Both represent my Islamic heritage and I'm proud of it (Amelia).



Figure 5: Representation of religious identity through association with Bo-Kaap

This image signifies where I'm from, like Bo-Kaap is a Muslim neighbourhood in South Africa; growing up we used to go to there as children, it really reminds me of home. When I saw this picture on my account, I thought okay, this is a little bit of where I'm from, kind of (Nadine).

The above images substantiate the sense of pride these participants derive from their religious identities. It is evident that this feeling of being “proud” is depicted on Instagram for their followers to see. The way they attach a sense of belonging to certain areas, not only in Cape Town, but internationally, illustrates that these women associate certain traditions and expectations with being Muslim. However, the hesitance Nadine shows when she says Bo-Kaap “kind of” signifies where she is from, suggests that she does not fully identify herself as a traditional Muslim woman. It also implies that the women negotiate a part of their religious identities in order to accommodate their cultural ones. The images these women share to illustrate the pride they feel being Muslim

also contradicts commonly held conceptions of what traditional Muslim womanhood is. Both women in the above images are fashionably dressed in current fashion trends of the West.

The way these women navigate these traditions to suit their identities both online and off, reflects their need to accommodate both their religious *and* cultural identities, which they identify as Western. Their cultural identities are identified as Western, thus demonstrating how they construct their sense of self in relation to the Other. Mahmood (2005:18) argues that the agency these Muslim women possess should not be understood only as resistance or submission, rather it should be perceived as the ability for an individual to develop a self in relation to dominant cultural norms such as those of the West. This is evident in the way the participants define themselves - they do not consider themselves as being traditional:

Tradition says that a woman is supposed to be at home and like cook, and clean and that's not me. I never want to be that way. I'm not submissive, I'm very opinionated. I feel that the traditional way is very backwards, and very dysfunctional. So no, I am not traditional in any way (Dania).

I definitely don't see myself as traditional, I am very career driven and I am very ambitious. I was raised [to] voice my own opinions (Camilla).

I definitely don't think a traditional Muslim in Islam is supposed to be submissive and unopinionated. I'm very much about equality and female empowerment. So no, I'm definitely not a traditional mindset. I guess I'm a very modern mindset, I guess it's like Western (Nala).

In many ways I am traditional, but in many ways I'm not. I love our traditions, but it's equally important to think for yourself and make your own rules, because far too often culture, tradition and old wives' tales are confused and taught as if it's Islamic ruling when it's really not (Amelia).

All these participants have a particular perception of what traditional Muslim womanhood means to them. The participants perceive tradition negatively in terms of what it means for their freedom and, empowerment. Amelia, in particular, identifies a distinction between tradition and religion, by doing so, she demonstrates how she has crafted her own identity in a way that does not encapsulate herself as being fully religious. Rather, she implies that her identity is multi-faceted. Moreover, this suggests that there is a connection between the curation of the identities these women have created for themselves. Their cultural and religious identities cannot be clearly demarcated since they intersect on various levels in the way they define and perceive themselves. In addition, the above quotes depict how the nexus between the participants' religious and cultural identities create the basis for the construction of the self in relation to the Other. The women have clear ideas of what traditional Muslim womanhood entails, therefore, the way they compose their identity is done in relation to cultural norms that are perpetuated by the West. This perception of their identity being more modern than traditional is illustrated in the following pictures which Amelia and Sofia presented to me:



Figure 6: Traditionally dressed

I believe this picture shows how you can look beautiful even if traditionally dressed, which is out of my comfort zone, since I prefer modern silhouettes (Sofia).



Figure 7: Modern perception of the self

I feel this image represents me best because it shows that I am confident, fashion forward and modern (Amelia).

It is apparent that Sofia and Amelia understand fashion as being a key determinant of their modernity. Beauty and fashion trends play a significant role in the curation and performance of cultural identity for the participants. Amelia explicitly illustrates how she perceives “fashion forward and modern” as synonymous, therefore implying that traditional Muslim women are usually not fashionable or modern. Sofia reiterates this by stating that she is not accustomed to traditional forms of dress, thus suggesting that she has negotiated her religious identity in favour of her cultural one. This also elucidates how Instagram has become a platform where fashionable Muslim women can express themselves, and it has also become a style mediator for both Western

and Islamic fashion (Lewis, 2010: 2). Furthermore, it is evident that Instagram provides a space for women to create and express new meanings for what it means to be a Muslim woman (Lewis, 2010: 2). This is apparent in the way the influencers try and redefine what it means to be a modest, modern Muslim woman on Instagram. As a result of this, “Muslim women [have] increasingly become demanding consumers as well as producers of the Islamic culture industry as active shoppers, buyers, models, designers, entrepreneurs, or fashion bloggers” (Deniz, 2014: 23). From these PhotoVoice images we can deduce that fashion and beauty are key tools that are used to negotiate religious identity and with which to experiment with self-expression of one’s cultural identity.

Lewis (2010:12) argues that Islamic fashion caters to a specific niche market which strives to combine faith and fashion. This is evident in the way some of the influencers expressed what fashion and beauty meant to them: “[f]ashion specifically means a way of living” (Sofia). “It’s an extension of my personality and life. Fashion is the ultimate art form; it’s movement, architecture, politics and so much more” (Amelia). This relates to how these women are able to brand themselves as “modest influencers”, they appeal to a certain fashion style, which in turn attracts a particular audience. Additionally, they are able to use their religious identity as a strategic marketing tactic; especially since dressing modestly adds an aesthetic value to their brand (Bucar, 2017: 4). These influencers are also using Instagram as a way to navigate and express their religious identity in a way that challenges common nuances of how Muslim women are meant to be.

Bucar (2012: 3) argues, “[t]hrough the increasing market of Islamic fashion could be driven by capitalism, it could also be a good reason for the surge in Muslim women’s participation in public expression”. The influencers engage in public expression through the content they share. Moreover, the boom in the Islamic fashion industry has forged a nexus between religiosity and fashion, which in turn has encouraged many Muslim women to be modest and fashionable (Kiliçbay and Binark, 2002: 10; Gökarıksel and McLarney, 2010: 4; Gökarıksel and Secor, 2010: 17; Lewis 2007; 2010: 48 & 2). This is encapsulated in the following quote from Dania: “[f]ashion is an expression; it’s just me being creative. On Instagram you can see through my posts that I really enjoy fashion because I feel like the way you decide to dress is the way you want to be

perceived by others”. Simmel (1957: 555) argues that nuances of fashion are a “voice of agency” for women. “Through fashion, women can communicate their ideas and values that signify the existence of their selves” (Pramiyanti, 2019: 46). This is especially evident with women influencers, since many of them perceive fashion as a form of “expression of their identity” and a “creative outlet”. This is apparent in the following responses from Camilla: “fashion and makeup are an expression of who you are”; Dania: “makeup is kind of a way for me to control what people see and how they see me. It’s a creative outlet”, and Nala: “makeup for me is a way for me to be creative and express myself. Like fashion, it just conveys what I want to show the world”.

The above quotes suggest that the participants use fashion and makeup as tools to ensure that their identities and sense of self is portrayed “authentically” on Instagram. Not only does it ensure that they remain authentic and relatable, but it also guarantees that they are able to profit from the commodification of their “authentic” identities. Fashion and makeup allow the women to explore, navigate and negotiate the relationship between their religious and cultural identities. Fashion and makeup are key aspects to the content these influencers create, it makes them relevant to the audiences they try and reach. They use beauty trends as a tool to challenge misconceptions of them, and they use it as a means of assimilation into society. Individuals tend to wear certain fashion trends to suggest their connection with a specific group, however, in the same instance they deny that the trend is replicated (Entwistle, 2015: 2). This relates to the element of resistance and compliance these women engage in vis-à-vis norms that are perpetuated by the West. This illustrates how the influencers adopt Western trends subconsciously; it is a norm and an expectation for minority groups to appropriate Western cultural trends, since the West is perceived as the hegemonic global culture. Entwistle (2015:2) states “individual fashion preferences are determined by a shared value within the social group, because individuals are located within communities, and their style of dress expresses this belonging”.

Various scholars have argued, “[I]slamic fashion adheres to modernity and globalization, unlike the old label that Muslim women’s appearance lacks the ability to fit in with Western fashion” (Tarlo, 2010: 21; Moors and Tarlo, 2013:2; Lewis, 2015:11). This means that modest fashion is becoming a trend, which makes it easier for Muslim women influencers to assimilate into the digital sphere and make themselves relevant through the curation of an identity that presents them

as being religious, yet modern in a Western way. The nexus between religious and cultural identity was evident in the image Camilla showed me:



Figure 8: Conflict between religious and cultural identities

This is at the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi; I love Dubai, because it's Muslim but [also] Western, which is really nice because I feel like I'm almost reminded to be Muslim all the time, but I can still be myself.

It is evident from Camilla's description of the above image, that she feels the need to negotiate her religious identity in order to accommodate her cultural identity, which would allow her to feel a sense of belonging. Sairin (2011:48) argues, "[W]estern culture, especially from the US, has become the standard of modern life for many people globally, where the image of the West is perceived to be more superior". Camilla identifies more with her cultural identity since she perceives that as being her true self. However, the image she shared on Instagram portrays her being modestly dressed, and in hijab, therefore Camilla is still portraying herself as an "authentic"

Muslim woman to her followers. According to Sairin (2011:48), this attempt to duplicate the West has become common through technology, and digital platforms such as Instagram. This implies that Camilla is self-reflective in what her identity is comprised of in terms of her religion and her cultural self. She defines a clear distinction between the two, thus suggesting that her being is multi-faceted. Additionally, the nexus between this modern and religious identity that Camilla refers to, implies that there is a certain degree of negotiation involved in the reappropriation of a new religious identity that meets the standards of the West.

This need to negotiate religious identity was reiterated by the following participants as well:

Hijab for me is a religious attribute. Maybe one day I would decide to put it on for my religion, but currently it might be too much of a commitment (Sofia).

Wearing hijab all the time and being fully covered is something I aspire to. But I always say when I'm married with kids. Hijab for me definitely means you've reached a certain level in your religion (Rihanna).

I'm not at a place where I feel I need to wear hijab, like I know in Islam you're supposed to wear hijab but I'm not comfortable enough to wear it yet, so I don't feel the need to wear it, in real life or on Instagram. When I was younger, I was like I would like to get to a place where I wear hijab, but I don't know if I would get to that place (Nala).

The challenge the participants are explaining in the above quotes vis-à-vis wearing hijab implies that they have negotiated their religious identities. They cannot commit to wearing it full-time due to it not fully reflecting their holistic identity. To these women, their identity is not only comprised of a religious one - by wearing hijab their identity would then be encapsulated by Muslim womanhood alone - whereas these women acknowledge the fact that their identities are multi-faceted. While they may be branding themselves as modest Muslim women on Instagram, they are simultaneously presenting themselves as modern. For these participants, the hijab does not symbolise their "authentic" identities on Instagram, therefore, they only wear it during certain

times when they need to appeal to their audiences, such as during religious occasions such as Ramadan or Eid.

The hijab has also become incorporated into fashion trends for these women, it allows them to be perceived as “authentic” Muslim women, while still remaining true to their cultural identities by being stylish. El Guindi (1999:4) defines hijab as being symbolic of tradition and religious affiliation, whereas fashion is associated with being “ever-changing, consumer-based and decisively modern”. It is apparent that the participants perceive hijab as a restriction on their progression in their careers as influencers.

With Islamic feminism, the notion of conventional religious symbols has also transformed to display new trends of “consumption, pleasure and identity” (Pramiyanti, 2019: 26). The hijab has become a symbol in the public sphere, where it is perceived as being an expression of religious identity through fashion for many Muslim women around the world, but more specifically for Muslim women influencers on Instagram. Additionally, Amer (2014:13) argues, “each type of hijab is the result of a complex interplay between factors such as religious interpretation, customs, fashion, race, ethnicity, geographic location, and the political system in place at a given time”. This relates to my group of participants with differing views on modesty, piety and hijab. Ultimately, these women have many external factors influencing the way they develop their multi-faceted identities.

4.3.1 “I can be modest and still be stylish”

In this section the understanding of “modesty” and “piety” will be explored and how these two terms allow the participants to construct and portray their interpretations of “authentic” Muslim womanhood on Instagram. This section also addresses how, on the one hand, these women portray themselves as modest Muslim women by incorporating Western fashion trends into Islamic forms of dress to make themselves relatable to their niche audience. By incorporating Western fashion trends into Islamic forms of dress the women are, on the other hand, also performing their Western cultural identities. Piety is defined in this research as being a level of spirituality that differs from modesty. This is evident in the way Dania described piety:

When I started wearing my scarf [it] meant that I was fully embracing my deen¹⁰, my connection to Allah¹¹ was what I wanted for myself, and that was the main reason why I wanted to start wearing hijab.

Dania was the only participant who wore hijab full-time, and she was the only one who was not born Muslim. Dania was originally born Christian, and she embraced Islam at the age of fourteen. The above quote illustrates that her decision to start wearing hijab was based on a spiritual connection she felt with the religion she had chosen. Dania's conversion to Islam implies a deeper understanding and perception of the religion that the other participants do not share. During the interview, Dania explained her fascination with Islam, because she found it to be "a beautiful religion that advocates for kind and caring behaviour towards everyone". Moreover, she believed that Islam "answered all [her] questions about life" (Dania). During the period in which Dania explored Islam, she undertook to learn in depth everything about Islamic practices and the reasoning behind them. She felt that she did not belong in Christianity, she experienced a stronger sense of belonging towards the Islamic religion. Therefore, by wearing hijab, she had accepted her new religious identity and the hijab symbolised her "authentic" portrayal of Muslim womanhood. Furthermore, by branding herself as a modest, hijabi influencer, Dania automatically became a representation of Muslim womanhood on Instagram and is changing perceptions of Muslim womanhood by using Instagram as a platform to express her multi-faceted identity.

Dania, however, does not perceive herself as the ideal example of traditional Muslim womanhood; as she states: "I don't believe I fit the perception of what Muslim women are expected to be, I'm very opinionated and modern". She therefore indicates that her identity is composed of not only her religious identity, but a cultural one too. "These hijabis have presented modesty, and established a dialogue with their audiences, and in so doing disrupt the normalised associations of hijabis¹² with passivity, and otherness by establishing intimacy with the audience" (Piela, 2013b:788). Dania's understanding of modesty and piety illustrates a nexus between these two terms, since the one (piety) is a projection of the other (modesty). It is evident that Dania affords

¹⁰ Arabic word meaning Islamic religion.

¹¹ Name of God in Islam.

¹² Women who wear hijab.

a great level of importance to her religious identity, which has motivated her to incorporate it into her cultural identity through the means of fashion. The following image will illustrate how Dania has managed to incorporate modesty in a fashionable way:



Figure 9: Modern modest fashion

I was 18 when I started wearing a scarf. I decided I can be modest and still be stylish. In this photo I'm incorporating so many mainstream fashion styles in one, and it's still modest.

It is evident that Dania uses both her hijab and fashion sense as modes of “authentic” self-expression of her religious and cultural identities. Furthermore, the image and description depict a form of fashion that is exclusive to Muslim women, it is modest with a Western twist. Additionally, Dania portrays her identity as being an expression of hybridisation by integrating her religious identity with Western modernity. The conscious incorporation of Western culture into Dania’s look illustrates the way in which she tries to navigate and negotiate her religious identity in order for her to assimilate into society and challenge the status quo. By depicting herself in this way, Dania is challenging common perceptions of traditional Muslim womanhood. She incorporates “mainstream fashion trends” in order to communicate to her followers that she has an “authentic”

Western cultural identity too. It is common for Muslim women who conform and abide to Islamic rules of modest dress to appropriate Western fashion styles in order for them to be acknowledged as modern (Pramiyanti, 2019: 49). However, by wearing her hijab in a turban style she is not wearing her hijab in the traditional Muslim way, rather she is appropriating it to match her Western fashion sense of style.

By being career women in the digital sphere via Instagram, these women are able to generate a considerable amount of buying power. And these Muslim women influencers are able to do so through dressing modestly. Moreover, the intentional use of modest dress through fashion is the way these women try and challenge nuances of Islamic stereotypes, while being covered and wearing hijab (Moors and Tarlo, 3: 2013). Islamic fashion allows them to find a sense of belonging in the new public sphere, as Dania depicts in the above image. By doing this on Instagram, she is engaging in a form of globalisation that involves a process of cultural transaction which is determined by a particular locality and global trend.

Modesty is more than a type of embodiment; it is also a tool that is used to pursue a constant practice of piety in all aspects of one's being. Thus, it contributes to the participants' performance of an "authentic" religious identity on Instagram at all times. Moreover, the ambiguous definition of modesty was raised by Sofia as well, "anyone can believe they dress modestly if they think it works for them, what might be modest for me, may not be modest for so many others". This was echoed by the following participants:

[m]odesty is an internal belief that is expressed through behavior (Amelia).

The inner self needs to be modest before this outward thing (gesturing to hijab) gets involved. You need to be modest in your thought and in your action. I don't feel that I am modest in that way, because I am very outspoken. My understanding of modesty is very much encapsulated by masculinity and that a modest woman is someone who is seen, not heard. (Dania)

The fact that the participants perceive modesty of behaviour, speech and thought as being more important than that of dress illustrates that perceptions of modesty and piety are subjective. Therefore, the portrayal of “authentic” Muslim womanhood would juxtapose between the participants. This was depicted in the following image Dania presented:



Figure 10: Hijab is my crown

With my scarf and the way I dress, I feel I have more control with what you see and the perception you have of me (Dania).

Dania was the only participant who wears hijab full-time, and her experience and perception of hijab differed from that of her peers. Dania uses hijab as a tool to manage the way others perceive her, therefore, she uses hijab to perform her “authentic” religious identity. The term hijaber identifies an individual as being someone who is fashion-conscious and tech-savvy (Pramiyanti, 2019: 25). This relates to Dania and the other participants since this describes them as being members of a global community that is transnationally mobile and interconnected via social media.

Beta (2014:2) and Faiz (2017:27) describe hijabers as being “characterized as young Muslim women who demonstrate creativity in wearing hijab by marking it as their fashion statement.” Additionally, Dania uses hijab and fashion to control how she is perceived by her followers. This contributes to her performance on Instagram. Moreover, by sharing this image on Instagram, Dania is challenging nuances of traditional Muslim womanhood.

Moreover, the modesty of Muslim women is dependent on various factors, such as “historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts” which makes it challenging to identify what is deemed as true pious fashion (Bucar, 2016: 82). Moreover, this demonstrates that the identity of these women is multi-faceted. They are constantly trying to portray an “authentic” sense of self; however, this self is constantly changing since their identities are fluid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

With the expansion of technology, human interactions have now become digitised. Social media platforms such as Instagram have become the new public sphere where communication currently takes place. Globalisation has allowed the intersection of a mirage of countries, cultures and people; digital media offer a new form of interaction for everyone around the world. Therefore, it is evident that Instagram offers a platform for individuals to curate, negotiate, navigate and perform an “authentic” sense of self in ways that have not been done before, especially in the South African context. Furthermore, certain individuals, such as influencers, are able to capitalise from their “authentically” curated online personas. This research argues that performing “authenticity” is imperative to fitting into society; in this study society refers to the online society of Instagram. Appearing as “authentic” as possible enables the participants to appear “relatable” to their niche audience; this in turn ensures brand collaborations, which ultimately secures an income for them.

The visual nature of Instagram affords individuals such as influencers the opportunity to manipulate how they craft and express themselves, thus making it easier to curate an “authentic” online persona. Furthermore, the essence of being an influencer lies in their “authenticity”. The brands which they create are based on their identity, and it needs to be “relatable” to a niche audience to ensure their success in the industry. However, it is evident that by performing “authenticity”, these women are also striving to find a sense of belonging on Instagram. Therefore, influencing allows the participants to craft and explore their true “authentic” identities through the narrative they curate and share on Instagram.

I have argued that the participants craft their “authentic” identities on Instagram since they are engaging in processes of creativity and expressiveness. Online identity expression is proven to be a more effective method of self-expression than offline. The identities that the participants express online are in fact “authentic”, since it is an extension of their true identities. The performance of identity is also believed to be better expressed online than offline, since Instagram provides the participants with various photo-manipulation options, thus providing the resources to craft an

“authentic” identity that they deem acceptable to display online to their followers. Furthermore, this research also argues that the self-branding of these influencers is a form of expression of their “authentic” sense online.

When applying Mahmood, Hall and Goffman’s theories to the way the participants perform “authenticity” online, it is evident that their portrayal of their sense of self is dependent on their interaction with their audience; since one’s construction and performance of the self is done in relation to the Other. Moreover, since each individual has an innate desire to belong, it is common for minority groups such as Muslim women to adopt social norms that are perpetuated by Western secular society. Western secular society is perceived as the hegemonic culture, especially for minority groups such as Muslim women. Therefore, in order to fit into society, these minority groups are expected to comply with Western fashion and beauty trends. But in addition, their compliance with Western fashion and beauty trends also ensures their success as influencers, as it will allow them to be perceived as trendy, modern Muslim women on Instagram.

These Western trends are learnt, internalised and performed on Instagram. This portrayal entails the performance of an “authentic” cultural identity. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the cultural identities of these women are complex, since besides having a Western cultural identity, these participants also possess a South African identity, which is complex and diverse due to the history of the country. This suggests that the identities of the participants are multi-faceted and fluid, since it is constantly changing and being influenced by various factors. Furthermore, the women who participated in this research also realise that Instagram provides them with a platform where they can be seen and heard in ways that South African Muslim women from the past have never been seen and heard before. Therefore, they use the platform as a way to resist common stereotypes of how and what traditional Muslim womanhood is meant to be.

By branding themselves as modern, modest women, they are able to make themselves appealing to a niche market of Muslim women, thus, distinguishing themselves from other influencers. This also allows them to gain cultural capital on a platform such as Instagram, where they are able to impact the fashion and influencing industry through their “authentic” religious identities. Therefore, the participants have created a nexus between religion and consumerism. Fashion also

acts as a form of self-expression for their religious and cultural identities. It is evident that fashion and beauty play an integral role to the articulation and performance of both “authentic” religious and cultural identities for the participants - it allows them to negotiate, navigate and express their sense of self, as well as capitalise on the “authentic” identities they portray.

The portrayal of an “authentic” religious identity also suggests a resistance from common misconceptions of traditional forms of Muslim womanhood. By displaying themselves as visible, vocal, and agentic on Instagram, these women are redefining what it means to be a Muslim woman in the digital era, as well as in the post-apartheid context. Furthermore, by participating in consumerism and neoliberalism, these women are resisting Western notions of Muslim women as docile, oppressed beings. Another aspect which allows the participants to display their “authentic” religious identity is through hijab. However, it is evident that the hijab for these women is something that is not a true reflection of modesty in its totality. For most of these women, modesty is encompassed through more than dress: it is shown rather through aspects such as behaviour, speech and attitude.

Another aspect that is used to perform “authenticity” is hijab, which has also become commodified to allow the participants to capitalise on it. By wearing hijab on Instagram and branding themselves as modest Muslim women, the participants negotiate their cultural identities, and portray their “authentic” religious identities, since the hijab portrays them as being the embodiment of “authentic” Muslim womanhood. For these participants, the hijab is a symbol that identifies them as Muslim women. Therefore, for some of the participants, the hijab is a key aspect that features in their content on Instagram, since it helps them perform an “authentic” religious identity. Additionally, the hijab also helps the participants communicate that their religious identities are not grounded in Islamic belief. In lieu of this, they depict themselves as being fluid because by commodifying the hijab, much like their identities, they convert the hijab into a fashion item that can be consumed, so that they may profit from it; these women imply that by complying with their cultural identities there is a nexus between their cultural and religious identities. This research argues that the participants use Instagram to navigate and negotiate their “authentic” identities through influencing.

This research concludes that the participants perform “authentic” identities on Instagram in order to fit into society and to make a profit from their “authentic” identities online. By using various aspects of their identities to make them appear “relatable” and “authentic”, the participants are able to build an online community and capitalise from their brand. The participants look for cues on how to construct their “authentic” identities, depending on the preferences of their followers, thus suggesting that their identities are multi-faceted and fluid, since they are ever-changing in relation to the Other.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Interview Guide

A- Influencing and Instagram:

1: What is influencing? How would you define it?

Do you consider yourself an influencer? Why?

- Is influencing a hobby/job?

2: Why have you chosen Instagram specifically as your social media platform to be an Influencer?

3: Has Instagram allowed you to express your identity? If so how?

4: Has being an Influencer affected your personal and religious life in any way? If so, how?

5: How and who do you try and influence? Why this particular group?

6: What kinds of image attract followers?

7: What are the aspects of your physical appearance that you think your followers like?

8: Do you ever hold back on posting certain things? Why?

9: What does your day consist of?

B- Background:

1: What's the highest form of education you have?

2: Are you renting or do you own your own house?

3: Is Influencing your main source of income or do you have another job?

4: And does your job influence the kind of lifestyle you live?

5: Were you born Muslim?

6: Are you a practicing Muslim?

- Do you pray?

- Do you fast?

7: Are you married or are you in a relationship?

8: What part of your life do/don't you show on Instagram and why?

C- Identity:

- 1: What image of yourself do you try and portray on Instagram? Is the identity that you portray related to your religion?
- 2: Do you feel as though you have to sell a specific type of person
- 3: Do you wear hijab? If so, what does wearing the hijab mean for you?
- 4: Do you dress modestly? If so, why?
- 5: What does modesty mean to you?
- 6: What does piety mean to you? What role does piety play in your religious identity?
- 7: If you do not wear hijab and/or dress modestly, do contractors ever ask you to wear it? Why?
- 8: Do you choose what you post and when you want to post the image(s)?
- 9: What does fashion and makeup mean to you?
- 10: Do you consider yourself to be a traditional Muslim woman? If so, how?
- 11: Do you find the need to negotiate your religious identity on Instagram in order to fit in with International Influencers?
- 12: What signification does being a Muslim woman in post-Apartheid South Africa hold for you?

Appendix II

Informed Consent Form

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to take part in a study conducted by Zara Schroeder, from the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University. You were approached as a possible participant because you are a South African woman Instagram Influencer.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

My research project is aimed at giving Muslim women Instagram Influencers the opportunity to speak about how they express their religious identity on Instagram.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a research method known as PhotoVoice, this method requires you to bring along five pictures you have already posted on Instagram that you feel best portrays your identity as a Muslim woman. Please select these five pictures from your Instagram feed prior to meeting with me. During this activity I will ask you a few questions related to the picture and following this activity I will ask you more general questions about your experience of being an Influencer. The duration of the PhotoVoice and interview should be 90 minutes long. It will take place anywhere of your convenience in Cape Town. Lastly, this will be a once-off activity.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participation in this research study is unlikely to cause you any discomfort since the issues that will be raised are ones that you already think about and may have discussed already in previous interviews. Furthermore, in the unlikely event that you do feel discomfort, the following service is available to you. You may make an appointment with LifeLine Western Cape (located in central Cape Town) for free counselling by calling **(021) 461 1113** to schedule an appointment.

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY

The benefit of participating in the study would be that the data collected could contribute to existing literature on Muslim women's identity in South Africa.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Please note that there will be no payment for participation in this study.

6. PROTECTION OF YOUR INFORMATION, CONFIDENTIALITY AND IDENTITY

Any information you share with me during this study and that could possibly identify you as a participant will be protected. This will be done by making use of pseudonyms for the participants. Informed consent will be obtained from the research participants before the PhotoVoice and in-depth interview commences. Furthermore, to ensure optimal anonymity of your identity, your face and any other identifying features of the pictures you choose to use for the PhotoVoice will be blurred. Once the images have been blurred, I will provide you with an opportunity to view them and decide whether you are satisfied with them or not. You also have the option of choosing not to have your images blurred, it is your choice. After the PhotoVoice and interview I will transcribe the conversation and once completed I will email a copy of the transcript to you, in order to provide you with the opportunity to comment on it. I can also remove any information you do not want me to include in the transcript. Once I have transcribed and electronically saved the audio recordings, I will erase them, and only my supervisor and I will have access to the electronic versions. You have the option to withhold any information. The information collected for this study may be used for other purposes in the future. Information that I will collect from you will be stored as anonymised non-identifiable data. Paper data will be stored in a locked drawer. Electronic data will be kept on a password protected computer that only I will have access to. There is no time limit as to how long the data will be kept, given the possibility of further longitudinal studies in the future. I take primary responsibility for the maintenance and eventual destroying of the information that I will gather from you.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time. Additionally, if you choose to withdraw from the study, I request that any data you may have provided up to the point of withdrawal still be used in this research. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study if any offensive comments are made about any other Muslim Instagram Influencers.

8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact *Zara Schroeder* at 19221940@sun.ac.za and/or the supervisor *Dr Patricia Hamilton* at phamilton@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by Zara Schroeder.

Signature of Participant

Date

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

| | |
|--|--|
| | The conversation with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent. |
| | The conversation with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent. |

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date