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An Rra of visible Hijabis: the gendered surveillance of Muslim women influencers on Instagram

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

An Era of Visible Hijabis:

The Gendered Surveillance of Muslim Women Influencers on Instagram

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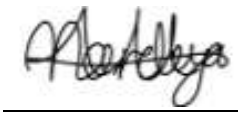
A report on a research project presented to the Faculty of Humanities, the School of Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree M.A (Sociology) by Coursework and Research Report

March 2022

DECLARATION

I, Mardiya Siba Yahaya declare that this thesis is my unaided work. It is submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Sociology by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signed: 

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Thank You!

ABSTRACT

The research argues that online public spheres have been characterised by masculine hegemonies, and women are reminded through violence that they do not belong. When Muslim women use social media, the response is that they should not expect reasonable privacy or protection against harassment and violence in a 'public space'. At the contours of control, Muslim women are made visible while shamed for being visible. This research investigates the implications of social and data surveillance and scrutiny of African Muslim Influencers online. By bringing together the strategies Muslim women use to navigate and resist control online, the research addresses gendered implications of surveillance, and the importance of regrounding technology in social context, embodiment, and place.

Keywords: Online Publics, Gendered Violence, Muslim Women, Surveillance, Instagram Feminist Technology Futures.

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Part 1: Introduction, Methodology and Literature Review

Chapter 1: Research Background, Question and Rationale

1.1 Background & Context

"I heard to be an influencer, you need to have thick skin" (K. Dunia, personal communication, October 2021)

When Kawthar decided to no longer wear the hijab in 2019, she shared that the Muslim community online bullied and harassed her, forcing her to stay offline until the issue 'subsided'. Besides the need for social media content creators to retain their online engagements, having 'thick skin', according to Dunia, becomes part of their realities as somewhat public figures who supposedly 'put themselves out there'. In this sense, 'thick skin' is synonymous with navigating the different controversies and harms that exist, including the consideration of one's privacy, safety, and mental health.

Kawthar is not the only Muslim influencer who has experienced intense harassment for existing and expressing herself on social media. As many Muslim influencers use their platforms as spaces to highlight personal stories and creative expressions, why do Muslim influencers need to have 'thick skin' and what happens when they cannot retain this much-needed resilience?

The violence women face online is Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) – technology-facilitated violence of people based on their gender or sexuality. It includes stalking, bullying, harassment, doxxing[1], and non-consensual sharing of intimate images (NCII). OGBV exists within the context of patriarchal and disciplinary societies. Online, women such as Kawthar are targeted and controlled through violent means.

[1] "Doxxing is the internet-based practice of researching and publicly broadcasting private or identifying information about an individual (Achieng, 2021)".

As such, *An Era of Visible Hijabis'* goal is to investigate the concept of being a 'visible' Muslim woman online by centring the patriarchal expectation that women should be visible yet hidden (Padte, 2014). These paradoxes exist within the intersections of patriarchal hegemonies and structures that play out as gendered social media affordances[2] where the pleasure points of the platform become marred with designed and unintended harms. Muslim influencers, given the nature of their profession, allow us to examine these contradictions that position them as visible, agentic users, but at the same time as people vulnerable to certain forms of the risks of surveillance cultures on various fronts.

'Visible Hijabis' does not assume all Muslim women wear the hijab but centres the hijab as a subject of study on visibility for a Muslim person. Visibility of the hijabi also suggests a few things regarding religion, including morality, spirituality, and becoming a faith-based 'role model'. However, this thesis assesses what happens when Muslim women do not fit within the categories of such expectations. And how their online expression and existence come to defy patriarchal hegemonies. The thesis argues that while the Muslim influencers come to understand and navigate violence and conflict within Instagram (Instagram), their strategies remain limited when aspects of surveillance become data-driven (datafied). The thesis explores the convergence of social and data surveillance (dataveillance) to highlight the implications and suggest speculative liberatory technology futures. The questions raised are used to examine surveillance and disciplinary societies and how gendered technology affordances impact Muslim women's experiences while using Instagram. In addition, Instagram is selected because of the platform's significance in amplifying influencer culture and bringing together the affordances of Youtube and Tiktok in one service. While the thesis focuses on Instagram, the interconnected nature of visual media allows me to reference similar content and affordances from spaces such as Tiktok or Twitter threads speaking on the type of surveillance Muslim women experience.

1.2 Research Question

How do Muslim women navigate Instagram as a contested social media space?

[2] What a given technology allows or enables. "Gendered affordances are social affordances that enable different users to take different actions based on the gendered social and cultural repertoires available to users and technology designers" (Schwartz and Neff, 2019).

1.2.1 Sub Question

1. How does Instagram become a public space?
2. What conditions create contestations in online public spaces?
3. What are the existing forms of gendered control that make online spaces a domain of surveillance systems and cultures?
4. How do Muslim women influencers subvert masculine surveillant gazes?
5. How do Muslim women influencers' actions to resist and protect their space become limited?

1.3 Using Surveillance to Assess the Social Media Space

"Women see my makeup and say Masha Allah[3], and men see my makeup and say Astaghfirullah[4]" - Tiktok User (2021).

Surveillance cultures in this study refer to the structural, hegemonic, and interpersonal domain of oppression that causes online gender-based violence and disciplinary action. It looks at surveillance as an active design of control societies. According to Kovacs (2017), surveillance is used to achieve two things: monitoring what you have done and are doing and controlling what you will do in the future.

In any space, resistance exists as a response to conflict. Social media in this research is examined as a public sphere that operates within the context of patriarchal hegemonies that seek to control women. Fear, shame, and scrutiny are used as a tactic and language that achieves surveillance effects within this public sphere, including self-monitoring and policing actions.

To extensively assess the implications of surveillance on Muslim women's lives online, the research looks at two forms of surveillance: social surveillance and dataveillance. On one hand, the thesis explores how the "haram police", who are Muslim aggressors online, use

[3] Used to express feeling of awe and good intentions
[4] I Seek forgiveness from Allah

gendered repertoires and dynamics available to them on Instagram to control women influencers online. The term haram police have been used to describe social policing of morality and women's lives. In the online sphere, it has come to describe people who also use social media to surveil and police women's lives in the space. The haram police usually claim that Muslim women online engage in haram (forbidden) activities by wearing makeup or simply expressing themselves within the space. They consider hijabi influencers or Muslim influencers in general as a threat to Islam. Eman Naga (2020), in her article 'The Harm of the Haram Police', explains that they closely monitor Muslim influencers. Even when they post innocuous headshots, they portray the image and spread that the influencers are 'devilish', purposefully enticing men to sin (Naga 2020). Msimang (2021) explains the actions of such aggressors who continue to morally and socially police women's lives by portraying them as 'devilish' beings.

Similarly, the disciplinary partitioning of Muslim women as everything other than human within a sexist gaze based on their religion signifies the multiple segmentation legitimised through surveillance societies and systems. Here, people are categorised as good/evil and normal/abnormal (Foucault, 1978), thus, validating the need to monitor ones classified as 'abnormal'. In this case, when patriarchal hegemonies dehumanise women, it validates the need to control and monitor them (Lugones, 2010). However, Muslim women exist within an overlap of misogyny, racism, and Islamophobia, which suggests they are predisposed to violence (Olufemi,2020) and engaging in shameful behaviour that threatens Islam. Hence, they present a complex intersection of oppression that Foucault (1978) examines, making it appropriate to centre such actors and their actions in exploring the conditions that create contestations on Instagram and the existing forms of control that make social media domains surveillance cultures.

These multiple marginalities also exist in the use and creation of technology within our society. Technology's affordances allow various possibilities depending on how it is used and who uses or accesses it. Interactions online and the design of technologies do not exist outside of our offline social structures and relation; within this realm, this research looks at how particular social media affordances facilitate surveillance and its effect on Muslim influencers on Instagram. This aspect centres on dataveillance, which is used to collect and analyse user personal information (UPI) to generate predictive analytics on user behaviours to facilitate

surveillance activities that remain complex to many internet users. As Muslim influencers and audiences interact on Instagram, they share information that is used to make decisions on how to position them on social media and the level of visibility they gain. Similarly, this information is used to suggest “content you might like '', and “find your contact” features on Instagram (Iyer and Achieng, 2022). In this sense, Kovacs (2017) alludes to the fact that “surveillance is used to predict what you will do in the future”.

Influencers are often told that by choosing to ‘put themselves out there’ they enjoy the pleasures of Instagram. In this way, the cybergaze and the platform are assumed to be neutral actors that allow people ‘freely interact’. Yet, given the fundamental evidence of the biases, cultures and systems that reproduce power, and carry out surveillance, the research explores how this ‘neutral’ space facilitates the disciplinary power through a surveillant gaze. In other words, how does Instagram become a space that affords visibility for pleasure while facilitating risks of harm against women? For instance, when a person constantly engages with certain posts or accounts on the platform, they are also shown similar content and account suggestions. This means, that if a serial aggressor constantly engages with Muslim women's content, the algorithm suggests more of its kind and would not identify the context of the situation. The performance and visibility designed into Instagram also present a contradictory phenomenon where many can benefit from it; however, given experiences of bullying and constant negotiation for safety, many influencers are forced to censor or fit themselves within that which is 'right' and 'works'. This form of assimilation avoids the surveillant gaze and the policing effects.

Meanwhile, the violence against Muslim women online is validated by patriarchal control of women's lives, and many influencers have shared online that they are targeted regardless of their actions. Okech (2021) explores this situation in her work ‘feminist digital counter-publics: Challenging femicides In Kenya and South Africa’ by explaining that,

> "These issues are symptomatic of a society whose intolerance for women's voices, space, and visibility is increasing. When systemic violence is reconstructed as isolated criminal acts and not as part of a broader conversation about patriarchy reconstituting itself, it does not allow us to examine the systems that motivate and support how aggressors exercise power (Okech 2021, pp.1019)."

To analyse systems that motivate and support aggressors, the research uses surveillance theories and practices, which explore the multiple events and interactions within spaces like Instagram. Examining these events develops an understanding of how contestations come to happen in the first place and how Muslim influencers push back. Between dataveillance and patriarchal surveillance cultures, Muslim influencers become subjects of control where on one hand, they fight back and protect their space, whereas, on the other hand, their social positioning and how their content is received are out of their control. As such, dataveillance in this thesis is examined through the perspective of its gendered social outcomes to assess the limitations of Muslim women's resistance strategies. The constraints on resistance techniques are highlighted to develop and recommend more structural and holistic frameworks for online privacy, safety, and freedoms. This approach centres on Okech's (2021) suggestion to "examine the systems that motivate and support how aggressors exercise power."

With that in mind, the thesis uses the comment, "these hijabis will destroy Islam," as a phrase throughout the thesis to critique and analyse how the haram police control women and reproduce patriarchal power online. It depicts social media as a domain of control and surveillance and the conditions that create contestation. Similarly, given that the comment eventually became the subject of mockery of Muslim men on social media by women on TikTok, it also comes to represent pushback from Muslim women in subsequent chapters. The exploration of social surveillance and dataveillance collectively shows how their convergence enhances the effects of surveillance cultures, which sets the basis for understanding how Muslim women navigate the space and finally conceptualising what a digital safe world and space might entail.

1.4 Rationale and Significance of the Research

The research study addresses technology-facilitated control through the lens of social and data surveillance. In addressing technology-facilitated control, this research primarily shows

how technology exists within the ecosystem it is created to serve. In other words, if our society is patriarchal and capitalist, technology's affordances may mirror these realities through its design and use. This research imagines liberatory futures of the technology space to be used by women-identifying and non-conforming groups to their fullest potential (Chair, 2020). The research maps out the influencer ecosystem to understand the harms and risks influencers experience and potentially experience through the current embedded surveillance culture. By bringing together the experiences of Muslim influencers and mapping out their realities, this thesis comes to identify strategies used in navigating the space and its limitations.

Technologists and surveillance scholars have often pointed out the need for contextual online safety measures, privacy, and security. Meanwhile, understanding a group or community's social context requires a continuous study of the lived experiences of these communities. As such, *An Era of Visible Hijabis* is a study into the intersection of gender, religion, and technology by examining the experiences of Muslim influencers on Instagram as a starting point towards understanding the context of African Muslim women's online interactions.

Chapter 2: Methodology, Sampling Techniques, Ethical Considerations and Limitations.

2.1 Methodology

This research was designed to bring together ten African Muslim influencers' experiences and personal accounts from six African countries. Instagram was used as the site of study to explore collective online cultures that transcend geopolitical and national boundaries.

As such the research explored the perceptions of surveillance cultures online and the engagement techniques of the ten influencers on Instagram. The project investigated the motivations behind becoming an influencer and the existing risk of threats of being an influencer. It also examined the gendered-religious violence and how Muslim influencers' identity and social positioning impacted their experiences on social media. In addition, this research project investigated influencers' insight into Instagram's designs, policies, and safety features. The study particularly paid attention to how they responded to threats within online public spaces and dynamics that put them at risk despite the supposed benefits. Furthermore, each process leading up to the conversations with the influencers was considered part of the

study. For instance, the difficulty in finding Muslim influencers to respond to and the type of influencers available including the conditions that created this availability, were also examined as part of the research project.

The data included in this study is qualitative to examine women's lived experiences and perceptions of online spaces. The method used centred around feminist research methodologies and recommendations from 'Data Feminism' that suggests using qualitative research to study women's lives and replace context in existing data (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2019). In addition, qualitative interviews inform us of the observations of others, people's social life, their challenges, and experiences as they live their lives (Weiss, 1994). For this study on Instagram, speaking to influencers through interviews was an effective approach because Instagram relies on our aspiration and performative selves, thus making the people's profiles well curated and abstracted from their journeys and stories. Conversations with Influencers help in conceptualising how and why they curate their spaces in a specific way, and their evolution as people whose reach expanded and continues to expand.

With that established, the primary research participants, Muslim influencers, were selected using a combination of convenient and snowballing sampling. Meanwhile, the secondary participants, four feminist technology and surveillance experts were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The data collected mostly include, but is not limited to; understanding the motivation behind Muslim influencer's work; what they consider while they curate their content and select platforms; their use of Instagram; their perceptions of surveillance; how visibility impacts their work; what they decide to keep offline and; their safety techniques and strategies. Experts expanded on the datafied aspect of surveillance and provided insight that further developed and explained the accounts of Muslim influencers. The research was designed with the contexts of Muslim women, the Muslim community, and influencers in mind and structured to map out the influencer and Instagram's ecosystem.

2.2 Self-Writing to Examine Muslim Influencers' Experiences Online

This research employs 'self-writing' as a feminist literary tool (Baderoon, 2015) to tell black African Muslim influencers' experiences on Instagram. Self-writing creatively traces and contextualises minoritised groups' lives at gendered, religious, and patriarchal margins by humanising the study. The stories gathered through the semi-structured qualitative interviews are documented using a storytelling format while reflections on the narratives from the interviews were also captured using personal pronouns and observations. It also enables an in-depth exploration of ways technology facilitates gendered social reactions, hence addressing the essential aspects of this research. To humanise and replace context, the thesis uses pseudonyms along with the first letter of their country for all influencers instead of generic participant IDs. For example, an Influencer from Ghana will be referenced as (G. Fatima). Only experts are not anonymous.

2.3 Mapping Out the Influencer Ecosystem

Understanding the influencer ecosystem enables the research project to draw out the contexts and experiences of Muslim women to the topic. The existing tiers allow the study to recognise the different realities for multiple influencers based on what they create, their audience, and their followership and engagement metrics. It also provides insights into the limitations of this study. In figure 1 and table 1, the report indicates the framework used to categorise the participants.

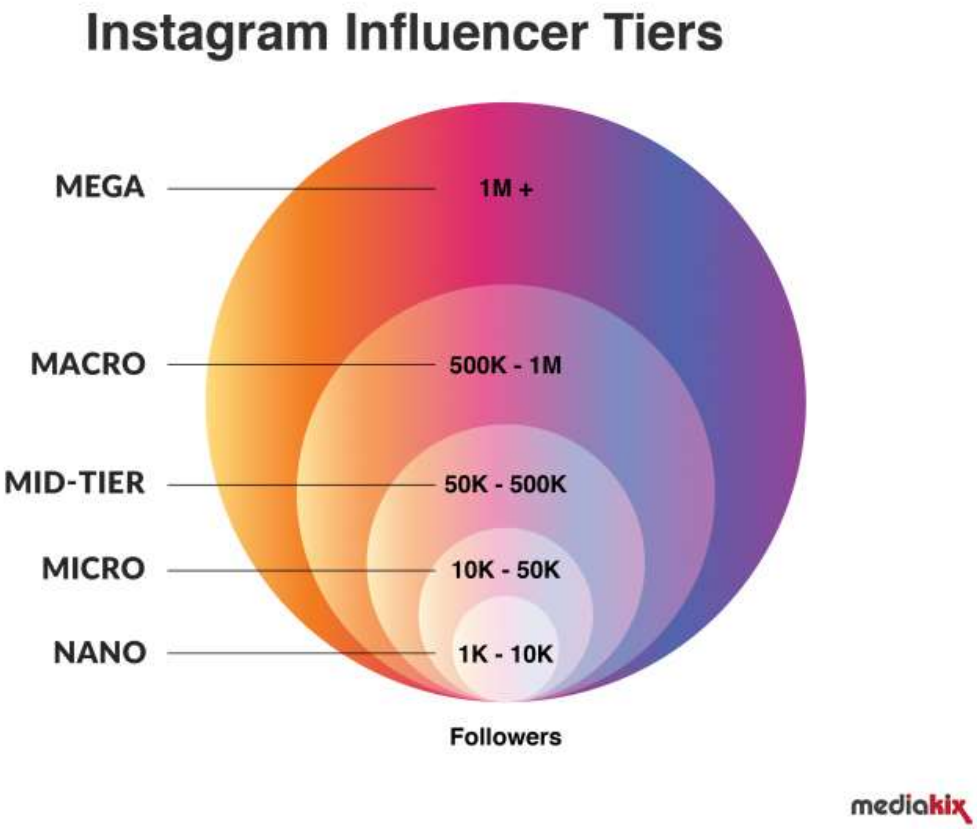

Figure 1 : Influencer Tiers

2.3.1 What These Tiers Mean

influencer Tier	Description
Nano	• Starting and building an audience, brand image and exposure • Has a niche audience thus higher target specificity • Engage more with followers given their not-so-large following • Create less sponsored content

	• Most likely to partner with small brands or brands that fall within their target audience • Higher accessibility • Authentic engagement
Micro	• Usually manage their brand and pages • Have a more established image and focus • Curate their content and strategy • Have a relatively large following but manage and directly engage with their audiences • Partner with small to medium size brands or brands with a niche customer base • Higher accessibility • Have authentic and more engagement • Occasionally have their products and services
Mid-Tier	• Built a following and a sustainable brand image which they manage themselves • Have an extensive content strategy

	● Mostly work with medium and large brands ● More reach than micro and nano influencer
Macro	● An established brand ● May have agencies who represent and optimise their content strategy ● Partner with large brand ● Have higher reach ● Lower creator-to-audience engagement ● Lower accessibility
Mega	● Well-established and sometimes considered a celebrity ● Lower accessibility ● May have a team and agencies who represent and provide content optimisation consultations ● Have brand collaborations, co-creation, and projects

Table 1

The influencers who engaged in this project mostly fall between the Nano, Micro, and Mid-tier (not reaching 500K followers). Considering their creator-to-audience engagement, and direct interaction with the platform they were well positioned to contribute to this study. While influencers focus on lifestyle, food, travel, beauty, book reviews, activism, and parenting, the data gathered from this research mainly were from food, lifestyle, travel, beauty, and book review creators.

2.4 Sampling Technique

The influencers for this project were selected using a mixture of convenient and snowballing sampling. According to Bless et al. (2013), a convenient sampling method is when the researcher selects a convenient location and place to find their participants efficiently regarding time and money constraints. Yet, Bless et al. (2013) warn that convenient sampling risks being non-representative. While the motive behind using this technique for the research project is partly true for this study, convenient sampling was employed particularly because influencers' site of work is on social media, which is also the location of the research project. Thus, making it the best space to reach participants. A call was widely shared on WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram for African Muslim women influencers to participate in this project. Twitter and WhatsApp were used to encourage people to share the call within their networks, and Twitter specifically does well in amplifying posts when retweeted enough times. Given the low accessibility and response rate of Instagram influencers, this research also used snowballing sampling to reach more participants for the study. In addition to participants who volunteered to engage in this study, the researchers' networks came in handy. Snowballing sampling techniques were also used primarily to avoid the risks of non-representativeness. For instance, Nigerian and Kenyan women influencers were not represented in the initial call for participation and were only found through snowballing. Likewise, this technique assisted in reaching more micro and mid-tier influencers and people who created more diverse content. It also helped to reach non-English speaking communities, that is, in the case of this research project, Francophone West Africa, which has one of the largest Muslim populations in the region (Hanretta, 2009). The research participants from this region spoke English fluently as such the researcher did not face specific communication barriers.
Similarly, some participants were contacted directly based on recommendations and through email and Instagram during the data collection stage.

Ten Muslim women from six African countries, two Kenyans, one Ghanaian, three Nigerians, two Ivorians, one Motswana, and one South African, engaged in this research project. Each woman had a different target audience and content type. All the influencers were also at various career stages, with some as full-time content creators and others as part-time creators. Selecting Muslim women from different African countries was because social media

was the research project's location, and the reach of influencers may transcend geopolitical borders. However, the criterion for selecting the countries included the significance of the Muslim population in certain African countries such as Nigeria and Kenya and countries such as the Ivory Coast where there are major gaps in documenting Muslim women's lives despite their large population. In addition, countries like South Africa and Botswana were a result of convenience and the researcher's interest in mapping the dynamics in less researched Muslim communities in Africa. Most importantly, researching different African countries was done to bring together the different perspectives concerning the multiple contexts that exist. Gqola (2021) uses this technique in the form of stories from around the world to avoid the misconception that patriarchy in certain locations for certain women is 'worse', hence 'distract[ing] us from the fact that patriarchy is everywhere' (Gqola 2021, pp.27), even in our digital spaces. As such, the participants are located both in Africa and the diaspora, are of different ethnicities and backgrounds, and contribute to distinctive yet similar perspectives and experiences.

The second group of participants for this project were experts who examined aspects of surveillance cultures that may not be known or apparent to the everyday internet user. As such, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their work on surveillance and technology in the global South. Four people were selected for this project; Neema Iyer, the founder of Pollicy, Dr Nyx Mclean, a researcher at Rhodes University, Chenai Chair, a Special Advisor for Africa Innovation at Mozilla Foundation; and Dr Deniz Yonucu, a geography, politics, and sociology lecturer at Newcastle University. The experts who participated in this research project provided context into the design and implications of dataveillance. They also offered to guide questions and frameworks for imagining more equitable technologies and strategies for influencers.

2.5 Influencer Interview Stage

The interviews with the influencers were conducted online using Zoom and WhatsApp at the convenience of the participants. Using Zoom was valuable for engaging with interviewees from a distance. In addition, the research location being social media, and most participants being based around the world, Zoom made it easier to bypass potential travel restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. While most of the influencers were contacted via emails, others were also engaged through Instagram DMs. However, the participant information letter and consent forms were shared via email. Some influencers also requested that the transcribed interview be shared with them for review. Similarly, others requested to receive the questions beforehand.

Through semi-structured qualitative interviews, information on the influencers' gender and religious identity, work, and motivations for being content creators were documented. The semi-structured interviews were designed to collect detailed information on their lives as influencers and a description of their processes online. This research project looks at the multiple interactions between influencers, audience, and the platform; as such, in describing their processes regarding content creation, growing engagement, and followership, the study captured the existing interactions, including strategies. Most of the accounts highlighted first-hand and second-hand experiences on the implications of being an influencer. The influencers were asked questions on the pleasure points of social media, the risks of harm as visibly Muslim, and as women, their strategies to navigate these harms or curate a safe space, the effectiveness of current safety and privacy features, and what a safe digital space entailed. The goal of the research project is to explore the experiences of Muslim Influencers on Instagram, thus, qualitative interviews allow "researchers to explore the unique experiences of the interviewees and insights into how different phenomena of interest are experienced and perceived" (McGrath et al 2018, pp. 2). Semi-structured qualitative interviews are also useful for in-depth documentation of Muslim women's experiences of online gendered violence and surveillance, specific follow-up questions were also asked based on the participants' context. The interviews also drew in examples to contextualise some of the questions for the influencers; this allowed them to share similar experiences, ones they have

witnessed and/or distinctive accounts. They also referred to the limitations of this research to reach more macro and mega influencers as part of the implications of surveillance and control online. Notably, while this research project does not focus on geopolitical spheres, who is considered an 'influencer' within certain countries differs from the popular conception. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire/ Ivory Coast, influencers are also people with offline impact and may not necessarily be limited to online engagements and following. At the same time, many of the interviewees referred to themselves as content creators, which is used interchangeably with influencers in this thesis.

To snowball, the Influencers played a vital role in connecting the researcher with other Influencers to partake in the research project, especially when they referred to an experience that they witnessed or was encountered by their colleagues within the influencer communities. While others recommended other people to include in the research because of their extensive work as influencers, most of these people remained unreachable.

2.6 Expert Interview stage

The expert stage of the interview was designed as a form of follow-up on the influencer's accounts. Questions were developed in line with identified trends from the initial interview with the Muslim influencers, especially on imagining ways to address some of the concerns raised. For instance, questions on how surveillance is conducted online and in society, understanding of the interaction between platforms and users, arising trends regarding surveillance cultures, and work by technologists to address the harms of surveillance cultures on the internet were asked.

All experts were contacted via email, and the information letter and consent form were included as attachments. The interviews were carried out via Zoom and WhatsApp audio calls, based on the platform convenient to them. Each expert shared accounts based on their work and expertise; for instance, Dr Deniz Yonucu referred to the use of technology within policing societies and malware surveillance. Data for this stage was specifically to develop the already existing information from influencers and to answer unanswered questions from the initial interview stage. Experts investigated the influencer ecosystem and fluid power dynamics

between the influencers and technology companies. This aspect of the research project collected data on how technology could be biased, gendered and enhance surveillance against minoritised groups.

The experts primarily provided guiding perspectives and questions on mapping out the various actors' conflicts within social media spaces. Finally, a common theme in their interview was the need not to view surveillance as solely a tech issue, thus contributing to the conceptual frameworks that were considered in this study.

2.7 Data Analysis

Given the complex nature of the research project, which is to analyse Muslim Influencer's interaction between gender, religion, and technology, data were categorised into different cases to represent the different variables that emerged from the data collection stage. A thematic analysis was conducted to interpret the patterns from the research's data, which was further examined using narrative analysis. A narrative analysis allowed the researcher to make sense of the stories of Muslim Influencers, beyond codes and themes. Both methods helped map out the data patterns and draw out a clear view of Muslim women, how they perceive the different social media functions including its efficiency in protecting them, as well as how it impacts their content creation journeys.

Furthermore, during the data analysis stage, some insights from the Muslim influencers required further enquiry. Hence, to verify claims on the racial and contextual biases that came up during the interviews, the extraction of information from hashtags was used to research trends that the participants had mentioned. This aspect of the analysis stage did not necessarily extract specific posts and the content or responses. However, it looked at, for instance, which accounts appear more when a certain hashtag is typed into Instagram's search? Does the search result verify what a certain participant pointed out regarding race, culture, and aesthetics? While this approach confirmed certain references in the interview, at this stage, I followed up with participants through DMs to clarify questions that came up during the data analysis.

What's more, assessing the themes and narratives against existing literature allowed the research to contextualise work on social media, technology, gender, surveillance, and religion to the realities of Muslim women. These methods were used because most gender, power, and surveillance theories, although targeting minoritized communities from the global South, remains limited regarding African women's bodies, lives, and experiences.

Collectively, these strategies and tools allowed an in-depth analysis of complex social media relations and interactions between three parties, technology, creators, and users.

2.8 Limitations of the Study

The influencer ecosystem demonstrated in table 1 provides a basic insight into the limits of this research. While a diverse influencer network and tier would have proven valuable to this research project, reaching macro and mega influencers came to be rather difficult, if not impossible at this stage. First, most mega and macro-influencers have disabled their Instagram DMs from people they do not follow. Second, they never responded to any emails, except for two, whereas one suggested filling in her responses, and the other pointed out that she engages in research that provided honorarium. However, the three hypotheses drawn from this is that macro and mega influencers are well versed in Instagram safety features and use them to create a safe space; having built a known brand, they are no longer required to interact with their followers and audiences constantly, unlike nano, micro and mid-tier influencers and; given their level of professionalism, reaching them would have to be through their agent or a significant brand collaboration. Altogether, the major takeaway is that the macro and mega tier influencers are hard to reach given the unsafe nature of digital space, and anyone might embody a researcher compromising their safety. Along these lines, the first-hand narratives captured within this thesis are that of nano, micro and mid-tier influencers.

Likewise, the research solely focuses on social media cultures and interactions that transcend geopolitical and national borders. Further research can explore the country-based gendered, power, and surveillance effects and contexts. Conducting such research would provide an in-depth locational mapping of Muslim women Influencers' communities, realities, challenges, and harms.

2.9 Ethical considerations of the study

Ethics Clearance

This research was approved by the Sociology and Development Studies Ethics Committee Constituted Under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) with protocol number SOCL-2021-11.

The terms of the ethics clearance recommend that research does not engage in any form of social media 'scroll back', 'data scraping' or 'content analysis' methods, but only use the stories and narratives of Muslim Influencers for the study.

Considerations of the Researcher

The research's ethics board's recommendation to avoid scraping or content analysis inspired reflection on a highly controversial subject in ethics on conducting internet research with human subjects. Another controversy is on what constitutes public versus private and human versus bot. Online, we cannot tell if an avatar or an account with no pictures counts as human. While content is made public by people who post them, 'people may operate in public spaces but maintain strong perceptions or expectations of privacy' (Markham and Buchanan 2012, pp.6). Similarly, the big data era has brought many ethical data collection and analysis questions. Luka and Millette (2018) describe the different versions of social media research methodologies in their research '*(Re)framing Big Data: Activating Situated Knowledges and a Feminist Ethics of Care in Social Media Research'.* In their description, big data has come to be associated with quantitative methods while 'small data' is matched with qualitative modes of data collection. However, within these modes, other forms of data are lively data from online users' everyday interactions (Lupton, 2015). At the same time, there is "thick data which builds on small data sets by adding layers of data to each entry point of a small, documenting the context, traces, and user's experience" (Luka and Millette 2018, pp. 2). Regardless of the form of data, it is never neutral and is humanly constructed through contexts and power relations (Luka and Millette, 2018). In this case, Markham and Buchanan (2012) come to suggest the need for context with any form of ethical consideration. Markham and Buchanan (2012) also highlight that the researcher must protect more vulnerable communities in their study.

African Muslim women, given their positionality between the 'trifecta' of oppression (Eltahawy, 2019) that is, racism for being black, misogyny for being women, and Islamophobia for being Muslims, have come to occupy a very complex and vulnerable space. Some of the guiding frameworks used to situate the feminist ethics of care are to accept framing corrections from participants on their position as content creators, rather than only referring to them as influencers. They identified that they are content creators first before they are influencers which comes with much more responsibility and visibility. In addition, this research project does not use 'lively data' since it may be part of the soft-surveillance ecosystem, which is critiqued in this study. The research also asks the question "would quoting directly from a social media site cause harm to the creator?" (Markham and Buchanan,2012). In answering this question, Markham and Buchanan (2012) suggest the use of alternative methods of representation. As such, to afford privacy within what is considered a 'public space' quotes from other social media sites used as literature are represented by the origin platform of the creator. For example, a quote would be labelled as a TikTok user, not an online name or personal identifier.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature review first depicts how masculine public spaces are organised offline, which uses a framework to explain the design of these public spaces and their effect on Muslim women's expression online. This part answers how spaces like Instagram become public spaces and assesses the conditions that come to create contestation in the first place. Moral surveillance and assemblages provide a framework to investigate social media as a domain of control and examine the social aspect of surveillance while showing how the impact of control and scrutiny online becomes linked to dataveillance. The concept of assemblages is used to demonstrate the thesis' main argument that, the limitations of Muslim women's resistance practices happen because 'soft surveillance' complicates traditional notions of surveillance cultures.

At the intersection of gender, technology, and surveillance, the literature draws out the unequal power relations and online surveillance actions. It centres on the argument that

women online have agency by engaging publicly as a point of critique and provides a gendered perspective for the claim that dataveillance is rhizomatic to further show how online spaces become domains of gendered control. Finally, in answering the underlying question, the argument of this report leaves, if Muslim influencers' strategies may be limited, how should the effects of dataveillance and social surveillance be addressed? The literature, and eventually the entire thesis, look at speculative and practical holistic security and safety.

Visible Muslim Women and Online Public Spaces

3.1 What the Female Fear Factory Teaches us about Online Publics and Visibility

The story of the animated film *The Breadwinner* begins with Parvana's, the protagonist, father (Baba) being arrested for religious treason for 'having forbidden books and teaching women with them' (Twomey,2017,0:10:15). This incident occurred after a market altercation between Baba and his former student, Idrees, who had now joined the Taliban. In the market, Idrees had taken offence for Parvana shooing off a dog and 'drawing attention to herself as a woman'. Her father insisted she was a child, but to Idrees, she was old enough to get married and suggested marrying Parvana, which her father refused. Later, Idrees spied on them and followed them home, which later resulted in bringing his colleagues to arrest Parvana's father for 'betraying Islam'. This left their family with no adult man to work and provide basic needs for the family.

At the time, the Taliban-ruled-Afghanistan barred women from leaving their homes without male supervision (Twomey,2017,0:05:03), which meant being unable to engage in economic activities. Men who sold to women were reprimanded and punished. Hence, the only option for Parvana was to dress as a boy to work and engage in economic activities to provide her family with sustenance.

Parvana's story in the *Breadwinner*, although fictional, communicates how public spaces are organised within patriarchal cultures. It shows that men who were in solidarity with women were not safe from violence either. In her book, *Female Fear Factory*, Pumla Dineo Gqola (2021) expands on the concept of manufactured female fear by explaining that "the public space becomes the domain of the masculine". Thus, what happens when women occupy a

space which is ‘for’ men? Women are reminded through violence and pain that they do not belong within this space (Gqola, 2021), hence for Parvana, the violence she and the women in her family faced was the loss of her father and inability to source income. Young girls like Parvana, to paraphrase Gqola (2021), are fluent in the language of the female fear factory, hence finding ways to resist it even when they do not do so openly. Parvana had to be present as a boy while placing her identity as a girl in the background within public spaces.

Social media currently represents the public sphere which according to Gqola (2021), is a contested space of engagement. Offline spaces are often characterised by the freedom of movement as seen in the *Breadwinner* story, as such the assertion of masculinity within these spaces works in the form of limiting movement. Meanwhile, in digital spaces, our ‘movement’ has more to do with engagements and less to do with moving. The online public sphere takes the shape of the Habermasian public sphere which refers to a more conceptual space, ‘a domain of social life’ and where public opinion is shared (Habermas, 1964), yet is less physical. What Habermas’ conception of the public sphere has in common with social media is that it began as an idealistic conception of social engagements. Meanwhile, Fraser (1990) critiqued the aspirational theorisation of public spaces, claiming that it was ‘uncritically masculinist’ (Frazer,1990; Gqola 2021). In other words, these ideas, and relations in the form of public engagements also exist within patriarchal structures and hegemonies demonstrated through online interactions.

Social media are designed to provide space for people to connect and share. It relies on visibility to conduct its function for technology companies, audiences, and content creators (here, a content creator is not limited to only influencers). As such, unlike offline spaces where women may be physically removed from a space, and marginalised by mainstream media (Nyanbola,2018), online, the contestations happen when people attempt to limit the free engagement of women through online violence, censorship, and political and gendered violence. Such contestations against gendered violence and socio-political affairs are what Papacharissi (2015) categorised as Affective Publics, where discourse and networks are organised and driven by people’s feelings over a particular phenomenon. Okech (2021) also refers to a similar concept as feminist online counter-publics, where the collective grieves against gendered violence drive protests and debates on femicides online.

Meanwhile, considering Gqola's (2021) conception of the manufacture of the female fear, these 'freer' forms of engagement afforded through social media, on one hand, present a threat to the fear factory's attempt to limit women's public life. More Muslim women use social media spaces to challenge stereotypic ideas of hijab fashion and express their passion in many ways which undermine the rules of the patriarchally constructed public space that hope to control women's lives and engagements in public spheres. At the same time, when people interact online, even within a virtual, affective, and counter-public, their interactions embody their norms and beliefs. As such, the 'free' engagement that social media promises become marred by the reminder that this too is a realm that belongs within the masculine. Hence, the emergence of violence facilitated online to re-enact the female fear factory.

The haram police's claim that hijabis will destroy Islam achieves what the Taliban in *The Breadwinner* enforced to restore order, which is to determine and regain dignity by restricting and controlling women's movement and expression. In destroying Islam, 'these hijabis' began to wear too much makeup, paint their nails, not cover up 'properly', or use the hijab to gain more followers online. They also use benevolent sexism claiming that women's beauty is precious and hidden. Both forms of harassment suggest that Muslim women should not be expressive within public spaces and communicate that women are excessive and require regulation (Gqola, 2021). Online violence's fatal and physical harms include the murder of Qandeel Baloch in 2016 was killed by her brother because her online content supposedly brought 'dishonour to her family' (Maher,2019). In Nigeria, Rahma Sadau's prosecution and bullying happened over a post of herself in a backless dress which caused a stir on northern Nigerian Twitter (Arewa Twitter) (Enwongo, 2020). Most recently, Aneeqa Ateeq in Pakistan faces a death sentence with claims that she allegedly posted blasphemous content on WhatsApp (Farrukh, 2022).

"Patriarchy is murderous" (Gqola, 2021), and online spaces are not free from its violence. The spectacle created out of 'punishing' and 'shaming' women (Federici 2018; Gqola 2021) creates collective fear and anxieties about engaging online. Fear, according to Gqola (2021), is integral to maintaining power, and the anxieties Muslim influencers identify through this research represent the "prolonged exposure to the direct teaching about the dangers that await if women behave in certain ways" (Gqola 2021, pp.61).

These forms of control inspire resistance among Muslim women who constantly fight to protect their space outwardly and subtly. For instance, Muslim women in Sudan challenging authoritarian regimes (Abusharaf, 2022), women in Saudi Arabia on driving restrictions (Haynes, 2018), Parvana by embodying a boy, and Alwad Ali Bedioun women within their gendered segregated groups and through stories (Abu-Lughod, 1990). In addition, challenging the female fear factory relates to Muslim influencers' use of familiar tactics to ensure safety and address aggressors including 'pretending that violence is not happening' (Gqola, 2021), to avoid escalation. Meanwhile, others craft presences and absences (Hooks 1992; Salman 2021), by removing themselves as subjects of their content creation, thus retaining some of the pleasure that social media affords them.

It is important to consider social media as a public space to assess the forms of harm and risks of threats women face online. Using the female fear factory in this way helps the research investigate the gendered forms of surveillance that create conditions for contestation and resistance among Muslim women influencers.

3.2 Avoiding Moral Policing: Surveillant Assemblages on Instagram

Introduction

The haram police are often men who mock women through memes (Akthar, 2021) and harass Muslim influencers online to control their 'excessiveness'. These incidents do not remain online. In October 2021, a Pakistani Tiktoker Ayesha Akram was assaulted by hordes of men while taking a TikTok video in a park (Akthar, 2021). According to Akthar (2021), the violence against her was these men's way of teaching women like Ayesha a lesson. Hence, 'hijabis destroying Islam' incites not only online violence but physical harm to Muslim women with the claim to keep them in check, to not 'destroy the Ummah' (Muslim community).

Moral policing is a form of control women face online. According to Saeed (2021), it is "an extension of the moral compass that restricts women and gender minorities' agency, decisions, mobility, and freedoms in offline spaces. Moral policing is rooted in the patriarchal ideas of controlling their body and societal values and norms deciding what is right or wrong. Such tactics are used to harass, bully, shame, and silence women, particularly those who assert their voice in online spaces" (Saeed 2021, pp. 3). Moral policing, in this thesis,

represents the first interaction between people online which examines the circumstances that create contestation, and the initial continuum for surveillance cultures online. This section considers the complex interactions between technology and people from a social and datafied perspective. In assessing the reciprocal actions using moral policing, the literature shows how control happens, simultaneously by 'avoiding moral policing' the resistance that occurs within the space. Surveillant assemblages provide a perspective into how 'avoidance' techniques, such as using the close friends' list, are complicated by dataveillance.

3.2.1 A look into Moral Policing and Assemblages.

In her essay *Close Friends on Instagram-- Navigating the Moral Gaze*, Zoya Anwer (2021) used real-life accounts to show that women create 'finstas' (fake Instagram accounts) or curate close friends lists on Instagram (Anwer, 2021) to avoid the moral policing online. The Instagram close friends function, according to Anwer (2021) has helped Muslim women safely share content with trusted groups of people. The people who end up on a close friends list may not always know the creator personally, however, are chosen based on instincts that they are safe people to share with (Anwer, 2021). A close friends space on Instagram allows Muslim women who wear the hijab to share photos of themselves without it, personal details, and emotional rants about anything. It is a space away from the 'moral cybergaze' or considered judgement-free. However, some of the women Anwer (2021) cited in her story agreed that using close friends has its constraints since those selected few can screenshot your story and share it with others without your permission, thus breaching the unspoken confidentiality. Still, it provides a degree of safety for Muslim women to share more about themselves, "instead of curating their experiences to fit in" (Anwer, 2021). Nonetheless, using close friends and the privacy concern only present one aspect of the limitations of Muslim women's strategies online.

The second aspect Anwer (2021) points out is that "posting on social media does not always guarantee protection against surveillance, especially when there is a monopoly on the applications". She added, "while the close friends feature on Instagram would be a very small feature which allows such groups to be free, it must be remembered that the name in the list also means sharing very important information with the app, and putting information which is very private and sensitive should be avoided to ensure the safety of individuals" (Anwer

2021, pp.18). The ‘monopoly on the applications’ and ‘sharing valuable information with the app’ is what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) traces as essential components of surveillance, where social media platforms, specifically Meta, capitalise on what she calls the behavioural surplus of users to again user personal information (UPI). Behavioural surpluses are created when people use digital services such as search and the by-products of users’ online behaviours including “how a query is phrased, spelling, punctuation, dwell times, click patterns, and location” (Zuboff 2019, pp.75-76) is left in data caches. Technology firms capitalise on the surplus, which becomes UPI to develop profiles on different users.

Using close friends or finstas to avoid moral surveillance and policing encourages people to share more intimately, yet privacy is not guaranteed from one’s audience or the platform. This problematises the concept of privacy online using close friends or other features, thus providing an entry into the concept of surveillant assemblages.

Surveillant assemblages contend that bodies are abstracted and separated from their territorial settings and rearranged into distinct ‘data doubles’ that operate in an information system to be scrutinised (Haggerty and Ericson,2000). Similarly, ‘soft surveillance’ demonstrates that in modern technology, or the era of social media collapsed the Foucauldian panopticon metaphor which includes a specific gaze looking down on populations of people as whole entities. Kester and Schneier (2021) explain that soft surveillance is less invasive in a surveillance culture and may involve individuals surrendering data through public displays of vulnerability that are common via cookies and social media sites. In other words, people’s willingness to share parts of themselves online or monetise their lives as Instagram content creators forms aspects of soft surveillance where individuals surrender data. Kester and Schneier (2021) argue that “contemporary surveillance culture is, therefore, less obvious yet everywhere, fewer spy guys and big brother and much more participatory and data-driven”. As such, Anwer (2021) warns against sharing vulnerable information even on a close friends list because we might unknowingly surrender data. This means that unlike in a panopticon where people understand that surveillance is understood in a more direct sense of discipline and control, surveillance on the internet presents a ‘rhizomatic levelling of hierarchies’ (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000).

Simply put, Radhakrishnan (2020) asserts that bodies are no longer treated as single whole entities, but surveillance practices fragment them into a series of discrete disembodied flows of information forming a 'surveillant assemblage'. As such, one flow of information is provided through the audience to content creator interaction where influencers share parts of themselves with groups of people who become engaged in their lives online, and vice versa. On the other hand, the more discrete form happens when all forms of interactions, be it the aggressor, the victim of online violence and moral policing, an influencer who has curated a safe life online or a social media user who merely enjoys content, become part of the contemporary data-driven surveillance. Together, they form part of Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) 'rhizomatic levelling of surveillance hierarchies' where people who were previously not subject to surveillance become a part of the data collection and analysis ecosystem.

Haggerty and Ericson consider this fragmentation of bodies as 'double data', a concept problematised by Radhakrishnan (2020) who claims that alluding to double data means a separation between datafied and material bodies exists. Van der Ploeg (2012) also argues that "when data is increasingly collected for surveillance, data can no longer be thought of as about the body but must be reconceptualised to be a part of the body under surveillance." (Van der Ploeg 2012: Radhakrishnan 2020, pp.5). This means that, when people share their lives and interests online, data on them includes aspects of who they are, thus forming part of the body being surveilled and not separate from their physical selves.

Despite the characteristic of surveillant assemblages being rhizomatic levelling of hierarchies, 'looking' relations remain unequal. First, when Muslim women online use the close friends to avoid moral policing, they act with the fluency of Foucauldian forms of surveillance (Thompson, 2017), here known and unknown internet users, observe, by either taking notes, or act by commenting, harassing, and bullying them forcing people self-regulate (Thompson 2017). Notably, when people use the close friend list, they hope to escape spoken and unspoken judgements or anxieties that come with sharing certain information with the public (Anwer, 2021).

Second, using close friends within this location also provides data to the app for aggregated collection and analysis for 'customisation and personalisation' (Zuboff, 2019). Kovacs (2017) explains that people under surveillance today are less in their control. Previously 'avoiding'

certain crimes or actions might enable a person to get by. Kovacs (2017) argues that unless a person stops participating in modern public life, it would be hard to escape surveillance.

The creation of internet surveillance towards the commodification of predicting a user's future behaviour, which Zuboff (2019) considers as surveillance capitalism, connects with Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) theorisation of the "desire to bring systems together, to combine practises and technologies and integrate them into a larger whole" (Haggerty and Ericson 2000, pp. 610). Zuboff (2019), and Haggerty and Ericson (2000) agree that these combinations have provided exponential capabilities for surveillance cultures.

Kovacs' (2017) theorisation of the convergence of data-driven surveillance, and social surveillance with gendered outcomes, explains that while surveillance in the digital age might be more dispersed, it is not democratic and remains unevenly distributed. "We aren't even all subjected to the same gaze now, but differently gazed at depending on which box the algorithm has decided to slot us in" (Kovacs 2017).

Hence, surveillant assemblages come to play a role in the control of Muslim influencers in these public spaces in three ways. First, surveillance is important to policing (Kovacs, 2017), thus forming part of people's interactions online where the haram police scrutinise and harass Muslim influencers (Naga, 2020). People must observe to control (Foucault, 1978) and Kovacs argues that gender is always a location for surveillance. Second, Zuboff (2019) contends that products of surveillance are about "predicting us, without actually caring what we do or what is done to us" (pp.78). Hence, the abstracted bodies and contexts Monahan (2009), and Haggerty and Ericsson (2000) describe being part of the process of creating data doubles. Third, when predictions happen without much care about what is 'done to us' or 'what we do', then we have instances where algorithms continue to suggest content that is considered as something a specific user might like without much care that they might be harmful to the user or the content creator. In the case of Muslim influencers, Instagram will amplify their posts when they 'act' according to platform prescribed strategies, and while they may be able to 'reverse the gaze' based on specific social practices, the positioning and response to their content based on algorithmic decisions remain outside of their control. Ultimately supports Van der Ploeg's (2012) argument that data is part of the body being analysed and not separate.

The literature analysis above communicates that 'avoidance' is complicated within a datafied society, and a person's fluency in Foucauldian surveillance societies only goes a long way. It shows that social media public spaces are more complex than our everyday publics and answers the question of 'how the actions of influencers to protect themselves become limited.'

3.3 'When You have a Pearl, You Hide It': The Intersection of Gender, Religion and Technology

The previous section acknowledged that despite Haggerty's and Ericson's (2000) notion that contemporary surveillance societies present 'rhizomatic levelling of hierarchies', this part problematizes their assertion by showing how surveillance in online spaces has specific gendered outcomes. It claims that users, specifically women, are agents of the cybergaze by 'putting themselves out there.'

Repositioning the phrase 'these hijabis will destroy Islam,' the haram police invite analysis into gender and surveillance at the contours of private and public spaces. In truth, Muslim women's lives have always been eligible for public scrutiny by the state authorities and communities (Puar, 2016), thus complicating the idea of women having private spaces. What's more, 'hijabis destroying Islam' refers to the frustrations and discomfort of internet male patriarchs on the increasing presence of women in digital spaces and their will to reclaim a primarily male-dominated space (Akhtar, 2021). Women being in public spaces falls within the category of attention in Mona Eltahawy's (2019) Seven Necessary Sins for Women and Girls. Eltahawy (2019) recommends taking up space and attention to disrupting patriarchal control of women's bodies and lives. Meanwhile, online, Muslim women influencers place themselves and part of their lives in the form of content. Both Akhtar (2021) and Eltahawy (2019) stress the importance of women owning spaces as threats to patriarchal structures and hegemonies.

Even so, the experiences of violence online demonstrate a non-linear slope between taking up space and patriarchal pushback against women's expression. Controlling visibility online

directly correlates with Padte's (2014) remark that women's bodies should be hidden and paradoxically be on constant display. Thompson (2017) analyses this using Vermeer's painting 'A Girl Reading a Letter in an Open Window' (figure 2) at the nexus of surveillance and slut shaming on social media. Thompson (2017) doubles down on Vermeer's use of the 'curtain' to breach the girl's privacy. According to Thompson (2017), the girl's use of a curtain in 1650 showed that she was not a docile subject. Curtains at the time had come to signify privacy, which Thompson demonstrates was not the case before, or among people in less populated areas in the Netherlands. Thompson also suggests that "the unnatural position of the green curtain draws the audience's attention to the fact that they are intervening in a 'private' scene" (Thompson 2017, pp. 330). In addition, the scene of 'A Girl Reading a Letter' inspires multiple interpretations of the girl reading an 'intimate correspondence,' and the 'artist makes her available' (ibid,332). Vermeer, according to Thompson (2017), humiliates and 'intentionally exposes his blushing subject to the communal gaze'.



Figure 2: A Girl Reading a Letter in an Open Window

Thompson's critique that the painting makes the girl visible signifies a violation of the girl's privacy by the artist. Thus, allowing us to gain insight into Padte's (2014) assertion that women's bodies should be on constant display for observation, judgement, and scrutiny.

What Instagram provides is visibility, and women willingly live out their own private lives in public (Puar in conversation with West, 2016). Hence, the haram police use this argument to assert that Muslim women's beauty is a pearl to be hidden. The same logic is used to shame Muslim influencers for choosing visibility. Dubrofsky and Wood (2015) point out that the controversy around agency versus control online with regards to female celebrities (in this research, influencers) "putting themselves out there" ignores the social contexts where women of colour are subject to heterosexist masculine gazes. Meanwhile, Bandura and Thompson (2002:2017) indicate that "shame brought about by online communities places the object of their gaze as 'agentic' in a surveillance context". The 'agent' here is the woman who posts a selfie or creates content for money or passion. Akhtar's (2021) work reveals how Pakistani women celebrities and online personalities are subjected to social media scrutiny through memes that criticise women for engaging in religiously forbidden activities or 'benevolently' mock them. Additionally, online communities because these women in public spaces cannot have reasonable expectations for privacy (Thompson, 2017) or safety.

Yet, when are women's spaces ever private? Dubrofsky and Wood (2015) remind us that while black women may not fully participate in their objectification, social media positions them as 'always already there to be gazed upon with desire, regardless of their actions'. Furthermore, shaming becomes a regulatory practice that produces docile bodies (Foucault 1978; Thompson 2017). The actions of the haram police perpetuate "negative female stereotypes that legitimise the disciplining of women" (Burns 2015; Thompson 2017). This achieves effects of surveillance, including Muslim women self-surveilling to avoid moral shaming that position them as 'the problem with the Muslim Ummah today.'

'These hijabis will destroy Islam' posits a reproduction of gendered power dynamics online that centres shame as the prison guard in a panopticon, causing women to censor themselves or alter their behaviour (Foucault 1978; Tanenbaum 2015; Thompson 2017). While it has been argued that contemporary forms of surveillance cultures mutate Foucault's (1978) theories,

Thompson (2017) recognises that women's reaction against scrutiny and surveillance is often to self-regulate to avoid the disciplinary gaze, which is Foucauldian. "Shaming incites responses that are like the panoptic gaze, permanent in its effect even if it is discontinued '(Foucault, 1978: Thompson, 2017). 'Making a subject visible' and 'shaming visibility' merge to 'control and determine the contours of female agency' (Thompson, 2017).

Meanwhile, Puar (2014) expressed that "the uncomfortable truth is that Facebook (now Meta) taps into our inner stalker, the pleasures we revel in by surveilling others and by living out our privates in public". Nonetheless, Schwartz's and Neff's (2019) conceptualisation of gendered affordances notes that contemporary surveillance cultures collect and analyse everyone's data for purposes of predictive and behavioural control (Haggerty and Ericson 2000: Zuboff 2019), but 'technology does not only shape individual capacity to act but also have implications for structuring interactions and society' (Schwartz and Neff 2019, pp. 2407). Consequently, 'enabling different users to take different actions based on the gendered social and cultural repertories available to them and technology designers' (ibid).

Gendered affordances demonstrate that depending on a person's social position; they may experience technology and digital spaces differently. Masculine online publics are designed to control women's expression of freedom through shame and scrutiny. Visibility in the form of agency is weaponised against Muslim influencers, and the claims that they 'put themselves out there' validates control. The analysis provided in this section also shows how gender is a location for surveillance, and the promise of safety based on women being 'hidden' is false. On the one hand, privacy is breached when people actively make women 'available' for scrutiny. On the other hand, dataveillance collects, analyses, and positions personal information in the form of behavioural predictions. Collectively, the literature presented realises women's Foucauldian responses to surveillance while demonstrating how social media becomes a location of gendered power dynamics.

3.3.1 Nothing to Hide: A Look into Holistic Digital Safety

'If you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to fear,' is a statement weaponised against people who share privacy and safety concerns (Kovacs 2017: Thompson 2017). Meanwhile,

Kovacs (2017) and Zuboff (2019) share that unless a person stops participating in contemporary public life altogether, they cannot escape surveillance. This does assume that surveillance is an inherent effect of technology, which will be explored in the concluding chapters. For this section, however, the report expands the argument that current strategies are limited within contemporary surveillance societies by showing how demands of privacy and safety are met by shaming people for *having something to hide*. In addition, the section shares feminist recommendations on digital safety discourses. The literature provided both critiques of surveillance cultures and the rhetoric that you waive your right to safety or privacy by putting yourself out there. Despite the argued limitations, it investigates the importance of Muslim women's social resistance and provides a perspective on the complexities of contemporary surveillance cultures.

With that established, the claim that people should have nothing to hide, Thompson (2017) contends, constructs the shaming culture that guilts people who demand safety and privacy. It works in conjunction with 'putting oneself out there,' and the invocation of *freedom of speech* because a woman participating in digital public space should not expect privacy (Dubrofsky and Wood 2015: Thompson 2017: Kryss Network 2021). Dubrofsky (2016) also indicates that 'transparency' has been aesthetically reconstructed to operate 'on the basis that if there is nothing to hide, then the body can be freely put on display' (Dubrofsky 2016: Thompson 2017, pp.334)

In this regard, people who are often men non-consensually share photos of women in online communities such as Reddit and Telegram groups (Achieng, 2021). Meme cultures also centre's women as targets of moral mockery. However, victims of violence, mockery, and policing (Akhtar, 2021), include men who are what Gqola (2021) refers to as "womanish" which means feminine men who do not perform patriarchal masculinity.

Instagram algorithmic functions that 'find your contacts' or suggests that 'this follower you know follows this page or this person' or 'your follower likes this content' (Iyer and Achieng, 2022), also present privacy concerns. The implications of such functions are gendered so that queer people, sex workers, and people who do not wish to be found are 'outed' or exposed

to family members and aggressors online (Iyer and Achieng, 2022). Similarly, social media communities use Artificial intelligence (AI) bots to undress underaged girls (Hao, 2020).

For many Muslim women and gender-nonconforming people, the close friends' list protects them from scrutiny and judgment (Anwer, 2021). Despite that, people who use close friends are still vulnerable to non-consensual sharing of information or data harm. In addition, research by Kryss Network (2021) on Power, Expression, Violence: Women's freedom of expression on social media in Malaysia addresses the assumption that freedom of opinion and expression is equal for all people. The network supports Schwartz and Neff's (2019) proposition that social media actions and reactions are not equal and have gendered effects, from design and social use. Consequently, the haram police use these gendered repertoires to observe Muslim influencers disapprovingly, scrutinising their lives and debating their hijab journeys.

The argument against needing digital security repositions Thompson's (2017) critique of Vermeer's painting 'A Girl Reading a Letter in an Open Window' and Dubrofsky's (2016) aesthetics of transparency. Both the painting and concept blur the lines between private and public spaces, relying on the rhetoric that if a woman has nothing to hide, is morally righteous, or is fluent in the female fear factory, then she should not have to actively worry about her safety. Yet, Gqola (2021) makes it known that, under patriarchy, the promise of safety is never guaranteed.

Within this domain, Kovacs (2017) disclosed that the effects of surveillance are 'never merely personal but structural'. She, Kovacs (2017), adds that because surveillance cultures seek to police and reproduce power relationships, it is about personal privacy and social justice. Concurrently, Kovacs (2017) recommends that fighting back against surveillance requires technology developers to be transparent and accountable, preventing possibilities for manipulation of data and algorithms. "And it requires grounding technologies once again 'in a social context, embodiment, and place" (Kovacs, 2017)

The literature demonstrates the existing power relations and how our digital interactions are not separate from existing social dynamics. Digital media too posits a public space organised

under patriarchal structures and hegemonies, with an added layer of the intended and unintended coded biases and harms. Consequently, the attempt to control people in digital spaces brings about contestations and resistance, where Muslim influencers and women push back and protect their space. Yet, surveillant assemblages restrict the control Muslim influencers might have in contemporary surveillance societies. The multiple marginalities and interactions highlight how technology may unintentionally facilitate and amplify the implications of gendered societies. Altogether, the literature depicts interactions within online masculine publics, including engagement techniques Muslim women use and speculation about what holistic digital security entails.

Part 2: Findings & Analysis

Introduction

The main finding in this research is that Muslim Influencers' safety online is a result of their careful consideration and curation of spaces that allow them to retain their engagement. While the concept of visibility places them between the complex arguments of agency on control, their different realities and experiences come to determine their engagement tactics and resistance against coded abuse and sexism.

As such, I detail how Muslim women online sub-consciously consider their social positioning as women, Muslim and black African as they engage online. The experiences at the trifecta enforce an existing consciousness on how gendered social dynamics are mirrored online and given influencers' positionality as some-what public figures, their social media space becomes less controlled than their offline personal spaces.

Notably, Muslim women influencers tend to design safe identities online to avoid being scapegoated. Despite the need for safety being fundamental to how Muslim influencers curate their Instagram identity and space, some only acknowledge their exposure to online violence as a 'strange' occurrence and not as violence. This suggests that the normalisation of violence against women desensitises the subject. Similarly, the trivialisation of violence

online happens because of the ‘perceived absence of physical violence’ (Kryss Network,2022) thus Muslim women identify experiences that fall outside the widely known cases as ‘strange’. Still, Puar (2014) reminds us that “concepts do not prescribe relations, nor do they exist before them; rather, relations of force, connection resonance, and patterning give rise to concepts''. While online violence does not and should not only refer to extreme forms of harm, characterising it as ‘strange’ nonetheless rejects the naturalisation of patriarchal power reproduced online. Gqola (2021), also supports the claim that rendering forms of control ‘strange’ makes the female fear factory unnatural and eventually challenges it, hence the importance of the naming of the concept OGBV. It is partly in this regard this research examines Muslim women’s realities online.

Violence online takes the form of what Muslim influencers already know, simultaneously remaining ambiguous given the dynamics within digital spaces. Essentially, influencers’ resistance strategies fall within their understanding of social surveillance and control. Here, they identify the implications of the actions of users who are the haram police and the unknown cybergaze who are assumed to be part of their audiences or close networks. On the other hand, while dataveillance remains on the less obvious and ambiguous side of things, many know it exists yet are unsure of the direct implications to their digital privacy and safety. Within this continuum, Muslim women come to exist between the argument that they have agency because they chose to make themselves visible versus their realities of experiencing control through surveillance cultures. To such a degree, placing restrictions on how they navigate potential harms the layer of online surveillance constructed by the technology.

With that established, the subsequent sections examine the stories of Muslim influencers to explain the multiple interactions between people and digital technologies. The stories are used to assess the conditions that create contestations online and the existing patriarchal hegemonies that make online spaces domains of surveillance systems and cultures. In addition, the research’s findings are used to investigate how Muslim influencers navigate surveillance cultures on Instagram while using their accounts and that of experts to explain the convergence of social and dataveillance. In my analysis, I look at why the concept of agency is often referenced; however, it is to show the positive social media affordances that motivated Muslim women to use the space in the first place. Mapping out the ‘positive’ looks

at the complexities of digital cultures to provide an analysis of how Muslim influencers navigate the contested social media space.

It is important to note that the findings are not exhaustive on the experiences of Muslim influencers on Instagram, especially given the limits in identifying stories from macro-level influencers. However, it serves as a starting point for more inquiry on the intersections of gender, religion, and technology.

Chapter 4: The Dichotomies of Agency and Control

Agency: Pleasures of Being a Digital Content Creator

Content creation, a common theme in the interviews with influencers, represents a rare form of storytelling that social media platforms have supported and enabled. Instagram has brought together video, text, and image functionalities that allow influencers to tell different stories depending on their artistic preferences. Informative slides allow users to add critical or fun information to images. Instagram users share posts such as “What is going on in Sudan?'' or “How to remove an online tracker” (Figure 3). Similarly, reels, which are currently the focus of Instagram’s algorithms, allow creators to share up to one-minute videos on just about anything. Like Tiktok, reels are short highlights of a person’s activities or opinions. At the same time, it is part of a design that taps into our desire to make our ‘private’ lives public, and Instagram perfectly brings together all forms of media in one space, thus enabling multiple forms of interactions among users and the technology. The multimedia nature of the space creates conditions that allow people to surveil scrutinise and police others actively. In this case, as shown in the stories, people put out very critical thoughts and images of themselves which make them visible both on the social and data aspects of surveillance. In this part of the chapter, I first trace how Muslim influencers use Instagram’s multimedia features, which form part of the rhetoric of ‘agency’. I argue that the conversation around women 'putting themselves out there’ thus validating surveillance cultures can be understood as a weaponisation of the Habermasian aspirational public sphere. This means that people assert that being visible in a public space creates conditions for ‘looking’ and scrutiny, without the subject having a reasonable need for privacy. While this subsection tells stories of the pleasures of social media, the main purpose is to set the tone to demonstrate how pleasures

become threatened because of gendered and religious-based power relations that exist on Instagram.



Figure 3: Access Now Informative Instagram Slide

4.1 Sharing through Stories and Books

Diarra from Ivory Coast began her content creation journey because of her passion for storytelling. At first, Diarra used blogging sites to write her stories and then moved to Facebook because it allowed her the number of words and characters to tell stories. She told stories about her journey as a Muslim woman, including her struggles. However, when Diarra got an unending writer's block, she orally shared her stories through podcasts. Hence, after

years of producing podcasts on her life journey, Diarra found Instagram to be one of the perfect spaces to promote her podcast. She shared that her growing subscriber numbers on her podcast were a result of using Instagram as a marketing site. Diarra is not only a podcast content creator, but she also uses Instagram to promote her business.

Just like Diarra, Aicha is also an Ivorian influencer whose journey began as a short fiction storyteller online. She occasionally included stories of her journey and narratives, book reviews, and experiences such as Ramadan stories. She creates content on her trips and professional life to assist other Muslim women to navigate travelling and their careers. Aicha's love for stories and books led her to open a community library in her neighbourhood while continuing to use different forms of digital media to tell stories. Aicha expresses herself on Instagram by creating posts of books and food to show their resemblance, which she shares increases her engagement rate. However, Aicha's Instagram life is only complementary to her life offline which she shares as having a partner and a full-time job that is rarely included in her online life.

Bookstagramming is the term for people who focus on book reviews and telling stories. However, Diarra and Aicha do not consider themselves *bookstagrammers,* this might be due to language and contextual differences. Meanwhile, Suraya from Nigeria openly shared her *bookstagram* journey in which she explained that her love for reading brought her to reviewing books online. The real push happened in 2015 when she discovered a Muslim woman who reviewed books. Suraya explained that at the time most *bookstagrammers* were white women who only spoke about Young Adult (YA) novels and did not provide diverse content. Hence, her motivation to begin her page contributed to the work of the one other Muslim woman who inspired her. Today, "there are many Muslim women who review and recommend books", and Suraya says she no longer feels the pressure to 'do it all'.

4.1.1 '<u>Freedom from the System': Engaging in Content Creation as an Escape and Space for Self-expression</u>

Free self-expression and passion for different topics and content inspire some Muslim Women content creators.

For Tasnim, a Motswana who lives in South Africa, her journey as a photographer began when she was a child using cardboards in the form of a pinhole camera. Tasnim said, “I also began to take my dad’s camera until I finally bought my own” (B. Tasnim, Personal Communication, October 2021). On Instagram, Tasnim is a food blogger, yet photography does not sum up her entire life. She is also an academic, currently studying for a PhD, but prefers to keep her life as a digital content creator and a PhD student separate. Tasnim partners with different restaurants, however, she occasionally works independently to create her content.

Other influencers explained that ‘putting modesty out there’, sharing relatable content of their lives and journeys, and expressing their passion inspires them. Instagram gave them a platform where stories could be captured ‘fast’, however, ‘in no way easy’. For instance, Dunia, a Kenyan, shared that other macro-level Muslim influencers inspired her work. She could imagine expressing her passion through them by engaging in activities she enjoys ‘away from the system’. She further explained that Instagram gave her a sense of freedom, and ‘the system’ she previously referenced could be synonymous with the religious and patriarchal system that dictates and controls women's self-expression, in this case, Muslim women. Dunia is not the only one who stated that social media presented a type of freedom that allowed them to be more expressive. Still, they shared many more experiences that affected their work and pleasures. Thus, limiting and threatening this found ‘freedom’.

The main finding of this subsection is that Muslim influencers have found a space to express themselves. It also shows how they engage and interacts within the social media space and their motivations for growing their online presence in a specific way. However, in analysing their stories for this part, I am more interested in looking at ‘freedom away from the system’. This statement leaves the question of ‘what is the system’, and why do Muslim influencers need to get away from it? Similarly, does Instagram present a space where they can get away from the said system or mirror realities from the systems Muslim women want to ‘get away from’?

The system, in this case, was explained to be synonymous with religious and patriarchal systems that dictate and control the self-expression of women. Before social media, engaging in public spaces was far more restricting, with physical movement being restricted and controlled for many women. Social media, as shown in the literature review, represents a

sphere where ‘movement’ is less physical but has more to do with engagement. The space initially focused on connecting people yet has come to provide far more than ‘connections’. Women-identifying and queer people use social media to express themselves, as seen in the stories above and find similar communities of people. Within physical spaces, women’s lives and expression are restricted through patriarchal hegemonies and structures of control that dictate how women should act in masculine public spaces. Dunia’s account acknowledges that Muslim women need spaces away from these masculine publics that shames and punishes visibility yet makes the subject visible enough for scrutiny. Still, this does not assume that gendered power relationships are non-existent on social media, but most importantly presents the pleasures that motivate people’s appreciation of social media spaces. For instance, the story of Parvana thoroughly demonstrates how freedom of movements ‘is an articulation of ownership of a public space’ (Gqola 2021, pp.24), one that women are constantly reminded that it does not belong to them. Thus, Muslim women see that on Instagram, they can overtly and subtly resist these forms of restrictions that aim to keep their ‘excessive’ selves in check.

On the other hand, Aicha and Tasnim’s accounts speak to the fundamental argument of this entire thesis, that is, Muslim influencers’ strategies remain limited due to aspects of social media designs that converge social and data surveillance. Both influencers point out parts of themselves they strictly keep offline. This communicates that Aicha and Tasnim acknowledge how their position as Influencers online may present harms beyond their control. It simply establishes that despite people ‘putting themselves out there’ they do not always waive their need and rights to privacy. As such, they support arguments that claim surveillance systems abstract from contexts as algorithms and people online may not always entirely know a person. In the coming sections, I explore influencers’ expression of privacy by showing the aspects of their lives they actively do not include in their online content. The lives of Muslim influencers online are not linear, and their work does not stop when their spaces are being threatened. Yet, they are forced to reconsider aspects of their engagement. Meanwhile, the findings and analysis of this subsection sets the basis of the complex digital cultures and explain how the pleasures of online spaces become threatened through violence and the risk of violence.

4.2 Control: Social Surveillance, Creepy People, and Online Violence

Muslim influencers explained that surveillance is when people and entities 'watch', 'observe', 'scrutinise' and 'judge' them. They also referenced policing as a form of surveillance that actively seeks to control their lives and work online. The concerns for 'creepy people' provide insight into the harms and risks of harms of surveillance societies. As demonstrated in previous chapters, surveillance seeks to control, and according to Foucault (1978), it breaks down people into docile bodies. In expressing entitlement to women's lives and bodies, users who are often men, according to the interviewees, stalk and harass women online, thus explaining their concern for 'creepy' people. Secondly, it communicates the discrete yet visible power of surveillance. Along these lines, this part builds upon the argument that positive social media affordances become gendered because digital spaces do not exist separately from our physical offline spaces. The previous subsection on agency provided a perspective on the claim that 'people willingly put themselves out there'. Nonetheless, this chapter further analyses the conditions that create contestations and show the existing forms of gendered social control online.

4.2.1 The Dynamics of Surveillance: Be careful of What You Do

Surveillance happens in layers of the personal, structural and interpersonal. The participants shared that they consider surveillance as scrutiny, policing, vigilante justice, and judgement through this research. Additionally, the experts from the interview further explained how the types of surveillance are organised and carried out in society. Dr Nyx Mclean described the personal as when surveillance cultures force people to monitor and control themselves. The second part they defined as when the community plays the monitoring role, which comes to be understood as what this thesis considered social surveillance; and the third happens through structures that include datafication, big brother, airports systems, and the state monitoring. However, it is worth noting that community monitoring is organised through patriarchal hegemonies that also form structures that validate surveillance cultures.

According to Dr Mclean,

> "*People will 'self-gatekeep' most of themselves to make sure that they are not doing anything that puts them at risk. And that may be based on a social group, identity norms, then you have got the interpersonal, with the community governing itself. So, you have got some aspects that are just purely based on expectations, or how people are treated, or think that or perceive that they are treated. Then you have got active policing. So also, there is a difference between surveillance policing, but surveillance could just simply be observing and documenting or noting and using for purposes that may harm or restrict someone. Whereas policing is far more active in the implementation, I would say up to speed and then you have got a delivery platform, which is strange because that is not always in the same way, as a person and interpersonal. So, at the level of the platform that's happening in always in a purely capitalistic, not neoliberal kind of way*." (N. Mclean, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Concerning the first form of online surveillance, Muslim influencers pointed out that the more they gained visibility, the more self-watching happened and the less they could freely express themselves. Most of the participants recalled instances where they were more expressive, usually at the beginning of their journey when they still had a small following and were building their brand. "The internet does not forget", one participant explained, and many influencers do not want to face any backlash that would always be referenced and never forgotten.

Surveillance exists within the continuum of gender, race, and religion. Muslim influencers described instances where they were policed because they are women, Muslim, and those who live in the diaspora, African. The interviewees recalled the perpetrators of such violence were often the Muslim community and Islamophobic people. The findings demonstrate their consciousness of the multilayered discrimination they face while creating content and engaging with people online.

> "*As a Muslim woman, I have to be generally careful of what I say. Of course, I cannot make bomb jokes, it might be taken the wrong way*" (I.C. Aicha, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Aicha fears something she says might be taken out of context. Other influencers, including Aicha, pointed out that they also consider their families' and close friends' interpretations of their content.

An example of self-censorship is when Harija, a Nigerian influencer, explained that she stopped including content about being a mother because she began to receive unsolicited opinions from online users. A Kenyan influencer, Bilan, also highlighted that the blurred lines between user and content creator are a result of sharing yourself online. At the same time, another Nigerian influencer, Kawthar, explained that while influencers put parts of themselves out there does not mean they are inhuman. Similarly, others pointed out that Muslim influencers are considered hijabi and faith-based role models, which play a role in the monitoring and policing they face. Likewise, Bilan expressed that while being visible comes with great career possibilities, "*life could also be simpler without it*" (K. Bilan, Personal Communication, 2021). Additionally, for women with smaller platforms, nano, and micro-influencers, one participant explained that having niche followership means directly interacting with violence resulting from surveillance cultures. Meanwhile, as shown in the methodology chapter, macro and mega-level influencers have a less personal engagement with their audiences yet do not provide a conclusive argument on whether or not they face the type of violence nano and micro-influencers experience. At the same time, the assumption is that the more your follower base, the more harassment and online violence you face.

Muslim influencers understand surveillance's effects and cultures, and many refer to surveillance as policing. Muslim women actively recognise policing as an effect of surveillance. Their activity online and visibility threaten the idea of public spaces being masculine, but these forms of active and subtle resistance come at a cost. While Muslim women take up space, as Mona Eltahawy (2019) recommended, shame is positioned as a panoptic guard that forces what Dr Nyx Mclean referred to as self-surveillance. In addition, surveilling the self in the form of censorship responds to both personal and collective fear. The 'cost' of women pushing back against patriarchal hegemonies in masculine public spaces is often violence carried out in a public manner. As such, when a spectacle is created or women continue to see others like them being punished, it communicates a 'lesson' (Federici, 2018). In this sense,

others begin to either tread carefully, that is self-monitor, or monitor others to avoid being scapegoated in that manner or with the promise of being rewarded which Gqola (2021) and Federici (2018) point out to be false. Through this, the report shows the forms of gendered control that exist even within our online spaces creating conditions for contestations and how the design of surveillance within patriarchal hegemonies, render Muslim women's resistance strategies limited. Despite that, what Eltahawy (2019) and occasionally Gqola (2021) allude to is the fact that the increasing forms of resistance by first taking space and seeking attention, and second identifying violence as 'strange', in the long run, wears patriarchs out, and ultimately contribute to freedom.

4.2.2 "You cannot be a Muslim girl online to the extent that you want.": Exploring Online Gender-Based Violence

Introduction to Online Violence

The dimensions of online violence continue to expand as new technologies and functionalities emerge. For instance, with the emergence of deepfake technologies, Artificial Intelligence (A.I) manipulated media has presented sophisticated forms of gendered violence. 93 percent of deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images (Petkauskas, 2021) where pictures of women are swapped with that of porn actors or women being undressed through 'deep nude'. On social media, gender-based violence is any form of gendered action towards behavioural control online.

Besides Muslim women facing forms of violence due to their online visibility, part of the scrutiny they experience is justified through ideas that they are 'defying' religious norms. Meanwhile, their defiance does not always follow the pattern of being an 'activist', but of simply existing, engaging and monetizing social media spaces. To reinforce the argument that women within public spaces are reminded that they do not belong. The organisation of violence in women's lives online is demonstrated through some of the responses of the influencers where they cited the fact that 'we pay them no mind' or 'we develop thick skin'. Similarly, it is through their recognition of how their social status as African Muslim women places them in positions to be extra surveilled that Suraya expressed with exhaustion and

disappointment that "*you can't be a Muslim girl online to the extent that you want*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021). In this way, Suraya's quote supports my argument that violence online has less to do with 'what you post' and more to do with establishing patriarchal power in public spaces.

Understanding both the practice and concept of OGBV brings it within the domain of what is 'known'. And, mapping out existing harms allows us to identify ways to address them individually and holistically.

In the next part, I expand the story of Suraya to show how surveillance cultures come to determine her interactions within digital spaces as someone whose work engages with books. I also develop her account by sharing other Muslim influencers whose content slightly differs from Suraya's. The stories illustrate the multiple interactions between audience and content creators and the content creators and their fluency in control societies online and offline. As such, by extensively exploring the implications of surveillance cultures in women's lives online, the thesis sets the basis for analysis of their existing strategies due to the contested social media space.

4.2.3 A Bookstagrammer's Story

> "*I know that people are obsessed with policing Muslim women and our appearance online*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021)

In relation to the research question, I reiterate the previous claim that online violence has less to do with 'what you post' and more to do with establishing patriarchal power in public spaces.

Bookstagrammers produce creative reviews of books, which they share on their Instagram feed, stories, and reels. In a 2020 book trend, *bookstagrammers* used makeup and outfits to match book covers along with the hashtags #MakeupAsBookCovers and #Outfitsasbookcovers. The trend became popular on mostly Instagram and Twitter as many people joined in to share their makeup, outfits, and books. The art form lives on, however, only among a few *bookstagrammers*.

Pairing makeup or outfits with the cover of books came to signify one of the moments *bookstagrammers* centred themselves or their looks in sharing books. The popular design of a *bookstagrammer's* Instagram feed is of books spread on grey or earth-toned backgrounds, a hand holding a glass of wine, coffee shops, tote bags or plants with books next to them. Yet for the first time, we began to see them use vibrant makeup colours and clothes for their feed.

For instance, Suraya shared that it was not until recently before she began including her face and body on her feed. Her posts from 2020 follow the *bookstagrammer's* conventional art described above. For Suraya, focusing on sharing the books moved the attention from her to the content she curated. Although she used Instagram stories to actively interact with people, and more recently reels to expand her work, she would later explain that her Instagram stories brought people closer and became the main source of content policing and harassment. Similarly, the types of books she shared played a role in how people police her online.

At first, Suraya explained that she was not sure surveillance cultures affected her work. She pointed out that it was probably because her content rarely centred on her body, but rather on her hobbies and interest in reading books she shared with her audience. Nonetheless, Suraya said, "*maybe now that I have started to post more of myself and face, I might start experiencing more violence*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

On the other hand, as we continued to unpack the range of experiences Muslim influencers face, Suraya began to share that the type of book or topic she reviewed inspired criticisms from online audiences. For instance, during the Palestinian protest, Suraya faced the pressure of posting 'what is right', and she shared that she received passive and active aggression on the topic. She said,

> "*I posted my support for Palestine, and I noticed how people would react to me. I even noticed the passive aggression from a woman who used to engage with my content*. I *did not understand why, until I saw her like a post by a Zionist. So, I just unfollowed her, but I still speak my truth."* (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

During the same period, Suraya said she shared an article on queer Palestinians, and she explained,

> *"It was not exactly about them. I was just trying to draw parallels to my followers, to know that the fact that, you say that you are pro-LGBTQ, but for some reason, when Palestinian topics come up, you just ignore it. And it shows that you are not as pro-LGBTQ as you think you are because there are queer Palestinians."* (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

These posts, according to Suraya, caused a lot of backlash from the anti-queer Muslim followers. She said, "*After I said this, someone came into my DMs saying, 'Oh my God, Suraya when I saw this story, I was heartbroken Wallah.' She was trying to manipulate. Saying stuff like, 'I respected you, I respected your intellect because I knew that you took your Islam very seriously*'." Suraya added "*Is it just because I read a lot of Muslim books, and I share them on my feed*? *She said that she has young cousins that follow me and if they see me posting something about queerness, they are going to believe it is okay. I don't know, she just came up with this very weird thing."* (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Suraya explained that each time she shared something to do with queerness is told, "*oh now you support them*". However, their reactions do not stop her from reading queer content. Suraya pointed out that regardless of people's online criticism, she would 'not deprive herself of good literature' because the characters or writer is queer. In this light, she shared queer books during pride month, which again garnered much more backlash.

Meanwhile, queer content is not the only cause of harassment Suraya faces. When she posts on women's issues in Islam, Suraya explained that it is another boiling point.

> *'I talk about women issues in Islam, openly. I read a lot of Muslim feminist books. Because I am a Muslim feminist. I know that there are people that do not believe that feminism and Islam can coexist. And honestly, I do not care about them. I am a Muslim feminist, and I share a lot of feminist content. But I have followers that like me and my content, but they do not like that aspect of my content. So, they always come into my Dm saying random stuff like, "oh, maybe not this book", "Oh, you should not be reading*

this person's book. They say that, and we should not use Him for Allah SWT" Well, it is just unnecessary censoring.' (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Race, according to Suraya, is also one of the controversies she has faced online. In her description, she said,

"*I also talk about being black and being Muslim. I talk about anti-blackness and racism in the Arab world because before moving to the UK, I lived in Qatar. So, I know firsthand what black people experience in the Arab world. I talk about that a lot. This brings lots of people under my comments with all sorts of remarks."* (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Outside of political posts, Suraya shared that she loves music. To use Instagram stories, reels, and Tiktok, a person must post and consume lots of music. Yet, the Islamic view on music is controversial. As such Suraya described the complex balance between expressing her love for music, the impossibility of currently curating content without it, and having to not put too much music content out because of her religious stance. She said,

> "*I do not want to put out a lot of music content because of my stance religiously. At the same time, some people would come into my dm and be like, "don't you think you have listened to too much music? There are times I have that anxiety when I add music to my story and this anxiety is a concern that someone might come into my dm and say, 'you are a Muslim girl, yet you are always putting music in your story'. This has happened before. I fear that somebody is going to say something along the lines of Suraya you should not be doing this because you are a Muslim girl or don't show your ankles when I take a picture and my ankles are showing for example. I do not show skin, which is my preference, but at the same time when I post a picture that I am comfortable with, and I look at the picture again, I think somebody else is going to see this and say 'oh, Suraya you know, becoming a bad girl'. Since I am comfortable with my picture, I will not take the picture down. But the anxiety exists.*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Suraya's story provides perspective into how aggressors online act. She also introduced music as one of the points of aggression. Despite her love for it, Suraya is not the only influencer who referred to their anxieties in posting music online.

"*No one wants to be used as an example as the bad Muslim woman online"* – (I.C. Diarra, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Diarra, Ivory Coast, and Hasiya, South Africa, also explained their fears of posting as a Muslim online. They both shared that they do not wish to be scapegoated as bad Muslims online and highlighted that influencers do not want to be targets of the haram police. As such, a few participants who shared that they loved listening to music said they had to censor themselves regarding how frequently they post songs or themselves listening to music. Some expressed that when they posted videos with music, they were either listening to, as reels or on their stories, they too got DMs from people telling them 'a Muslim girl should not listen to music.'

Hasiya, for example, explained

> *"You think before you post anything, you think about the haram police going to come after you. Is someone else going to come after you and be like, 'Oh, no, sister? This is not what she is supposed to be doing as a Muslim woman or hijab-wearing, girl.' So, it does affect what you put out there. As much as you try not to allow other people's opinions of your work and yourself to be criticised, you cannot help but think about it in the back of your head, especially when you do not want that confrontation. Alright so it does influence my freedom online as much as I do not like it. And I would like to post whatever, but I am always mindful of whether Allah SWT is going to be pleased with what I'm posting more than anyone else.*" (S.A. Hasiya, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Suraya, Diarra, and Hasiya's accounts demonstrate the intersections of gendered, racial, and religious interactions among influencers and audiences online. They illustrate the multiple events that simultaneously occur as influencers engage within online spaces. What's more, in Suraya's description of her experience shown above, she highlights that her followers like her content, but they do not like all of it. The friction between her and her online audiences begins

when they do not approve of aspects of her work. As such, they resort to sending her DMs on their disagreement in their attempt to control her. Suraya has transgressed her boundaries in this instance, and the DMs and comments are supposed to remind her of this transgression. Within the same interaction, we see Suraya defending herself and her space. However, she shared that when one constantly receives controlling and violent reactions, it begins to get to them and ultimately causes self-censorship, thus affecting how they use online space. Hasiya expresses similar concerns, and she too insists on retaining her space and freedom within it.

Collectively, these stories show how the effects of the disciplinary cybergaze, as Kovacs (2017) points out, cause influencers such as Suraya and Hasiya to limit their interactions and freedoms online. Not being a Muslim girl online to the extent you want conveys the goal of patriarchy to control women's lives in public spaces. Although Muslim women can push back in their way, aggressors' actions online leave a collective trauma, as contended previously. This way, it forces Muslim women to avoid certain content or expressions as part of their wish to be safe online. Similarly, Suraya's story is used to represent the range of content that exists online to show that regardless of what she posts, books, herself, and her opinions, she remains a target of online violence. According to her, scrutiny online is motivated by misogyny and not neutral, hence implying that surveillance online exists to reproduce patriarchal power using shame (Thompson, 2018) and fear of violence and harm (Gqola, 2021). Fundamentally, the accounts and analysis presented above communicate the conditions that make online spaces a domain of surveillance systems and cultures.

4.3 'I Decided to No Longer Wear the Hijab': The Violence of the Haram Police

> *"I feel like the Muslim community is very judgmental, especially if you are a visible Muslim and people can identify directly that you are Muslim."* (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021)

The haram police are usually referenced by Muslims online as people who always find your post, especially your images and tell you why it is haram. The haram police target mostly Muslim influencers and harass women for not properly wearing the hijab. They often justify their actions through benevolent sexism and claim their criticisms are to help Muslims stay

on the 'right path'. Yet, notably, a person's action is always haram thus, the haram police actively harass, target and bully Muslim women online. In other words, they reproduce their power in 'masculine publics' online, and as previously stated their scrutiny has more to do with control than what women post. In this sense, Msimang (2021) established that "sexist narratives strangle women's real-life stories and let ideas of who they should be, take over the complex fact of who women really are" (Msimang 2021, pp.18).

Take the case of the hijab, a practice and belief that continues to be polarised amongst Muslims and non-Muslims. For some, it signifies oppression while others consider it as a form of power and resistance, and represent faith for women in Islam. The hijab is often cited by liberal feminists as a symbol of control and oppression, whereas the Islamic religious community considers it as freedom and a choice. Yet experiences of Muslim women with religious patriarchal violence, racism, and Islamophobia complicates the binary perspective the hijab is often viewed with. The oversimplification of the hijab also ignores the multiple realities it represents and embodies shifting forms of power. To wear the hijab means to embody some form of resistance against racist and Islamophobic communities while representing faith. At the same time, and more importantly for the subject of this section's analysis, when Muslim women decide to no longer wear the hijab, they shared that "*the Muslim community become horrible and nasty*" (N. Harija, Personal Communication, October 2021). Hence, making some question the rhetoric claiming that it is a 'choice'.

Even so, the violence Muslim women influencers face when they decide to no longer wear the hijab communicates control over women's lives and bodies as situated in the opening paragraph. They are constantly reminded of their transgression, that their space and the facade of freedom can be revoked.

Before my conversation with the influencer, Kawthar, who shared her account of openly deciding to no longer wear the hijab, a few other influencers mentioned the 'nastiness' of people online to hijabi influencers who made such decisions.

> "*When I was wearing the Hijab, I was criticised, so imagine me deciding to no longer wear it. It was like twice the violence I faced*. *They would tell me, 'oh you are not*

wearing it the right way, why can I see this or that.'' (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Kawthar works part-time as a lifestyle and beauty influencer and blogger. Her account communicated that, just like Suraya, the shame and violence she faced was a reinstatement of patriarchal power online. Kawthar said it took her some time to post the picture of her no longer wearing the hijab. However, the responses she received threatened her; others attacked her family whom they had never met, forcing her to take a break from social media.

"*I would just wake up to someone cussing me out and cussing my family*. *This was when I realised the toxicity of the Muslim community. People randomly message me saying I'm misleading young Muslim woman and I did not even do it for a genuine reason, that I was in it for the wrong reason."* (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Kawthar shared that she has her businesses she uses her page to promote but still had to take this break until things 'died down'. She explained that three years ago (from the time this interview was conducted i.e., 2021) she only began wearing the hijab because she had always wanted to and women in her community inspired her. In 2020, she decided to no longer wear it because it was too much for her.

"*We judge ourselves a lot and there is this expectation to be perfect. Muslim women, I have spoken to have been through this journey one way or the other. Especially as black Muslim women, we have it worse because we are being judged by Muslims who compare us to white Muslims and now it is a competition of who is more Muslim than the other."* (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Kawthar's description of 'white Muslims' refers to white-phenotype Muslims. As such, she too supported the research's argument that online violence exists to reproduce patriarchal power in digital spaces. Simultaneously, Kawthar showed that part of the complexities of being a Muslim woman is to prove your 'Muslim-ness' which is a significant responsibility for black Muslim women who share their content online to carry.

Nonetheless, an interesting observation from Muslim women's social media interaction and personal accounts is the solidarity that exists within their friendship groups. When there is a 'crisis' of yet another hijabi influencer no longer wearing the Hijab, her comment is full of hate from the haram police, and people who 'pray for Allah to save her soul'. But what's more striking is the women groups who continue to share their support for her decision with comments including heart eyes, fire and hot face emojis. Perhaps their understanding of the complexities of being visibly Muslim makes them empathize with other women who struggle or decide not to wear the Hijab.

> "*Again, on the other side, you have people that are very understanding and generally very supportive. They allow you to process everything at your own time.*" (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021).

4.4 Online Publics and The Visible Muslim Woman

> "*Wearing the Hijab is not enough and is never enough*. *I think when you are a Muslim, it almost feels like you are a target. You know, and if you are from Africa, as well, as much as you are trying to feel like you belong in a space, no matter where you go, you always feel how people just look down on you because you are an African Muslim woman. And that is something I do not want to think about. Just because I am a visibly Muslim woman that should not stop me from living my life. And people who are not wearing the hijab still get under fire. But I do not think it is as much as women who wear the scarf and show themselves online. Although if I was not wearing the scarf, people would still judge me. They will still claim I am immodest.*" – (B. Tasnim, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Paraphrasing Padte (2014), who explained that "constant and rigorous emphasis placed on the female body in societies across the world tells us two things: One, our bodies are something that we should hide, and paradoxically two, our bodies are constantly on display". As such, what the previous sections in this chapter, including the literature review have sought to explore is the contradictory expectation that women should be available for scrutiny, while forcefully and non-consensually making them 'available' for the disciplinary gaze. In this way, we come to understand the social conditions that make online spaces

domains of surveillance cultures while gaining perspective into how contestations within the space arise.

In a recent Tiktok trend of women resisting patriarchal power by mocking male patriarchal perspectives on podcasts, a Muslim TikToker posted a video mocking Muslim men's take on hijabis online. In the video, she responded to a comment stating "these hijabis will destroy Islam", by sarcastically using a beard filter and saying,

> "*brother I am so glad you brought this up because this is the truth. These hijabis will destroy Islam, they are already doing it. So much makeup, their hair is always out, and your neck is showing. I would rather watch half-naked men grab each other for hours, I can do that. But these hijabis are ruining us. If we do not take care of our women, if we do not teach them what is right, it is the end, we are done as an Ummah.*''

Both her response and the comment were satiric and represent forms of resistance against men on the internet which will be further discussed in the section that looks at women's resistance strategies. Even so, in this part, as I did in the literature review, I use the comment as an anecdote to analyse Tasnim's and other influencers' point of view that "wearing the hijab is never enough". The TikToker's posts mimic Muslim men's policing of hijabis and women online. She and other women who engage in this new Tiktok trend make use of Alwad-Ali Bedouin women's form of resistance that mocks patriarchal power through stories (Abu-lughod, 1990).

What the hijab does for this research shows that Muslim women become even more visible to the masculine cybergaze. The accounts presented on the experiences of Muslim influencers also further validate the argument that their position as content creators online is considered controversial within the Muslim community. Occasionally, some of the Muslim influencers asserted that 'they make sure to do the right thing', yet they continue to wonder what this specific 'right thing' looks like when they remain targets of the haram police who watch and scrutinise them. In the case that they do not experience violence, they also cited that they still have anxieties about how their content might affect their families or be taken out of context.

For this reason, their stories come to show that the promise of safety is false under patriarchal hegemonies, and on the other hand, how visible Muslim women are considered to threaten the religion by openly expressing themselves. Muslim women are often caught between the intersections of indicating their 'choice', fighting religious fundamentalism online and avoiding the criticisms that they are traitors of their religion. For instance, Tasnim explained that the Muslim community become self-appointed enforcers of Islamic rules, and comment on Muslim women's outfit and lives online. This is also addressed in what the Tiktoker states in her mockery: "If *we do not take care of our women, if we do not teach them what is right, it is the end, we are done as an Ummah".* These assertions validate the need to watch and control women, corroborating the arguments of Puar (2014) and Gqola (2021) that gender is a location for surveillance.

By alluding to the fact that Muslim women who are visible online will destroy Islam, the haram police apply designs of the panoptic surveillance metaphor that categorises people as normal and abnormal; and good and evil. This way, they can garner support in the form of disciplinary actions against influencers online, using the collective belief that they should be 'taken care of' because "to be female is to be excessive and therefore legitimately kept under control, through violence and the threat of violence" (Gqola 2021, pp. 66).

In this line of reasoning, claims of 'agency' that come to mean 'you put yourself out there' only exist to invalidate women's experiences of violence, and justify so-called freedoms of expression that become weaponised by aggressors online. Nonetheless, agency can only be invoked as part of women's subtle and overt consciousness and resistance to surveillance and control in online public spaces.

Chapter 5: Assemblages; Complicating Agency and Control

5.1 Retaining Engagement: Technology-Facilitated Surveillance.

In her book, *Twitter and Tear Gas,* Zeynep Tufekci, explained that at the beginning of the digital age, experts anticipated post-humanist cyberspaces where our biases, race, gender, bodies and religion might not matter. Meanwhile, in a recent article on *Men Are Creating*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Girlfriends and Then Verbally Abusing Them, an expert shared that bots cannot be harmed because they do not have consciousness, but they can harm people. The piece clarified that the unintended consequences of an AI bot being emotionally abusive to its 'partners', is not on the bot but the creators of the AI technology (Bardhan, 2022).

The two examples above represent futuristic anticipations and the reality of the imagined future respectively. We continue to thrive for the former, however, the latter might be an unintended and intended effect of technology. At the same time, creators being accountable for harmful bots is referenced to serve as an entry into analysing the interaction between people and algorithms. If experts from Tufekci's explanation got one thing right, it is the attempted separation between "the material body and the datafied body" (Radhakrishnan, 2020).

For the most part in this research, surveillance has been analysed from a cultural, moral and social perspective. It has shown the existing forms of control that make online spaces a domain of surveillance systems and cultures and in this way a space that creates contestation. Yet, some of the research participants delved into how surveillance cultures on social media, specifically on spaces such as Instagram, are facilitated through their algorithmic and Meta's profit-based motives. Assemblages come into play to analyse the convergence of dataveillance and social surveillance in the contemporary world.

First, most of the interviewees raised concerns about "fitting in" where algorithmic standards dictate their creative direction. Influencers 'fit in' for two reasons, first to retain and grow their engagement metrics and second, an effect of surveillance cultures that forces people to act in a certain way. For now, this part will focus more on the first, and the second, that is where influencers fit in as a surveillance effect will be explained in more detail in subsequent sections.

Instagram's changing algorithms, influencers explain, continue to affect their 'natural flow of creativity'. For most, being an influencer is a full-time job, and following an algorithmic dictated path helps them maintain and grow their audience, engagement and clients. Instagram's current algorithm focuses more on reels, and a conversation with Harija, one of the research's participants, revealed this path long before most people's timelines became

filled with Instagram reels leaving fewer pictures. Instagram also suggests *similar* content to audiences based on their followers, and predicted interests. Harija and Suraya additionally pointed out that this means influencers must constantly churn out content. In support of their concern, Diarra explained that Instagram puts forward a certain aesthetic of a Muslim woman that may not always fit with the style and image of an African woman. However, to succeed they have to replicate what already works, yet success is not always guaranteed. In line with this conversation, I looked through the hashtags Muslim influencers commonly use which include #Hijabi and #ModestFashion among others, and found that Diarra's concern for the 'aesthetic' promoted, proved to be true.

Retaining engagement requires influencers to take the path the platform recommended, at the same time, platforms monitor creators and audiences alike to suggest 'similar' content or take down posts that are considered to have violated community guidelines. They also monitor engagements to understand user behaviour and design user experiences or predict content for users (Instagram,2021). In addition to influencers citing instances of how technology-facilitated surveillance has affected them, they also shared why they are aware they are being surveilled yet struggle to identify by whom or how.

In this line, Chenai Chair, a Mozilla Foundation Special Advisor, who also participated in this study demonstrated how technology is used to surveil people unknowingly. Chair categorised technology-facilitated surveillance in two parts, that is, the technical aspect and aggregated data collected, which she explains from a gendered and racial perspective.

> "*Technologies can gaslight you to believe that the thing you are thinking is not happening, but it is happening. It plays out more technically in how our devices are connected and interact with the internet. It also interacts with digital platforms, which is how information is being collected. Meanwhile, we believe that we have securely protected ourselves. Take the case where everyone talks about their voice system listening to them. Interestingly, if you use a Google device, an Android phone, although I am unsure about iPhones, you can find the data Google has on you. It has a voice section on your data profile, and you can listen back to recordings. This is how you realise so much data has been collected, and we give consent to one party but forget to read the fine print or do not understand what it means. An example is when they*

say 'data will be used by us and third parties to offer better services. Then you get specific ads, or you feel watched" (C. Chair, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Chair's description indicates that platforms use functionalities of surveillance to 'improve' services through new algorithmic designs that centre on certain media and in the case of Instagram, reels. They also use predictive analytics to suggest content a person would like or one that would keep the user's attention. Similarly, there have been cases where people shared that social media algorithms such as TikTok were able to predict major events in their lives, such as knowing their sexuality before they did or predicting they were going to lose their job (Cummins,2022).

In this continuum, Chenai Chair explained that our accounts such as emails being linked to the different sites, we visit allow cross-tracking through cookies and the permission we give. Hence, sites such as Instagram or Tiktok can make predictions based on the user's personal information that links to a major life event, specific need and interest that suggests 'your device is listening to you'.

Building on the notion of data collection for surveillance, the second aspect of Chair's argument is that data is being collected at an aggregated level with algorithms and automation. The data, according to Chair, are used to design user profiles, and if a person is an influencer, they fit a specific profile to have a certain kind of information that allows targeted advertisements and content suggestions. In this sense, influencers such as Harija can know beforehand that Instagram's focus is moving towards reels before many people get to experience it. For example, Harija shared that Instagram suggests the songs influencers should include in their reel to gain more engagement by sharing metrics of how many people have viewed or interacted with content with a specific song. To Harija, this contributes to how they are forced to fit within set standards that stifle their creativity.

Chenai Chair further highlights that these forms of surveillance leave people in positions of precarity or harm. Content on a person's phone could be taken out of context by their partner, family, or friend. For many people, their understanding of online ads comes from the idea that a person visited a website or searched for similar results. However, Chair highlights that it is much more sophisticated than this, and targeted posts are partly because people fit

within a profile. Hence, in this level of surveillance technology companies are building databases on an aggregated level. As such, according to Chair, people are not wrong that they feel watched especially when an algorithm or an automated platform increases that level of surveillance.

With regards to the gendered and racial aspects, Chair highlights that women of colour and minoritised groups are susceptible to responding to certain forms of advertisements during certain seasons.

Restating the prediction of major life events, *Data Feminism* expands Chair's example through a scenario where the American store Target, used a predictive model to advertise products to pregnant customers. According to D'Ignazio and Klien (2020), Target's marketing department asked their data scientists ``If we wanted to figure out if a customer is pregnant, even if she didn't want us to know, can you do that?". The data science department proceeded to design a pregnancy detection model that helped Target send discount coupons to possibly pregnant customers. In this sense, the model successfully captured the company's goal. Yet, with whose interest? The controversy began when they sent coupons to a teenager whose father demanded a target to explain why they sent pregnancy coupons to a teenager. D'Ignazio and Klien (2020, pp.53) highlighted that the teenager was indeed pregnant, and Target informed her family before she got the chance to do so.

What Chenai Chair and Data Feminism's examples tell us is that social media interactions or data are not 'neutral' and are impacted by the types of profiles each user fits in and what Instagram's goal is. This connects with earlier explanations on how algorithms may continue to feed influencer content to serial aggressors because it is what they engage with online. Similarly, when one is receiving backlash online, at that moment in time, it is what they may interact with on their timeline or feed. Also, as they 'respond' to bullying, the algorithm might count it as engagement leaving them in a continuous loop of violence and hate. This explains the normal tactic to stay offline, yet for Influencers, this affects their income and workflow. Some of the Influencers who were interviewed explained that in addition to Instagram suggesting music and trends, to increase their engagement or sustain it, a person must constantly produce content. This means that when a person is responding to harassment

online by staying offline, their engagement rate might drop which is a significant determinant for an influencer's success besides other metrics.

While the research is not focused much on the profit-based motives of social platforms, tech companies' focus on profits also affects how Muslim influencers experience social media. The cycle of data collection, wrangling and aggregation serves to be used for advertisement by predicting user behaviour on a sophisticated level. In my analysis of continuous user interaction being profitable to social platforms, violence online forms a part of these interactions. Hence, if Meta's goal is profit-driven, it may be unprofitable to address the issues of the platform as demonstrated in the leaked 'Facebook papers'.

5.2 The forced Activist: Assimilation and Retaining Engagement

Between 2019 to 2021, there was a wave of protests and mass resistance across the world. Social media came to play a significant role in amplifying these protests and hashtags have become part of their identifiers (Tufekci,2017). From #BlueforSudan, and #EndSARS to #FreePalestine among others, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram became sites for people around the world to shed light on these issues. On Instagram, people used slides to explain for example "what is happening in Ethiopia". Nevertheless, why do I draw the correlation between Muslim influencers, protests and surveillance cultures?

During the #EndSARS protest specifically, there were also rising demands from people that influencers should take a stand and release statements of solidarity with protestors in Nigeria (Lawal et al., 2020). Muslim influencers also faced similar concerning the Palestinian protests, as well as the genocide against Uyghur Muslims in China (Kirby, 2020). Tasnim, Botswana indicated that surveillance cultures play a role in how people come to perceive influencers.

She said,

> "*especially as women who are Muslim, people expect you to be speaking on issues or should be talking about things which relate to Muslims. And if you are not seen doing these kinds of things, then you are not seen as an influencer, that's even worth looking*

at or even worth considering following" (B. Tasnim, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Partaking in political topics has become part of the expectation for Muslim influencers' work. Nafisa Bakkar (2019) addresses this in her essay 'On Representation of Muslims'. Bakkar (2019) explains that, unlike a person whose platform has been built on activism and their identity as a Muslim, there are people who sort careers in music, fashion and politics without setting to achieve representation for Muslims. Thus, it is important to understand that one person's existence cannot seek to represent all Muslims. This is also true for Muslim women who are made into community role models for wearing the Hijab on the internet. Afia Ahmed (2019) also expressed her discomfort with the politicisation, and aestheticisation of the hijab, and Muslim women becoming objects of debates on what hijabs should be or not be.

The urge to fit in, according to Bilan Kenya, comes with the territory of being visible. Assimilation in this continuum also includes Instagram-dictated standards to "churn out content". To be a sustainable and successful Instagram content creator and influencer means to work towards staying relevant and up to date.

"*You want to be saying the right things, you want to appear the right way. If this is your job, you need an audience. So, you cannot afford to have people that do not support what you do. Because with their support is how you grow, it is how you become successful. This is how you get jobs. So, if you have an audience that does not support you, and think that you're doing the opposite, you kind of would want to bend*" (N. Harija, Personal Communication, October 2021)

For the most part, Muslim influencers are forced to take political stances and to speak on Islam-related oppression which includes misogyny and Islamophobia both on a personal and structural level. A few influencers shared that even when one is not well-versed on a topic, they are bullied into speaking on it.

"*I think that a lot of influencers should not be judged or put under fire if they are not mentioning every single topic out there. I mean, if a Muslim influencer decides to talk about climate change one day, instead of talking about what's happening in, you know, China with concentration camps, people are never going to be happy with you. And people are going to be like, why are you posting about this, but you're not talking*

about that. I just think people who are on Instagram and are influencers shouldn't feel the need to always adapt to what the surveillance culture requires of them." (B. Tasnim, Personal Communication, October 2021)

All the participants expressed their discomfort for not being allowed to simply not participate in issues that they may not have enough knowledge on. For example, Suraya shared that people within the bookstagram community adapt to the current trends without having specific interests in the topics. Others also explained that the pressures affect their authenticity as creatives and are considered performative.

The performance requirement for Instagram influencers is not isolated from Instagram-dictated standards and design. According to a Malaysian report on freedom and expression online, "Instagram facilitates a somewhat compulsory performance of the aspirational version of ourselves" (Kryss Network, 2021). Within this space, algorithms and patriarchal societies dictate what one should do or how one acts. For example, a few participants explained that being content creators on Instagram is their full-time job, and they need engagement or visibility. Hence, there is the aspect where the constant algorithm changes make one continuously produce content; and there is the other where the promoted standards for Muslim women are that of a certain type of hijabi.

Tasnim shared her frustration with these realities by saying that "*I just don't want it to get to the point where I am starting to live to always constantly please people and fit my lifestyle, my friendship circles, my relationship circles, to what my Instagram life has to be or what is dictated by people*" (B. Tasnim, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Additionally, Bilan explained that the line between the personal space of influencers and that of audiences is blurred on Instagram. As such, influencers are expected to keep sharing every aspect of themselves. Furthermore, others pointed out that in a surveillance culture, they know people are watching which increases the pressure to do 'what is right', and not offend their audiences by saying the wrong things. In an article by Muslim Women's times, the writer, Mutiah Badruddeen shared her empathy with Muslim influencers online who always provided multiple disclaimers to avoid any backlash (Badrudden, 2021)

"I think sometimes they put you under the pressure to want to do things that you're not comfortable with. Because people are watching, you are like, this is what they

expect of me, and this is what I should be doing" (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Collectively these accounts help us understand how Instagram's algorithms can produce gendered outcomes by creating standards that are to be followed by the influencer, to gain and retain engagement through what Bilan considers as a "highlight reel" of a person's life while staying in the good books of audiences. The implications of surveillance cultures that come to control how Muslim influencers create and interact online is what Nafisar Bakkar (2019) describes as "influencers themselves may inevitably become influenced due to the financial model through which they make an income" (Bakkar 2019, pp.63).

5.3 Terms and Conditions Apply: The 'Acceptable' Hijabi

"*When I gave the example of Instagram, that I was trying to better organise my timeline with my feed, I think I was probably at that point where I was like, Okay, I have to perform on Instagram*" (I. C. Aicha, Personal Communication, October 2021).

*"I feel like it (surveillance culture) plays a role because it's always putting forward a certain aesthetic of a Muslim woman. I don't know if it's an algorithm, but I feel like I need to be either classy… I don't want to say sexy, but it tends to be that classy and sexy. Being always dressed up with makeup, the Muslim hijabi girl or the one wearing the big jilbab and the big hijabs, you know what I'm saying, with the dark colours and everything. There's no balance, it's always either I'm classy or nothing. So, it feels like I have to choose a side. I can't just be me or it won't be aesthetically pleasing to follow. And I feel like that's one of the reasons why I rarely post pictures on Instagram. I'm more of a story person. I rarely post pictures" (*I.C. Diarra*,* Personal Communication, October 2021).

Fitting in, as Aicha and Diarra fall back on the aestheticization of the hijab, which Afia Ahmed (2019) expresses her discomfort with. For instance, Ahmed's (2019) essay on It's Not About the Burqa, contended that the standards of beauty that are required to fit like a modern and progressive Muslim woman also affect the self-image of women who are unable to wear

luxury designer Jilbabs meant for upper-class people in Gulf countries. Ahmed (2019) also criticises the impact of social media on Muslim women's beauty standards.

Given the concerns shared, I decided to investigate the dominant 'aesthetic' and 'features' of Muslim women represented on Instagram by searching some of the hashtags Muslim influencers use to amplify their posts. The hashtags included #hijabi, #Modestfashion #Modestworkwear #hijabistyle. The top search results were mostly of white phenotypical Muslims, whose style and fashion were exactly what both Ahmed (2019) and Diarra had described. After endlessly scrolling through the hashtag results, I eventually found three black Muslim women who also fit within the described 'Instagram aesthetic'. These have come to shape the way Muslim women online dress, and as Diarra put it, most African, specifically West African Muslim women, dress and express themselves differently.

The terms of conditions for the acceptable Hijabi, Ahmed (2019) indicates, is never enough and Muslim women remain the objects of dehumanising debates. These conditions are also not free from the moral policing and shaming of hijabis. For example, Hasiya an influencer from South Africa explained that surveillance cultures play a role in Muslim influencer's desire to assimilate is because

> "*of what society has deemed acceptable, and it's such a dangerous culture. We all just start doing the same thing and no one is different from anyone because society has dictated to us so much and it is instilled in our brains that we need to be like this or we need to be a certain way to be accepted and to succeed. So definitely, yes, surveillance has shaped the society in what direction it needs to move in*" (S.A. Hasiya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

Bakkar, Ahmed and Eltahawy (2019), explain that a lot of criticism, harassment and violence against Muslim women happen as part of gendered Islamophobia and misogyny. They also indicate that 'acceptance' is almost impossible, "because for a Muslim woman to be default (i.e. human) within Muslim communities and 'mainstream' communities she would have to be a man, and that is something she cannot be" (Bakkar 2019, pp.56).

In other words, the acceptable Muslim woman does not exist within a patriarchal and Islamophobic society which is also amplified through technology. Meanwhile, Muslim women's fluency in fear continues to be tested through forms of online violence, and the "long exposure to the direct teaching to the dangers that await women if they behave in a certain way, witnessing the treatment of others when they live in interesting ways or step out of line, lead to collectives emotional orientation" (Gqola 2021, pp.61). In this regard, Diarra explains that surveillance cultures force Muslim influencers online to fit in to avoid and deescalate violence. She said "I *do feel like surveillance culture is forcing us to try and fit in. Because nobody wants to be bullied online or taken as an example of what people should not do. So, when you do see someone that is being praised by the critics online for what they do and who they are, as a Muslim, you tend to want to be like that person*" *(*I.C. Diarra*,* Personal Communication, October 2021)*.* With that established, Muslim women online acknowledge that as they work there are unknown gazes, thus they are forced to consider people's reactions to, for instance, creating a video or a story of themselves dancing.

5.4 A Look into Surveillant Assemblages

As discussed, surveillant assemblages are introduced to assess the convergence of dataveillance and social surveillance. The concept helps analyse the multiple interactions that exist between people and technology, and the stories presented in this chapter demonstrates such interactions.

On one hand, Chair provides a view into the rhizomatic levelling of hierarchies by showing how everyone is surveilled as they engage in contemporary life. Meanwhile, the scenario from *Data Feminism* replaces this with a perspective on gendered hierarchies of dataveillance, and I build on the idea of 'not being enough' through terms and conditions that apply. Similarly, assimilation shows how data and social surveillance are not necessarily separate.

'Data Science with whose interest' was initially explored by D'Ignazio and Klien (2020), however, I similarly use this to explore the power dynamics that exist within surveillant assemblages. With that said, the Target story comes to demonstrate what Zuboff (2019) explained as to how people's data are collected and used in contemporary surveillance

societies without caring about how it affects them or what is done to them. The underlying argument of the research is that the convergence of datafied and social surveillance enhances violence online and limits Muslim women's resistance strategies. As such the analysis in this section shows that Instagram's continuous use of predictive analytics to suggest 'similar content', or to promote aestheticised versions of Muslim women, forces people to assimilate to retain engagement and to avoid the haram police. Similarly, abstracted context and the intersections of gender, religion and technology happen when content creation today centres on music, yet music exists in a controversial position for many Muslims, ultimately becoming part of the haram police's justification of why Muslim women should be 'checked'. While harm or biases is not an inherent feature of predictive analytics, it still presents such harm because it exists within a gendered and racial context.

Whose interest? As previously shown, profit-based motifs come to dictate the strategic direction of many technology companies, and surveillance is used to 'foretell' user behaviour, which might assume a person wants to be connected with a certain type of content or people, or with personalised recommendations that may leave them in a place of precarity if found by others. This may rarely be in the interest of the influencer, but the technology company, like Target, they have successfully predicted a major life event or personality. Simultaneously, given an aspirational self, which Instagram is characterised by, the findings show that that 'self' is rarely in the interest of influencers, but rather comes to be dictated by the moral police and Islamophobes who position Muslim influencers as an object of debate of who they should be.

In a gendered social organisation, as explained by Bakkar (2019) and Msimang (2021), acceptance only happens if men allow it, paradoxically, it will not happen because women cannot be men, thus not considered as default humans.

Finally, these accounts also come to demonstrate the constant pushback, and resistance from Muslim influencers to safeguard their space. While their strategies may mostly have to do with Foucauldian responses to panopticism and other forms of social resistance, it is significant progress and a recognition of the existing threats they face.

Chapter 6: Mapping out Muslim Influencers' Engagement Strategies

6.1 Digital Security

The concept of digital security emerged as one of the main findings in this research. Regarding the research question, this chapter explicitly shows the strategies Muslim influencers use to navigate the contested space demonstrated in earlier chapters. Similarly, this part of the thesis addresses the limitations by providing recommended frameworks to guide social and dataveillance.

Security and safety concerns online remain important and were observed in the type of measures Muslim influencers put in place when interacting with their audience. First, during the conversations with the influencers, I followed up on the reasons reaching them was particularly difficult. Most explained that this was a testament to the threats they face online, and a few pointed out the fact that I may have found it more challenging to reach Macro level influencers, which was indeed true.

Additionally, digital security was analysed using the perspective of privacy which is what they 'keep offline', and how their usage changed with increased visibility. This might not always translate to explicit safety measures, because for instance, some influencers who reduced their social media screen-time did so to limit their consumption of online content. For others, it also meant being able to draw the line between their private and public spaces and lives. Meanwhile, most people shared that they preferred to keep their families off their platforms, and to an extent their relationships such as friends and partners. For the most part, the participants believe that they may be able to control or address harm and violence directed at them. Whereas, once their families, friends, and partners get involved the narrative becomes complicated, leaving them even more vulnerable to scrutiny and judgement.

Ensuring the safety of women online, and addressing the effects of surveillance cultures, Kovacs (2017) and OECD (2015) indicate that digital security is much more than a mere technical issue but must be considered through a socio-cultural context. Additionally, Iyer and Achieng (2022) also assert that "it is important for technologists to understand that privacy and safety are determined by context" (Iyer and Achieng 2022, pp.9).

With that said, Muslim influencers have provided a lens to consider as part of a larger framework for achieving digital security. It is important to also note that the influencers for this research provided their strategies based on what is within their control, thus, these strategies remain limited with regards to achieving holistic security, especially within the domain of algorithmic and dataveillance. As such, part of this section, which is the conclusion of this chapter, maps out the recommendations from experts, and steps that technology companies are currently taking toward building safer internet spaces.

6.2 The Evil Eye: How Muslim Influencers Make Decisions on What to Share

The Islamic cultural belief of the 'evil eye' suggests that people watching your life may not always have your best interest in mind. These people might act spiritually and enviously against your progress or growth. The belief has come to influence how some Muslim influencers perceive their online security and make crucial decisions on what to include in their content.

Suraya was the first participant to mention the evil eye as part of the reasons she chose not to post updates of her travels. In reference to what parts of herself she preferred to keep offline, she said

> "I've *been on social media since 2016. People think I studied literature, just because I talk about books, but I am a scientist. And I enjoy science. I believe that you can be multifaceted. You can like science, and you can love reading. So, I just recently started sharing a little bit of my academic journey, just because I want people to know that, you know, this girl is a scientist, I don't want them to have a distorted image of me. But I keep a huge chunk of it to myself because as a Muslim, I believe that there's the evil eye*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Along with Suraya, all the participants mentioned that they prefer to keep their family offline, because "*online, it's just so many predatory people. And even though my audience is over 80% women. Women can also be predators*" (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021).

She also recounted a time when she had posted herself at the airport and missed her flight. Suraya explained that there was no specific reason for her and her sibling to miss it because

they were at the airport. This was when she realised that this was content that should have remained private because people do not "*always have your best interests at heart*".

The evil eye in this thesis signifies how religious and cultural beliefs come to impact people's actions online. Yet in this regard digital privacy and security. For example, Diarra shared that she posted about going to the cinema and was followed. Despite her claiming that it was not online harassment, it was action taken as a result of her online activity hence constituting technology-facilitated violence. After this incident, Diarra took specific measures to ensure her safety online.

> "*At that moment, I realised that I needed to be careful with the information I was sharing. So now, I will most likely share about a place after I have left. But after that episode, I did put my Instagram private, because I wanted to be able to monitor who was following me and who was accessing my content. I deleted a bunch of people as well. I deleted the people with no profile picture, no publications, or a bio*" (I.C. Diarra, Personal Communication, October 2021)

In this line, Kawthar also explained that 'there are lots of creepy people online', so she does not post where she works or takes any pictures of the area because people no longer need a pinned location to identify her live location. She continued by adding that a simple picture of a place can give enough information on your whereabouts. Aicha also shared that there were multiple instances where people sent her pictures of herself while in public, an act she considered very disturbing to her safety.

Both Aicha and Bilan explained that the blurred lines between online and offline realities play a role in how people monitor you in your offline space. Kawthar also indicated the importance of creating boundaries, she said, "*at the end of the day, your Instagram life is not separate, it is your life, and you just put a part of it out there*" (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021). Likewise, Harija, who had been on Instagram for a longer period, believes that as her platform progressed, it became increasingly important to reduce how much of herself she shared. For instance, as a mother, she began to receive unsolicited comments on how to parent. At the same time, Harija felt the need to slowly take access to her private life away from the public.

Safety as discovered in this research becomes one of the underlying implications of surveillance that creates instances of policing and disciplinary actions including online gender-based violence. Given the threats and risks Muslim influencers experience, their interactions online also include intentional forms of pushback and resistance against aggressors. Many stated that "I set the record straight", "I make sure they know I do not condone harassment, if that means not bullying others myself", and "You have to be vocal" to demonstrate their agency in navigating forms of violence within their online spaces and communities.

6.3 Sister in Black

Visibility, as cited by Muslim influencers, does not always afford positive outcomes. For instance, Hasiya shared that visibility plays a significant role in forcing influencers to assimilate. Similarly, Diarra expressed her frustration with the unbalanced power dynamics of being an influencer. She said,

> "*I feel certain hypocrisy with the Muslim community. I don't know if it's hypocrisy, the word that is, but sometimes Muslim women are pressured into not posting any pictures on social media. But then, because of these pictures, because I show you what I'm doing daily because you can see myself, maybe I don't know, my smile is sympathetic to you, you decide to add me or to follow me. But in return, I cannot see who you are, I can't see a picture, you do not have your real name"* (I.C. Diarra, Personal Communication, October 2021)

The existing power dynamics are what influenced Diarra's decision to limit her online interactions, and stories from other participants recount instances of self-censorship. However, an interesting discovery provided insight into how Muslim influencers reuse the idea of censorship to their benefit. As indicated, Muslim women's bodies are something that is expected to constantly be on display and at the same time be hidden. Yet, hijabi, jilbab and burqa influencers' lives complicate the binary notion of visibility and hidden. Their presence online affords visibility, yet their use of niqabs and burqas also challenges patriarchal hegemonies that seek to 'make women's bodies available' (Thompson, 2017).

As previously indicated, the haram police target Muslim influencers in an attempt to control their practice of the hijab, concurrently Islamophobic people criticise and enforce structures

that make Muslim women available to scrutiny and undermine their faith by forcefully taking off their hijab. The complexities presented are what Thompson (2017) describes in her analysis and critique of Vermeer's removal of the curtain in 'A Girl Reading a Letter in an Open Window' which she relates to cyber-slut-shaming. Bakkar, Ahmed and Eltahawy (2019) also indicate that these are both gendered Islamophobia and misogyny that make Muslim women objects of control within and outside their communities.

Along these lines, there are Muslim influencers whose content focuses on external objects and artistic subjects, subverting surveillant gazes. If the panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately (Foucault,1978), then Muslim women present a complex subversion to the panoptic gaze. Focusing on the burqa or niqab, Muslim women are visibly Muslim, yet present as threats to surveillance regimes and systems that function to control women's lives by 'seeing'.

In the case of Diarra, she provided an example of her friend who began blurring her face online as a response to physical threats she experienced. This tactic relates to the creative expression of a once-famous influencer who was known as 'Sister In black'. Sister in black only posted with a niqab, showing her feet, hands or back, thus making it impossible to identify her. While sister in black's action may not have been automatically political, she represents the complex threat to how surveillance uses visibility to control people's lives, while remaining limited with regards to dataveillance. Sister In Black's creative strategy inspired many more Muslim lifestyle, book, food and travel influencers to be able to carry out their work while protecting their identity from the cybergaze. This meant that their content could be created, consumed and appreciated, without compromising their personal space and lives.

For Muslim influencers, their visibility and traction make it hard to monitor and know each user or follower account. In this way, Diarra's strategy to monitor who follows her, in the long run, becomes exhausting. She too acknowledged the fact that such a strategy is tiresome. While anonymity is a tool used by women to curate safer spaces, protect their identities and express themselves freely, embodying an influencer requires even more creative and strategic ways to protect oneself.

To enact disciplinary action such as online bullying, the haram police often employ hegemonic domains of power to validate their practices simultaneously relying on structural and encoded sexism online. Similarly, in a panopticon, visibility is considered a trap, meanwhile, feminist technologists continue to explore the intersections of visibility and surveillance. Yet, for influencers the promise of distinguishing between online lives and intimate offline realities makes them thrive for security and safety on Instagram.

6.4 Block, Mute and Report

Instagram's blocking and muting feature has been commended for its effectiveness in entirely removing a person's existence from one's social media space. All interviewees also shared that they used these features, in addition to reporting when necessary. Although the reporting feature, as explained by the research participants, is not sufficient. The following quotes share the sentiments of Muslim Influencers on Instagram's content moderation and security.

> "*Instagram is nonsense*" – (S.A. Hasiya, Personal Communication, October 2021)
>
> *"I do not know whether they do not have enough content moderators, but how can they tell me they do not see an issue*? - (N. Suraya, Personal Communication, October 2021)
>
> "*I use the block tool whenever I need to, and I encourage others to do the same. Blocking and restricting accounts that don't have anything positive to say. You have to have a thick skin to share yourself on social media, but until I get there, I'll take ownership of my accounts and block people who don't fit in that space*." (K. Dunia, Personal Communication, October 2021)
>
> *"I have been impersonated a few times, but the page was taken down. I do see that they update their security and, or their policies all the time. I don't know much about that, honestly*" (N. Harija, Personal Communication, October 2021).

"I don't think it's been sufficient. They can do more, maybe I'm guessing if they sit down with a business team, or strategic team or security team, they can probably do more. But I don't think it's been sufficient because like I said, even if you block someone, you can still open another account and use that to continue doing what you're doing and they can still use someone else's account and access it, but have they put some things in place. Yes, you can block, you can flag a comment on bullying or harassment. Now they've put a limit on the comment section. If it's going to moderate again, with lots of bad comments, you can turn off your comment sections. You can do a couple of things, I would say. And I think they're constantly improving and trying to tighten the security more and put things in place. But right now, I don't think they are there yet. I think they can do more." (N. Kawthar, Personal Communication, October 2021)

"I feel like something that's not fair is that people can have their account in private and follow your account, that's public. I feel like if you follow my account, even if your account is private, I should be able to see who you are and what you share. That's one of the things I wish Instagram was doing" (I.C. Diarra, Personal Communication, October 2021)

"Personally – I can't speak for everyone – but the tools that are there, are very sufficient. They have the report and once you report they suggest you block the person, and they have this new feature where they block the person and any other account they have created or will create. So, I feel like they are playing a big role in trying to change the narrative when it comes to bullying and trolling" (K. Billan, Personal Communication, October 2021)

The range of personal accounts shows the different perspectives and provides insight into how Muslim influencers have varying experiences with the safety features and policies on Instagram. To some, it remains insufficient, but to others, it is a critical step towards a safer internet. It is important to note that influencers such as Billan addressed the fact that they have not experienced a lot of harassment, as such the current features help them stay safe. Whereas there is a difference in opinion among the ones who shared that they faced either physical or/and cyber-threats. For others, they provided information based on instances they have witnessed within their online communities including personal concern for safety.

The feature that is “block this account, and future accounts they might create” was particularly intriguing. Thus, inspiring a further investigation on how Instagram hopes to achieve it. In February 2021, Instagram released a statement sharing the security updates they have put in place. The statement acknowledged that people with larger followings may face more forms of abuse, especially through their DMs. Part of their new safety features included blocking accounts, and future accounts of a person, yet the only identification of how they were going to detect this was their use of “proactive detection technology” (Instagram,2021). This technology was cited by Suraya when she suggested that they may be able to do more but she doubts they would because they are currently focused on profits. Suraya explained that if Instagram can identify a harmful DM, then they can know when someone is being bullied. Instagram too, stated in its statement that they use proactive detection technology to spot violating comments and posts. These new features are in response to calls for Meta to tackle abuse and hate speech on their platforms.

However, experts also suggest that they may learn from other spaces such as Tiktok. For example, Neeya Iyer, the founder of Pollicy, a is a feminist collective of technologists, data scientists, and academics based in Uganda provided insight into the different forms of privacy options that exist on other platforms.

> *“I found on Tiktok, that you can only message people you follow and follow you. But on Instagram, anyone can message you. I know it goes to this other folder (message request) but it is still very visible. I think they do a good job of flagging spam. I think when you have a public account you just get the messages, but then there’s also a spam folder. So, this just opens up your inbox to whoever, which is kind of annoying. I think you should only be able to be messaged by people who follow. On Twitter, only you can decide if you want messages from anyone or if you want them from specific people”* (N. Iyer, Personal Communication, October 2021)

When it comes to reporting, Muslim influencers shared that it remains ineffective because of its manual nature and the limited content moderators who must handle most of these reports among various factors that affect content moderation in the global South. A few shared that the subjectivity of content moderation affects the efficiency of reporting. An example of this is Suraya's argument that “who are they to claim her experience is not valid”. Hasiya also

referenced the ineffectiveness of reporting when she said, “Instagram is nonsense”. Similarly, Tasnim also shared a time her picture was the face of a hate trend where people claimed influencers get ‘free’ products and mislead their audience. She shared that she went from blocking people, reporting, and limiting comments to ignoring them because all these tactics were exhausting.

6.4.1 Revisiting the Close Friends

The close friends' option came up in a few conversations with some of the participants. They acknowledged that it was a space for many women to express themselves away from the public gaze or judgement. For Aicha, although she does not use close friends, she recognises how it comes to assisting other women to use Instagram more.

> “*I believe a lot of women use close friends because they can choose specific people to see their content. They want to still share, but they do not want everyone to see what they are sharing*” (I.C. Aicha, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Suraya also has a close friends list, which she rarely uses because does not believe it provides as much privacy as many people believe. Aicha shares similar sentiments because she believes that content from the close friends' list could still be captured and shared. Both Aicha and Suraya point out that their rule is to not post any content they would not share publicly, whether on their actual feed, stories, or close friends list.

In this regard, Anwer’s (2021) review of women’s use of close friends suggested that it “would be brilliant if the feature disabled screenshots, like Netflix does as a blanket rule” (Anwer 2021, pp. 61).

6.5 Fighting Back, Community Solidarity and Strategies

The community influencers build, helps them navigate online spaces more safely. A few shared scenarios of having to help others within their networks to address bullying because of the isolating effects of violence online. Similarly, the influencers shared that their friends

play a significant role in their experiences online, where they share their content with them for approval and feedback.

Influencer communities were referenced as an important approach to dealing with the emotional and psychological aspects of policing and violence online. In addition, a few shared that other influencers need to avoid partaking in harmful behaviours online and be vocal against violence.

Ignoring aggression and setting spam filters are also some of the major ways Muslim influencers could navigate online violence. Similarly, Dr Nyx Mclean shared that their observation of queer influencers' responses to policing and hate is to deescalate the situation rather than respond with more hate. They (Mclean) recommended that this could be one of the ways people neutralise the violence directed at them.

Chair also suggested the need for active online communities where influencers support each other. A follow-up conversation with a few participants showed that many of them rely on their friends and occasionally influencer groups as support systems. Meanwhile, Chair and Iyer also referenced the importance of platform support for influencers and users in general. The support is to serve as training for content creators on safety mechanisms and features of the applications they use and contribute to. Further, this presents an opportunity for companies to gain first-hand feedback from users, especially Muslim women on what inclusive technologies might look like. Simultaneously, digital safety policies, content moderation and features need to work within the context of people, which means considering religious-based digital threats.

Fundamentally, Muslim influencers could only do so much to protect themselves especially when design and algorithmic biases and surveillance may put them at risk, knowingly and unknowingly. What's more, surveillance cultures have existed as part of a controlled society, where gender as demonstrated remains a location for surveillance. Hence, a feminist technology space would essentially mean a liberatory society for women. One which Kawthar and an expert participant, Dr Deniz Yonucu, expressed as "*people need to be better, and we need society to get better"* (D. Yonucu, Personal Communication, October 2021).

6.6 Speculating the Future: Addressing the Limitations of Muslim Influencer Strategies

> "Surveillance capitalism was invented by a specific group of human beings in a specific time and place. It is not an inherent result of digital technology, nor is it a necessary expression of information capitalism." (Zuboff 2019, pp.93)

While surveillance technologies and cultures have existed long before the recent digital age, Zuboff (2019), contends that dataveillance and the current form of surveillance happened as a result of a specific design and goal in mind. What this tells us is that, if the inherent result of digital technology is not surveillance, then we can imagine an alternative future where technology does not further harm or eliminate minoritised communities through its design.

The entire chapter mapped out the various strategies Muslim content creators used to navigate the contested social media space. Simultaneously, the thesis has argued that these strategies remain restricted to holistically addressing the harms of contemporary surveillance societies. Yet, the concerns raised regarding the effectiveness of safety features and moderation on platforms by Muslim content creators are not far from reality. For instance, a recent story investigating the realities of content moderation in Africa supported the assertion of Suraya that Instagram might not have enough moderators who understand her context. In addition, the constraints within moderation happen due to the gruesome nature of the job, and the low financial benefits for moderators in Africa (Perrigo, 2022). Meta has faced criticism, especially given the existing evidence that they can proactively detect content they consider inappropriate or harmful. For instance, they and other social media have recently been able to ban Russian government bots and major channels from the country. This was also seen in the recent American elections where Meta was able to effectively moderate misinformation and potentially compromising content and accounts. I draw these correlations specifically to demonstrate the possibilities of achieving the speculated 'better' influencers such as Kawthar suggested.

In addition, the constant reference to the limitation of the resistance and protective strategies of Muslim influencers is to indicate the need for more contextual and structural digital protection, safety and privacy frameworks. By revisiting Kovacs' (2017) recommendations on

digital safety as social justice, Muslim influencers' social actions come to represent forms of resistance in this manner. For example, when they form communities of support and place concepts such as the evil eye at the focal point of their safety and privacy online, they contribute to designing safe online spaces for other women. Likewise, while users such as 'Sister in Black' may not have initially intended to pose as creative inspiration, their peculiar use of the jilbab and burqa have come to reproduce forms of resistance in online communities. As previously argued, agency can only be invoked regarding influencers' consciousness and actions against the threat they face. In this sense, participants such as Suraya and Aicha validate Anwer's (2021) claims that while using close friends on Instagram is freeing for most women, possible data and social contract breaches may occur on the part of technology companies, and trusted audiences.

Hence, Kovacs' (2017) social justice with context also acknowledges the need for structural solutions. In this line, organisations such as Mozilla Foundation have created toolkits called 'Privacy not Included' to help online users understand the levels of privacy and the existing risks associated with a given technology service or device. This helps people such as influencers to understand the implications of certain services and provides them with additional methods for creating personal and communal safe spaces. Furthermore, Iyer and Achieng (2022) in collaboration with Meta, provide a framework for designing inclusive technologies. In their guide, they share four frameworks for achieving inclusion with technology. These include accessibility-by-design (ABD), gender-by-design (GBD), privacy-by-design (PBD) and safety by design (SBD). This report, however, will focus on the last three concerning the themes and objectives represented in this research.

Gender-by-design suggests the use of design strategies to reduce gendered inequalities. It centres on the needs of minoritised groups in designing technology functionalities and insists that technology companies discontinue features or provide users with options to opt out of products and features that put them a risk of harm (Iyer and Achieng, 2022). Diarra addressed the unequal dynamics of influencers' content being available to private users, thus making them vulnerable to people who weaponized anonymity online. A space designed with the implications of gender power dynamics would consider what it means for users such as Diarra to have anxieties against weaponised anonymity and, identify ways to protect them.

Meanwhile, the privacy-by-design framework requires technology companies to proactively protect individuals, integrate privacy as a default setting, embed it into their design, ensure end-to-end security, be open, and centre the user in the development of services, and processes, products and infrastructure. At the same time, it reminds us of yet again, Kovacs' (2017) recommendation that for privacy to be functional, it has to be determined by context. Here context would mean also designing with the user's interest, rather than solely that of the technology companies. What this means is that, assessing the implications of certain predictive functionalities for groups such as Muslim women, does this put them at more risk and how does it put them in a place of precarity compared to a man? In this case, Target would have considered the privacy implications of predicting people's pregnancies, or spaces such as Instagram on sharing 'who other followers they are following or content they might like based on a certain interaction'.

Similarly, safety-by-design advises technology companies to centre safety in the design of their products, services and features. The SBD framework allows tech companies to consider the social and power dynamics that make safety risks unevenly distributed. It advocates for technology "to assess risks across different users with different identity markers" (Iyer and Achieng 2022, pp.9). Some of the principles within this framework suggest that tech companies take responsibility for safety and not place the burden on users alone. For example, Tasnim expressed frustration for having to take the responsibility of constantly blocking, muting and reporting aggressors online, which made her eventually give up. In addition, Suraya, Diarra, and Hasiya shared the inefficiencies of Instagram's safety and privacy features, which made reporting ineffective.

Another principle provided by the Australian e-safety commission was the need for technology companies to empower the user and be autonomous. This means that first, products, services and infrastructure should work in the best interests of the user. In this regard, Zuboff (2019) explained that in the initial creation of products such as Google search, the users' behavioural data, was strictly used to improve search services, which benefited the user in the long run. This was an early indication of how technology services benefited the

user, until, according to Zuboff, the introduction of behavioural surveillance for profit (Zuboff, 2019).

A notable recommendation provided by both Iyer and Chair as part of this research was the need to onboard users on social platforms. In the case where users such as Harija point out that they do not know Instagram's policies and how they work, it becomes important for users to be able to easily understand the use of the existing feature and the policies. Within this sphere, one of the principles of SBD is for technology companies to "ensure that their safety tools and measures are accessible and perceivable to all users and that accounts are set to the most secure settings by default" (Iyer and Achieng, 2022). It also suggests the need for support systems for users who face violations.

Like Iyer and Achieng's proposal, Paes et al. (2021) recommend that data and digital rights work should extend beyond policy and include groups for social movement-building to learn and use strategic tools and, understand multiple cultural narratives towards achieving better digital societies. They too reiterate the importance of context and centring the experiences of minoritised and at-risk communities. Finally, with regards to accessibility, Paes et al. (2021) identify the need to reconstruct digital rights discourses beyond jargon and buzzwords, and so do tech companies when it comes to being more transparent and accountable. Zuboff (2019) identifies that one-way technology companies escape accountability and remain opaque in their processes is to use "buzzwords that gloss over these operations and their economic origins'' (Zuboff 2019, pp.213). As such Iyer and Achieng (2022) assert that content policies and their formulations should be clear and understandable for all. In turn, avoiding instances where people provide consent to the use of their data in a way they do not fully understand.

Collectively, these frameworks and suggestions provide a step towards addressing the harms of contemporary surveillance cultures.

Yet, it is important to note that, "surveillance still has offline consequences"- Neema Iyer. In addition, according to Deniz Yonucu,

> "*social media is not independent of the societies in which we live. So, as long as the society is the same, we cannot control the media, and it would continue to be used as a means of control and policing techniques, even good intentions would not be enough. So, we should devote more time for human liberation*" (D. Yonucu, Personal Communication, October 2021)

Tasnim also suggested that online violence should have offline consequences to deter the aggressor from acting against women. Yet the complexity this brings is that some users are anonymous, whereas some governments use these policies as predatory measures to silence citizens and activists online.

While the analysis, accounts and literature point out the gaps that may exist even with these recommendations and frameworks, it is important to note that these mostly remain speculative.

6.6.1 The Era of the Visible Hijabi: Gendered Surveillance of Muslim Women on Instagram.

Creating a technology that works for *all* people may be impossible, however, centring minoritized communities in design-led and platform governance processes and decisions take us a step further toward achieving liberated technology futures.

The design and creation of different technology services as argued throughout this thesis interacts with culture, social norms, and systems. Muslim Influencers occupy a very complex space in our digital society, where on one hand Instagram provides a space to create and share, yet on the other, they experience extreme forms of aggression because of design biases and gendered Islamophobia. As such, Muslim Influencers experience the direct harms of design and algorithmic biases on many points of their social media engagement, thus centring them as a subject of study allows the research to assess how a minoritized group experiences surveillance, violence, and control online.

For instance, when Suraya said that "*you cannot be a Muslim girl online to the extent that you want*" (N. Suraya, personal communication, October 2021), she also referred to the how algorithmic, policy and moderation decisions did not favour a Muslim woman. Tasnim also supported this statement when she shared that no matter what she does online as a Muslim woman she will never be enough. Similarly, Somali- American writer and journalist, Najma Sharif (2022), in a recent Twitter thread shared how Muslim women remain unprotected, over-surveilled, and constantly under social pressure and scrutiny whether they do what they want or what they are 'supposed to do'. Each woman's concern and story shows how, they experience Mona Elthaway's trifecta of oppression, where they face Islamophobia, racism, and misogyny. Each form of oppression requires an extra layer of surveillance to establish control and power, thus, Puar's (2014) point that Muslim women's bodies continue to be justified as viable sites for surveillance, and the hijab makes this possible because it has 'become one of the most contentious symbols in the modern world' (Olufemi 2020, pp. 104).

With that established, when there are multiple oppressive variables influencing the interaction of a certain communities use of technology, then mapping out how they specifically experience such spaces helps us reframe the problem and identify more inclusive and liberatory solutions. For example, I highlighted in the various conversations with Muslim Influencers, they shared how Instagram's content moderation, policies and designs put them at risk and did not address the harms they experience. This is because, for Muslim women, designers rarely anticipated that their products would facilitate religious and gendered control against them. Thus, product and policy decisions would centre a more privileged users who might not have to navigate constant violence and aggression directed at them. If a Muslim Influencer's goal is to share stories, her photography, and photos of herself as a hobby or a full-time profession, weaving through gendered Islamophobia, racial biases, and constant scrutiny by both the social media platform and users blocks her from achieving her goal. Yet, a key question a designer may ask when creating a product is "how might be able to enable a user to carry out a certain action using our platform easily and efficiently?". Meanwhile, if certain users are more likely to perform said actions and reach their goal without much or any hustle than others, then, design-biases are occurring. Similarly, Tasnim highlighting 'not being enough' demonstrates although some Influencers may be doing everything they are

'supposed to do', a space that reproduces gendered social power and dynamics will not provide the form of pleasure and safety they seek.

Sasha Costanza -Cock (2020) in their book *Design Justice Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* refers to these issues as technology disaffordances. Here, unlike affordances that allow people to perform certain actions, disaffordances block and put constraints on these actions. Costanza -Cock (2020) explains that injustices and biases in design create disaffordances which are embedded in structural, hegemonic, disciplinary, and interpersonal oppression (matrix of domination). Hence, Muslim women being marginalised by all these matrices impacts how technology media and services work for them. Suraya's reference addressed design-based, moderation and social aggressions she faced by using Instagram. As such, the lack of inclusivity on how minoritised communities' may experience or interact with technology plays a significant role in how they experience pleasures and displeasures of the spaces and services.

According to Costanza-Cock (2020), when technology is designed with a supposed unmarked user, it intentionally and unintentionally creates biases against people marginalised by the matrices of domination. This means that how minoritised groups come to interact with technology and its services is not the focal consideration of the designer, thus, content moderation, the community guidelines, and design functions will only facilitate existing social power dynamics or create disaffordances that limit the pleasures of the space. Thus, Muslim Influencers will continue to directly experience the irregularities of content moderation, or algorithmic biases that affect their participation, as shared by the research's participants.

On the flip side, given that black Muslim women experience intense forms of control at every point of their social interaction when a designer considers the gendered, language and religious contexts of this group, they would be able to identify the various social scenarios that may occur through a single interaction, potentially leading to a more just and inclusive design. This thesis offers a preliminary insight into multiple scenarios of how some of the most visible groups of Muslim women experience visual media such as Instagram. As previously referenced, a 'visible hijabi' is a person who lies at the contours of control and scrutiny, where

she uses a space that affords visibility, yet at the same time, it contributes to the threats she faces on many fronts.

With these issues established, the thesis' chapter on speculative futures, provides a guide to help designers, technologists and researchers ways imagine and work through more inclusive and safer internets for Muslim women. Costanza-Cock's design justice suggests a more holistic framework for 'hard coding liberation' by considering the entire design process. They recommend that, first, understand how the products we design reproduce the matrix of domination through design values which include considering the distribution of affordances and disaffordances encoded into technologies. They, Costanza-Cock, also reference the need to understand "who gets paid to do design work and who controls design practices", and for the purpose and goal of this research, "the inclusion and exclusion of various kinds of people from privileged design locations (design sites)" (Costanza-Cock 2020, pp.231).

Finally, by centring the cases of Muslim women Influencers to investigate the effects of digital surveillance, this thesis allows us to recognise the layered forms of oppression that exist within technology. Essentially, for technology designers and researchers in Africa and the global South, this research leaves, how can we contextualise and localise design justice frameworks for minoritized communities in our region?

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The era of visible hijabis considers visibility as a continuum of control. Foucauldian and contemporary surveillance rely on people's visibility or their willingness to 'live out their private lives in public. Influencers, in this research project, occupy a complex intersection between public and private spaces especially when their content relies on sharing parts of themselves on social media spaces. Arguments that validate the need to surveil, scrutinise and effectively control women were analysed. The implications of online controlling behaviours were also examined in relation to the research's aims and goals. Hence, in this chapter, the study summarises the key findings and reinstates the arguments that were raised in subsequent sections in-line with the research question(s). The chapter also provides insight

into the significance of the research towards contributing to feminist technology futures, simultaneously addressing the limitations of the study. Finally, it summarises key recommendations for further research on the intersections of gender, technology, and religion.

The main research question that is 'how do Muslim influencers navigate the contested social media space', suggests various other questions including, why is social media a contested space? and why do Muslim women need to navigate it? In answering this, the thesis argued that social media forms part of our contemporary public sphere, and is no less *real.* Public spheres are also examined as masculine spaces where women are reminded through forms of violence that they do not belong within the space. At the same time, the study posits that interactions are not linear on social media, thus, influencers curate engagement strategies that resist and secure their safety online. Hence, answering the main question. Nonetheless, as part of the contested space, the research demonstrates how data-surveillance i.e., dataveillance, also facilitates and enhances surveillance cultures and systems. Thus, giving rise to the research's claim that the existence of dataveillance places constraints on their social strategies for protection, in this way aspects of surveillance get out of Muslim Influencer's control. Collectively, these frameworks and analyses allow enquiry into the existing complexities of digital cultures.

To investigate the complex digital cultures at gendered margins, the study focuses on the concept of gendered public spaces and assemblages throughout the chapters. The literature, it compares offline and online public spaces while showing how these spaces are gendered and intertwined. By using common social media claims that hijabi influencers are *destroying* Islam, the study was able to find that surveillance and control online were validated through notions that women were excessive and threatened the religion of Islam. These claims were also a symptom of the frustrations of male patriarchs who were against women's rarely found freedom on social media. Hence to limit these freedoms, they garnered support from women portraying influencers as threats to the community's moral values. Assemblages, in this project, allow analysis into the non-linear social media interaction and assess how the main argument that Muslim influencer's strategies are limiting in addressing contemporary

surveillance. It demonstrates that bodies become data, and through this process complicates Foucauldian surveillance that is more social and watches whole entities.

The findings, on the other hand, extend what is already established in the literature. Portraying women influencers as threats argues that influencers have agency, by *putting themselves out there* for engagement. Agency in this way is weaponized against women with the assertion that they should not expect safety or privacy. By assessing the dichotomies between agency and control; the study looks at the pleasures of using social media, however, suggests, after thoroughly examining the effects of surveillance, that agency should only be invoked as a testament to influencers' consciously and active resistance to protect their spaces. The stories of Muslim influencers come to show that, although pleasures exist, they are forced to constantly consider the possible actions of aggressors online. Hence, supporting arguments against claims of *agency* that justify surveillance. Likewise, by complicating agency and control, the study understands the datafied and platformised aspects of surveillance, including predictions of major life events and content amplification beyond the influencers' control. In addition, the nature of their work requires retained engagement, thus further complicating their responses to violence and aggression online.

While the research question inspired analysis of the different variables that exist regarding surveillance on digital spaces, the expected result was to bring together the strategies Muslim influencers used, and design frameworks and recommendations towards a holistic digital safe space. However, the study also acknowledged that a safe digital space would ultimately mean a liberatory offline space, thus the rationale for placing *masculine publics* and the *female fear factory* as a conceptual framework. Meanwhile, the research project mapped out the engagement strategies of influencers and demonstrated that they rely on in-built safety features such as the block, mute and report while utilising other tactics such as community support, intentional curation of content based on religious beliefs of the evil eye, and the complex power of the hijab, niqab or jilbab.

Finally, the research builds on the issues posed by the literature that safety and privacy cannot only be personal but structural. In this way, suggestions for contextual safety and privacy structures provide practical framings that complement the current strategies of Muslim

influencers and help us create imaginative structures to achieve liberatory digital futures. Altogether answering the question of 'how Muslim influencers navigate the contested social media space?' by providing a comprehensive outlook on uprooting the harms that exist and are facilitated through technology.

The research project contributes to existing feminist knowledge of technology. It presents a perspective into a rarely studied group of Muslim women, and even more, the most visible ones currently include influencers. For technologists who are working to design spaces that do not further harm vulnerable communities, this study gives insight into the experiences and accounts of Muslim women online. It shows the power dynamics that exist within the space, and how patriarchal power is particularly reproduced to limit the access and freedoms of Muslim women within the space. Most importantly, feminist technologists can identify the gaps to create solutions based on the identified need by presenting an analysis of the strategies they currently use.

However, besides the non-representation of macro and mega influencers, the major constraints of this study are the recommendations for holistic interventions and designs for safety and privacy online. Most of the frameworks remain speculative. Although I engaged in further conversations with experts through technology events, they also acknowledge that it is extremely difficult to think of solutions that capture such complex realities. The realities, as shown, transcend the domains of the digital, thus making it intricate. Meanwhile, not capturing the experiences of macro and mega influencers also posed a significant challenge for the research. For instance, this group of people have extensive experience and knowledge of the ecosystem. Macro and mega influencers, arguably, have participated online at all stages of their career, hence might have provided a far-reaching perspective into the realities and lives of influencers, including an exhaustive strategy of engagement that has been honed over the years. Unfortunately, they remain the least reachable participants, given the time constraints associated with this project.

With that established, further studies and investigations on gender, religion, and technology could focus on the suggested frameworks, for instance. The study could test the strategies that have already been argued and mapped out in this research project with a similar group

of people. However, specific attention should be paid to mega and macro influencers' contributions to the ecosystem. This means that, unlike this study which draws out the complexities and contestations, further research could focus more on Muslim women's strategies and develop the speculated futures that have been raised.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Participants Information Letter for Influencers, Information Letter for Experts and Consent form(s) for Experts and Influencers

Participant Information Letter for Influencers

RE: Invitation to Participate in Research Project on Gendered Surveillance of Muslim Women on Instagram

Dear Participant,

My name is Mardiya Siba Yahaya, and I am a master's student in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I must undertake a research project, and I am investigating the Gendered Surveillance of Black Muslim Women Influencers on Instagram under the supervision of Dr Ben Scully. The aim of this research project is to examine the monitoring experiences of Muslim women online to recommend feminist policy-oriented solutions.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a single interview online/ virtually, where we have a conversation structured around questions I will ask. It will take around 30 – 40 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio / video record the interview using on my digital device through the calling software. This recording will be stored in a protected a folder on my laptop and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after 3 years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be confidential, however with regards to anonymity as an Influencer, you may consent for your identity to remain anonymous. In the case you request to remain anonymous, I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final thesis. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.
If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a thesis. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in password secured laptop and will be kept for 3 years.

Yours sincerely,
Mardiya

Contact Information

Researcher:
Mardiya Siba Yahaya, 2528635@students.wits.ac.za , +233240496434
Supervisor:
Dr Ben Scully, Ben.Scully@wits.ac.za , +27714466534
Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical):
Shaun Schoeman, Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za , +2711717 1408

Participant Information Letter for Experts

RE: Invitation to Participate in Research Project on Gendered Surveillance of Muslim Women on Instagram

Dear Participant,

My name is Mardiya Siba Yahaya, and I am a master's student in Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I must undertake a research project, and I am investigating the Gendered Surveillance of Black Muslim Women Influencers on Instagram under the supervision of Dr Ben Scully. The aim of this research project is to examine the monitoring experiences of Muslim women online, its effect to their participation in the space, and possible strategies to address some of the issue uncovered.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a single interview online/ virtually, where we have a conversation structured around questions I will ask. It will take around 30 – 40 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio / video record the interview using on my digital device through the calling software. This recording will be stored in a protected a folder on my laptop and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after 3 years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential, however with regards to anonymity as an expert you may consent for your identity to remain anonymous. In the case you request to remain anonymous, I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final thesis. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a thesis. If you wish to receive a

summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored on my google drive space and will be kept for 3 years.

Yours sincerely,
Mardiya

Contact Information

Researcher:
Mardiya Siba Yahaya, 2528635@students.wits.ac.za, +233240496434

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Dr Ben Scully, Ben.Scully@wits.ac.za, +27714466534

Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical):
Shaun Schoeman, Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za, +2711717 1408

Consent Form

Consent form for Influencers
Participant Consent Form | Gendered Surveillance Studies 2021/2022

An Era of Visible Hijabis: The Gendered Surveillance of Black Muslim Influencers on Instagram

By Mardiya Siba Yahaya

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle or underline the relevant options below).

Do you prefer for any data you share to be reported anonymously?	YES NO
If you answered No for the previous question, Do you wish for your real name and Instagram handle to be included?	YES NO
If you answered No for the above question, you agree the researcher can use anecdotes and examples from your public social media accounts, provided your name and Instagram handle are not included.	YES NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
Researcher - Mardiya Siba Yahaya
…… (date)

Consent form for Expert

Participant Consent Form | Gendered Surveillance Studies 2021/2022

An Era of Visible Hijabis: The Gendered Surveillance of Black Muslim Influencers on Instagram

By Mardiya Siba Yahaya

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle or underline the relevant options below).

Do you prefer any data you share to be reported anonymously?	YES NO
If you answered No for the previous question, Do you wish for your real name and affiliation to be included?	YES NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in their thesis.	YES NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (Mardiya Siba Yahaya)
…… (date)

Appendix 2: Participant Biographies

Influencer Participants

Pseudonym	Nationality	Influencer Tier

Aicha	Ivory Coast	Micro
Diarra	Ivory Coast	Nano
Harija	Nigeria	Micro
Tasnim	Botswana	Nano
Dunia	Kenya	Micro
Bilan	Kenya	Micro
Hasiya	South Africa	Nano
Suraya	Nigeria	Nano
Kawthar	Nigeria	Micro
Lila	Ghana	Nano

Expert Biography

Name	**Affiliation**
Neema Iyer	Founder of Pollicy Senior Fellow at Mozilla Foundation Women's Safety Advisor at Meta
Chenai Chair	Special Advisor for Africa Innovation at Mozilla Foundation
Dr Deniz Yonucu	Lecturer, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University
Dr Nyx Mclean	Research Associate at Rhodes University

Appendix 3: Research Questions for both experts and Influencer

Research Questions use as a Guide with Influencer Conversations

- Tell me a bit about yourself, beyond being a content creator and visual artist - i.e., your hobbies, interests etc.

- What inspires your work as an artist?
- Is Instagram the primary social media platform for showcasing your work? If so why and if not kindly explain?
- What do you consider while curating your online space?
- What come to mind when you think of "surveillance"? How much does surveillance culture impact the work you do? Especially within the Muslim community and as an African woman?
- How did online traction and your content becoming more public change your social media usage?
- Given your life as a content creator, what parts of your life do you prefer to keep to yourself and why?
- Do you think the cultures of surveillance influences people's will to fit in? What about visibility, or the need for it? How does it force us to want to fit in?
- In your view, how does Instagram as a platform for instance play a role in the need for assimilation?
- How does Instagram respond to cases of bullying/ harassment you have witnessed or experienced? Have the privacy tools been sufficient in addressing these experiences? What about their platform policies, have they been effective in deadline with such issues?
- In what ways do you or women around you negotiate forms of online bullying, control, and harassment?

Research Questions sent out to Experts and used as an Interview Guide

- How does surveillance happen within the digital context? How do users surveil? And how does the technology facilitate it or play a role?
- How does Instagram's design facilitate monitoring and discipline?
- Who is the monitoring gaze?
- What are the ways in which people 'discipline' influencers online? i.e., what are some of the harms they face online, which may also transcend offline?

- A lot of Instagrammers specifically influencers, say Instagram must do better, but many people are unable to conceptualise this idea of ‘better’, and most do not believe that it is attainable in the first place. What are some of the platform governance strategies that can be used to protect or rather eliminate violence against women online/ achieve this 'better'?

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