Investigating Young Women`s Attitudes towards Female Algerian Influencers.

Amel Bakour

The Department of Sociological Studies

The University of Sheffield

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Declaration

I, Amel Bakour, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. I declare that I am aware of the University of Sheffield guidelines on the Use of Unfair Means. This work has never been submitted or shared with external institutions.

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Abstract

This thesis explores young Algerian women's attitudes towards Algerian female social media influencers. Drawing upon academic literature about influencers, Islam, and Algeria and using a qualitative research approach, the study explores how followers understand and respond to influencers' self-representations, their dress and hijab practices, finally exploring the status of the hijab in three different Algerian cities.

The female Algerian influencers explored in this study are both veiled and unveiled. Algerian influencers are diverse and represent both modern and traditional religious lifestyles through their dress and hijab practices. While some adhere to religious Islamic dress by wearing a hijab, others adhere to secular dress habits. Veiled influencers practice diverse forms of hijab, including modern and Islamic. Modesty in unveiled influencers exists on a spectrum: while some wear clothes that fit with Islamic ideas about modesty, others wear less modest forms of clothing. My research examined young Algerian women's attitudes toward these diverse dress and veiling practices.

My study combines semi-structured interviews with a qualitative content analysis of comments on influencers' YouTube and Instagram posts. The overarching finding of my research is that how influencers present themselves – and how their followers respond - is shaped by three interacting phenomena: a) the Algerian social environment; b) Islam and Islamic customs; and c) patriarchal norms. Followers' attitudes towards influencers self-representations, dress, and hijab practices are influenced by the Algerian social context. The features of Algerian society led to followers' interpretations of the influencers' visibility, hijab, and dress through the lenses of Islam, traditions, and patriarchy. They are influenced by Islam including the Islamic dress code. Finally, patriarchal roles also had an impact on how dress is interpreted and the position of women in society. The importance of each of these phenomena varies across the different aspects of my study.

My research contributes new knowledge to social media research by focusing on a part of the world that has hitherto been under-researched, namely Algeria. It also contributes to knowledge in audience research by understanding social media followers as audiences. It contributes to social media research by focusing on followers, an important group that is surprisingly often overlooked in social media research. Finally, it contributes an understanding of the interplay between religion, patriarchy, and national culture when it comes to women's self-representations and how these get interpreted.

Chapter 1: General Introduction

1.1 Motivations for the Study

This thesis explores young Algerian women's attitudes towards Algerian female influencers. My personal experiences as a Muslim woman from Algeria and a follower of several Algerian influencers sparked my interest in pursuing this research. In 2016, I developed an interest in female influencers in my conservative, Muslim country. Influencers attracted me in a variety of ways, partly because it was unusual to see women in the media and on social media platforms in Algerian society due to Muslim and national norms, which encourages the exclusion of women from public view.

I viewed the emergence of female influencers as an uprising against Algerian society's patriarchal structure. I became fascinated by how influencers present themselves as strong, independent, successful, and feminine women. I was interested in their dressing practices and the responses they received from followers on social media. Reading comments on their social media pages, I observed that many followers praised the influencers for their accomplishments, intelligence, beauty, and for challenging the established traditional norms that hindered their visibility online.

At the same time, the emergence of female influencers in Algeria seemed like a double-edged sword. Initially, some influencers were supported and admired, but many followers derided them. The judgements often had a moralistic or ethical root, and certain influencers were accused of promoting Western ideologies and taboos that contradicted Algerian and Islamic traditions. The influencers' visibility and lifestyles sometimes seemed to be viewed as an attempt to weaken or alter the traditional and conservative nature of Algerian society.

I grew up as a Berber Algerian Muslim woman in Bejaia (one of the Berber Algerian cities), where the practice of hijab had less social meaning. Thus, I was surrounded by many unveiled women: a decision I also chose to make. In my city, I had never encountered criticism for not wearing a hijab. Followers debating influencers' dress and veiling habits online therefore

attracted my attention and made me aware that women practice veiling in different ways in different Algerian cities. Growing up, I did not have the chance to travel between many cities in my country because as a woman, visiting other cities in general requires the presence of a male figure for safety and religious reasons. Therefore, my research is a response to this curiosity. It investigates female influencers as a new phenomenon in Algeria, how they are assessed by their followers, the reasons underpinning followers' attitudes towards them, and how women's experiences of veiling vary across Algeria's different regions.

Furthermore, Algerian female influencers are themselves diverse. While some adhere to religious Islamic dress by wearing a hijab, others adhere to secular dress habits. What's more, veiled influencers practice diverse forms of hijab. Some wear a hijab that fits the Islamic dress code, while others wear modern forms of hijab that conform to modest fashion. Unveiled influencers also have diverse dress habits, including some who wear clothes that fit Islamic modesty to some extent, such as clothes that cover most of their bodies. Others, however, wear less modest forms of clothing. The diversity of Algerian influencers thus crosses modern and traditional norms. In this study, I draw on sociology, media and communications studies, and gender studies to make sense of this diversity.

1.2 Defining Key Terms

Before I situate my research in current debates, it is important to define some key and overlapping terms: self-branding, microcelebrity, and influencer. First, self-branding refers to the practice of creating a saleable self-image to attract others (Shepherd, 2005; Hearn, 2008; Marwick, 2013). It has been argued by Abidin (2018) among others that the rise of digital media enables people who seek popularity to create a public image through self-branding. According to Khamis et al (2017), self-branding is a strategy through which ordinary people use modern technological innovations, particularly social media platforms, to promote themselves.

The concept of microcelebrity was introduced by Senft in 2008 study about camgirls, who she defines as women who publicly webcast themselves. Microcelebrities use digital intimacy to foster closeness with their followers (Milner, 2013; Abidin, 2018). They forge a persona, create content, and enact authenticity to build an online audience: techniques that are also

sometimes characterized as self-branding (Marwick, 2013). Indeed, Jerslev describes micro-celebrity techniques as a "particular online performance designed for self-branding" (Jerslev, 2016, p. 8). According to Marwick and Boyd (2011), microcelebrity practitioners view their followers as fans, control their audiences through different strategies, and forge a self-branded image.

The term influencer is used to refer to a group of internet celebrities who build audiences on social media platforms (Abidin, 2018). Influencers shape other people's opinions and beliefs by publicly displaying their private lives to their followers on social media and appearing credible to followers (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Del Fresno García et al., 2016; Chae, 2018). Influencers are said to obtain celebrity capital through their online performances, portraying themselves as outstanding, knowledgeable, talented experts, and sometimes as ordinary (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2015; Abidin, 2018).

Influencers are an important internet celebrity group (Abidin, 2018). They shape opinions and beliefs by displaying their private lives to their followers on social media (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Del Fresno García et al., 2016; Chae, 2018). Influencers can belong to different categories, including beauty, fashion, and lifestyle (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Jerslev, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). Evidently, self-branders, microcelebrities and influencers share characteristics. They all promote themselves online, especially on social media, and they cultivate followers through a diverse range of strategies. I therefore choose to use the term "influencer" throughout my research. In the Algerian context, internet celebrities are referred to as "مؤثرين" in Arabic, and this Arabic term translates to "influencers" in English. As a result, I use this term throughout this thesis.

1.3 Situating Female Algerian Influencers in Historical and Geographical Contexts

The social media influencers and followers at the heart of my study have emerged in a very specific historical, geographical, cultural, and religious context, which I summarize in this section. Throughout the history of Algeria, religion and traditions have had a great influence on women's position in society. After the French colonial era and the independence of Algeria in 1962, the state strived to restore the Algerian Arabic identity by instituting Islam and Arabic as the official religion and language of the country (Lazreg, 1994; Nakla, 2021). Between 1990

and 2002, Algeria witnessed a civil war, characterized by a call for rejecting Western lifestyles (Slyomovics, 1995; Croisy, 2008). After the civil war, in 2002, the state attempted to replace the previous form of religion by promoting a new form of Algerian Islam, which was said to not be influenced by politics or violence and to be characterized by rejecting religious extremism and practicing moderate forms of religion (Lazreg, 2021).

The political situation in Algeria has affected women, as they have witnessed diverse ideologies over different periods. After Algerian independence in 1962, women were invited to be active participants in education, politics, and manufacturing (Slyomovics, 1995; Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999). However, during the civil war, women were not only forced to take on the traditional roles of homemakers and mothers but also lost their freedom to be in public spaces without a hijab (Slyomovics, 1995; Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999). According to Lazreg (2021), following the civil war, women still struggled in society as their rights are often weakened under certain Algerian traditions and patriarchy. This is the social context in which Algerian influencers have emerged. Algeria thus represents a society where traditional and modern ideologies have clashed: a nuanced picture which forms the context of my research, which investigates how women influencers become active on social media in a society where different forms of Islam and tradition coexist.

Muslim women have often been portrayed as victims and oppressed in their societies (Lewis, 2015). With the emergence of digital media and new modes of celebrity, such as microcelebrity and selfie cultures, women's engagement in the process of media production has been assumed to reduce and improve traditional inferior representations of women (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Dobson, 2015; Marwick, 2015). Muslim influencers, also known as hijabi bloggers or Muslim fashionistas, represent the category of Muslim influencers who dress or produce fashionable styles while still complying with the principles of Islamic modesty (Hassim et al., 2015; Hassan and Harun, 2016; Kavakci and Kraepelin, 2017; Warren, 2018).

Several studies have examined Muslim female influencers (for example, Jafari and Süerdem, 2012; Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018; Warren, 2018; Lewis, 2010; Hassim, 2014; Peterson, 2016; Pennington, 2018; Mas'udah, 2018). Muslim influencers' 'modest fashion' has been of particular interest (Lewis, 2015). In most modern Muslim societies, there has been a shift from conventional Islamic dress to more modern fashions (Tarlo and Moor, 2013). The phenomenon

of modest fashion is an important topic in debates about religious clothes because, for some, fashion contradicts the essence of Islamic modesty as a practice (Moors and Tarlo, 2013). Some scholars argue that, by combining concepts such as modesty and beauty, many Muslim influencers use social media platforms to create modern and positive representations for themselves, thus potentially dispelling previous negative associations with Islam (Gökariksel and Secor, 2009).

Modesty for Muslim women is achieved by embracing the principles of the Islamic dress code (Lewis, 2015). Islamic dress codes for men and women comprise a set of rules that Muslims are encouraged to respect as a part of their faith. To be modest, Muslim women are generally required to cover their hair and their bodies with loose clothes, concealing their body shape without covering their hands and faces in public (Abdullah, 2006). However, in Islam, modesty applies not only to the physical appearances of both men and women but also to behavior, including lifestyle, verbal communication, and actions (Boulanouar, 2006).

Although Islam sets out the idea of an Islamic dress code for women, it does not indicate whether a Muslim woman should wear specific types of clothes or forms of hijab. As a result, what constitutes proper Islamic dress and 'modesty' is contested (Tarlo, 2010; Siraj, 2011; Lewis, 2013; Tarlo and Moor, 2013). The complexity of Islamic modesty has led to the emergence of multiple forms of veiling and modest dresses, and, as a result, what Muslim women wear is influenced by the local traditions of each Muslim country (Tarlo, 2010). The extensive literature about hijab in Islam (see Tarlo, 2010; Lewis, 2013; Bucar, 2016) shows that veiling practices in the Muslim world are diverse and complex, highlighting that veiling in its different forms is not simply a personal dressing style, a gender norm, or a political hallmark but rather a combination of several elements (El Guindi, 1999; Tarlo, 2010; Bucar, 2016), including geography.

Women in Muslim societies are often evaluated and judged for their dress and veiling habits, mainly because some dress and veiling practices are sometimes associated with immorality and violations of spiritual codes (Jones, 2010; Mir, 2014). Scholars (Lewis, 2013; 2015) have argued that how dress and modesty are judged in online spaces echoes traditional offline popular religious debates, where women are often called on to embrace their religious standards and modest fashion is judged, disputed, or accepted. Most of the existing studies about

Muslim influencers have focused on how they use social media to claim new, modern, and positive representations. For example, studies have focused on influencers' dressing styles, the type of veil they wear, their behaviour in public, and their body language (Ajala, 2017; Hassan, 2018; Beta, 2019; Zaid et al., 2022). These studies have focused more on influencers' content and its potential meaning rather than their followers' understandings of such content. Furthermore, despite the wide literature discussing Muslim influencers, there has been little consideration given to the diversity of influencers across the Muslim context, such as unveiled influencers.

Previous studies about influencers used research methods like observation or ethnography to explain and identify the microcelebrity techniques influencers use to build audiences and gain popularity. The lack of investigation into how followers view influencers' content is a gap that I address in this thesis, following the tradition of media audience research. In the era of digital media, audiences are even more crucial for research (Livingstone, 1999). This is because audiences have become increasingly unpredictable, complex, and diverse (Livingstone, 1999; 2015). Researching audiences requires acknowledging that media content can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and that the social environment is a significant influence on how people use media and the outcomes of that use (Livingstone, 2003; Gray, 2017). According to Barker (2006), regardless of the small progress that was made in audience research, the field did not flourish. This is because several fundamental questions about audiences have not been answered, and specifically, a large number of audiences in different locations and contexts have not been investigated (Livingstone, 2015).

In influencer marketing, the engagement, views, and positive responses from influencers` followers are crucial to their success (Berryman and Kavka, 2017). By interacting with their audiences and using various microcelebrity techniques, influencers achieve visibility (Abidin, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). Therefore, examining the followers of Algerian influencers will first contribute to knowledge about audiences in Algeria - a Muslim context – which helps us to understand the role of a religious environment in how audiences engage with online content. Furthermore, my research will contribute to knowledge about how followers understand influencers, including, for example, their self-representations and microcelebrity techniques. Therefore, this study aims to examine how young Algerian women view Algerian female

influencers, including their dress and veiling habits, along with their lifestyles. Unlike existing studies that examine Muslim influencers' content in different social environments, this research focuses on followers' views on Muslim influencers, who also come from a Muslim context: Algeria. It uses a qualitative content analysis of followers' comments and interviews with followers to achieve its aim. Therefore, my research addresses the following questions:

Overarching research question: What are young Algerian women's attitudes towards female Algerian social media influencers?
RQ1: What themes emerge in people's comments on Algerian female social media influencers' Instagram and YouTube posts?
RQ2: What are followers' responses to influencers' dressing and veiling practices?
RQ3: What is the status of veiling in different Algerian cities?

To capture a large volume of data featuring a wide range of attitudes toward Algerian influencers, I collected data from two social media platforms: Instagram and YouTube, on which Algerian influencers are highly active. The majority of the data needed to address to my research questions, which investigate comments made under influencers' posts, was on Instagram and YouTube, as opposed to other platforms. Additionally, influencers publish a range of content on YouTube and Instagram. For example, their YouTube channels include content like makeup and veiling tutorials that they don't often upload to Instagram. The quantity of comments and the diversity of content they share across the two platforms therefore offered essential data that serves the aim of this study.

This research makes an original contribution to existing academic literature and knowledge in many ways. First, by examining the followers of influencers, my research extends beyond an examination of how influencers present themselves online. It contributes to knowledge about how audiences and followers interpret influencers' posts, behaviour, and lifestyles. At the same time, previous studies have focused on how Muslim influencers dress and veil, mainly with the emergence of modest fashion. As previously discussed, Muslim women in religious contexts are often evaluated and judged for their dress habits. Therefore, my study expands existing knowledge by identifying whether and how followers evaluate the influencers' dress and veiling practices.

Second, existing academic literature has also shown that veiling in its different forms is affected by different factors, including the type of Islam practiced by the state, patriarchy, and traditions in different historical periods. My study adds to the literature by examining the status of veiling in the specific context of modern Algerian society. Furthermore, it acknowledges differences within national contexts, examining how young Algerian women experience veiling in three different Algerian cities. The overarching finding of my research is that how influencers present themselves and followers respond to influencers is shaped by three interacting phenomena: a) the Algerian social environment, b) Islam and Islamic customs, and c) patriarchal norms.

The final contribution that my thesis makes is to media audience research. In this field, non-Western audiences have not been the focus of many studies. Therefore, this research contributes to de-westernizing audience research by investigating the followers of influencers in the Algerian Muslim context. This research thus acknowledges the diversity of audiences and the importance of context in audience research.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of my research, bringing together four concepts: a) gender, women, and media; b) the concepts of representation and online representation; c) self-branding, microcelebrity, and the rise of social media influencers; d) audience research. Chapter 3 introduces Algeria as the context of the research, providing background information about Algerian women, culture, and religion. It then examines Islamic modesty and the politics of veiling in the Muslim world and Algeria, and Muslim influencers, to finally introduce some information about Algerian social media influencers. Chapter 4 outlines the research methods used in this research, including why qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews were selected, the steps used in conducting each of them, and how thematic analysis was implemented.

Chapters 5-7 are the main empirical chapters, based on the results of the research methods described in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, through a detailed analysis of the comments, I explore how followers view influencers' self-representations. I introduce the main themes that were

discussed in followers' comments under the influencers' posts on both Instagram and YouTube. Chapter 6 focuses on the dressing and veiling practices of the influencers. In this chapter, I explore how followers view influencers' Islamic veiling, modern veiling habits, and unveiling. The chapter sheds light on the importance of the concept of modesty and how it is negotiated by different people. This chapter argues that interpretations of influencers' dressing and veiling habits are affected by religion and its interpretation, as well as social norms.

Chapter 7 extends the previous investigation about veiling and dress to explore the status of veiling in three different Algerian cities. This chapter introduces the role of patriarchy in women's life experiences and then in their veiling practices, exploring how this differs across the different Algerian regions. This chapter argues that veiling and dress are social phenomena with specific meanings in specific contexts. Chapter 8 is the final chapter of the thesis, and it provides a summary of the findings of my research, the academic contributions of the research, the study's limitations, and suggestions for potential future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to situate my research within specific literature and debates, namely gender, media, social media, feminism, self-branding, and audiences. With the ability to capture the interest of a large number of people, influencers are an important internet celebrity group (Abidin, 2018). Influencers gather followers on social media platforms through different activities, such as posting text or images related to their private and daily lives, advertising for commodities or services, and attempting to reach celebrity status (Abidin, 2016; Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016). Influencers on social media have become a major phenomenon in both Western and Arab contexts.

Existing literature about Muslim influencers, most of whom are women, typically asks how Muslim women use the internet to create modern representations of Muslim women (Lewis, 2010; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Some writers argue that influencers dispel the negative associations of veiling practices (Hassim, 2014; Peterson, 2016; Pennington, 2018), and some authors claim that influencers represent themselves as integral members of society (Mas'udah, 2018; Warren, 2018) with a strong sense of fashion (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018). My research thus aims to provide renewed insight into Muslim Algerian influencers from their followers' perspectives.

This literature review therefore consists of four sections. It explores how Western, Muslim, and Algerian women are represented in popular media texts, along with their self-representational practices. The next section introduces debates about microcelebrity, self-branding and influencers. I first address the concept of self-branding and microcelebrity, then move to social media influencers, highlighting how female influencers produce various types of femininities, situating this discussion in debates about female visibility. Finally, I summarize the major developments in the field of audience research, explaining how these have characterized audiences, and how audience and gender intersect.

2.2 Women, Gender and the Media

This section introduces representations of Western, Muslim, and Algerian women in some popular media. It explains how women were portrayed in traditional media, and how their more recent online engagement has contributed to producing new and varied representations. This in turn provides a rationale for understanding Algerian influencers' self-representations and situates them in broader debates.

2.2.1 Representations of Western Women in Media

Historically, in popular Western media, women have been represented as inferior to men. For example, Gauntlett (2008) notes that from 1950 to 1990, men occupied most of the leading roles in movies. In general, women in movies and advertisements were shown as characters that needed protection and guidance while still supporting the male hero (Gauntlett, 2008). Between 1970 and 1980, the number of men in Western advertisements still exceeded the number of women (Gunter, 1995). For instance, women were frequently relegated to domestic roles in British and American advertisements, where they were portrayed as dependent on men and predominately featured in advertisements for household products, while men were portrayed as assertive, confident, and dominant (Gunter, 1995; Gill, 2007).

Between 1980 and 1990, women became progressively sexualized in advertisements (Gill, 2007; O'Driscoll, 2018). For Gauntlett (2008), showing women in a decorative manner to attract consumers devalues their self-confidence and dehumanizes them. Second-wave feminists – who represented the women's movement that emerged in 1960 in the United States to fight for gender equality – recognized advertisements as sources of sexism, which propagated narrow notions of ideal femininity and beauty (Thompson, 2002; Gill, 2007). In the late 1980s, advertisers moved from representing women as sexual objects to what Gill (2007) named the "sexual subject", where women were believed to enjoy trading their sexuality for financial gains. Although gender representations in advertising became less sexist after 1990, as Gauntlett (2008) notes, advertisements continued to show women in roles as homemakers. After 1990, advertisements also employed pictures of beautiful and appealing women and men, and this led to increasing pressure on the physical appearance of women (Gauntlett,

2008).

2.2.2 Muslim and Algerian Women's Representations in Media

Muslims were often negatively represented in western media. Muslims for example were commonly portrayed in British news as a threat to culture because they were frequently linked to terrorism, extremism, and violence (Knott et al., 2013). Muslim women were portrayed as being oppressed and victims in their societies (Lewis, 2015). In many debates about Islam, the religion and the Quran were depicted as oppressive towards women (Byng, 2010). Regarding Algerian women, there is limited academic literature on representations of women across popular forms of media in Algeria. Most of the literature has been published about depictions of Algerian women in films. Among the most important Algerian movies are *La Nouba des femmes de Mont Chenoua* (The Nouba of the Women of Mount Chenoua) (1976) and *Rachida* (2002). The former is a pre-eminent movie because it put women at its center and addressed the war and violence against women (Khannous, 2018). Algerian women in movies such as *La Bataille d'Alger* (The Battle of Algiers) (1965) were shown in secondary roles and had men in the leading roles (Smail Salhi, 2004). The Battle of Algiers is a war film based on the events of a famous battle (1957) between the French army and some Algerian revolutionists in the capital, Algiers. According to Lazreg (1994), women in such movies were restricted to receiving commands, and their communication was scarce. They were represented as women who obeyed the male characters, implying that Algerian women did not play a significant role in the war of independence (Smail Salhi, 2004).

However, La Nouba des Femmes de Mont Chenoua was believed to offer new representations of female participants in the war of independence and acknowledged their contribution (Smail Salhi 2004). The story of *Rachida*, which portrayed the lives of women during the civil war, centers on a young teacher living in Algiers who becomes the victim of a member of the Islamic groups (Martin, 2011). After escaping Algiers to another village, she discovers that it is under their dominance (Martin, 2011). Women were kidnapped and raped by their members, and after their release, they were rejected by their families (Martin, 2011). However, the end of the movie, as Martin (2011) explains, shows Algerian women in the public sphere, where they contribute to rebuilding the village with the hope of reconstructing the whole society. Women could educate young people, and Rachida becomes a teacher again. Rather

than focusing on independent Algeria, the film focused on giving a new position to women (Martin, 2011). This literature about Algerian women in movies raises questions about how contemporary women in Algeria react and coexist with the content diffused through media, especially how women now represent themselves on social media, which this study aims to investigate. Women's online self-representations are therefore introduced in the following section.

2.3 From Representation to Online Self-Representations

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) discussed how individuals construct their identity by using metaphors from dramaturgy. Goffman suggested that when individuals interact with others, they tend to present a desirable image. He suggested that individuals engage in a theatrical performance where social interaction is considered the front-stage performance of a backstage self. The interaction thus includes the actor (the performer) and the viewer (the audience). During the interaction, actors self-consciously or unconsciously attempt to control how others perceive them by regulating and controlling information. Therefore, self-presentation involves impression management: the process of regulating and adjusting the front (including someone's appearance, manner, or information about themselves) to achieve a desired public image. This, in turn, suggests that the self-presentation process changes based on the social setting and the audience. However, Meyrowitz (1986) critiqued Goffman`s theory because of its inability to acknowledge social change. Meyrowitz (1986) argued that individuals adjust to the changing social order by picking up new social conventions. This indicates that new forms of self-presentation may arise with the emergence of new social conditions or the disturbance of old ones. Therefore, individuals may adopt new roles throughout time and may decide to reveal traits that they previously kept hidden in order to fit in with new social situations.

Nonetheless, Goffman's ideas are helpful for understanding the new self-representations that became possible in the digital age. With the emergence of digital culture and social media platforms, self-representation, as opposed to representation, has become more widespread. Examining self-representation on social media platforms is crucial because it provides new and different representations of women. In other words, it helps in understanding how

women present themselves online and how their followers view those representations.

The emergence of Web 2.0 in the 2000s arguably offered alternatives for individuals to represent themselves (Hudson, 2014). Web 2.0 refers to "a series of technological innovations in terms of both hardware and software that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability, and that put the lay user – rather than the firm – center stage in terms of design, collaboration, and community on the World Wide Web" (Berthon et al., 2012, p.262). With Web 2.0, some commentators argue that users are no longer the receivers of information, rather they have become the creators of it through their contributions online (Hudson, 2014). Online users are required to represent themselves when they use social media (Enli and Thumim, 2012), which enables the generation of descriptive profiles about the self and building connections with other individuals (Donath and body, 2004). Social media has therefore resulted in multiple new forms of self-representations (Wheeler, 2017). When individuals engage in social media activities such as tweeting and sharing videos on YouTube, they engage in a wide variety of self-representations (Hudson, 2014).

YouTube, one of the platforms I examine in my research, is one of the most popular user-generated content (UGC) platforms on the internet (Cha et al., 2007), with 122 million daily active users (Increditools,2022). It is owned by Google and is one of the main social media platforms for self-representation (Hudson, 2014). YouTube extends self-representation to a global scale and, as Hudson (2014) notes, it enables ordinary people to gain popularity. The diversity of content that the YouTube platform hosts can reach large audiences (Khan, 2017). YouTube's popularity is also gained through the financial rewards that it offers to users; the higher the number of people who view monetized videos, the higher the income for the creator (Burges and Green, 2020).

Instagram, the second platform I use for my research, was purchased by Facebook in 2012 (Marwick, 2015). The number of users on Instagram is estimated to be 2 billion (Increditools, 2022). Instagram is a crucial social media platform for achieving fame by engaging with fans followers or audiences (Marwick, 2015; Tyer, 2016). In marketing, Instagram is widely used by influencers to create advertisements to sell products (Kozinets et al., 2010; McQuarrie et al., 2013). Influencers use Instagram in different ways, including sharing curated pictures,

modifying them with filters, engaging with followers, and building larger audiences (Hoffman, 2012; Abidin, 2016).

As previously mentioned, women in both Western and Algerian popular media were often represented as inferior to men. However, by using social media platforms for online self-representation, women engage in creating new self-images that may or may not challenge old stereotypes. However, it is also important to ask what audiences make of women's online self-representations – for example, what do the representations that Algerian influencers produce mean to their audiences? This question will be investigated through my research. The following section considers how individuals engage in online self-representations through microcelebrity and self-branding to become influencers.

2.4 The Rise of Social Media Influencers

The theoretical framework of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) is essential for studying influencers because they are believed to perform different types of personae on social media (Khamis et al., 2017). Influencers are believed to create, manage, and shift between different personae based on the context, thus enacting Goffman's concept of impression management (Abidin, 2016). The modes influencers use to perform different personae on social media involve mainly microcelebrity and self-branding, which are discussed below. This section therefore introduces the self-representation techniques that influencers use in the process of attaining fame and building an audience. It explains how female influencers produce various types of femininities online, situating influencers in popular feminist debates. I first consider the changing character of celebrity in contemporary society.

Celebrity is perceived as a social status characterized by uniqueness and by being far from the usual (Jerslev, 2015). In the modern world, however, fame may come from the celebrity`s ability to capture people`s attention rather than achieving remarkable accomplishments (Turner, 2004). Due to technological developments, fame has become more attainable (Marwick, 2015). Digital technologies and modern modes of interaction on social media make internet celebrities and online fame highly attainable by ordinary people (Senft, 2008; Abidin and Ots, 2015). Furthermore, it is believed that the development of new media genres such

as reality TV, talent shows, and private channels on platforms like YouTube have resulted in a more widespread desire for fame (Senft, 2013).

It is also believed that there is a shift from the notion of celebrity as a state of *being* to a state of *doing*, from celebrity to celebrification (Jerslev, 2015; Marwick, 2015). According to Driessens (2012), celebrification is the process that ordinary people or public figures use to become famous. Jerslev (2015) considers this definition restrictive and states that celebrity has been transformed because of the internet and social media platforms, arguing that celebrification does not only refer to the state of becoming a celebrity but rather involves other communicative and cultural performances. For example, ordinary people become famous by engaging with the public, imitating the strategies of celebrities' communication and engagement with the public, and by disclosing their private lives (Jorge, 2019). Jerslev (2015) notes that fame also depends on other factors, such as people's abilities to afford new technologies (Jerslev, 2015).

Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube allow many ordinary people to become famous (Marwick, 2015; Khamis et al., 2017). On Instagram, some ordinary users achieve "Instafame": the condition of having a great number of followers on the app (Marwick, 2015, p. 137). Like Instagram, YouTube allows internet users to become a well-known brand through the creation of an original persona, and the construction of relationships with others, thus creating an online audience (Chen,2013).

As noted in Chapter One, social media influencers are a group of internet celebrities who have the capacity to appeal to huge audiences while also maintaining those audiences on social media platforms (Abidin, 2018). Influencers shape others' opinions and beliefs by publicly displaying their private lives to their followers on social media to appear credible (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Del Fresno García et al., 2016; Chae, 2018). Influencers are believed to acquire celebrity capital through their online performances by presenting themselves as exceptional, knowledgeable, talented, and experts (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016; Abidin, 2018). Influencers are believed to acquire celebrity capital through their online performances, through the strategies of self-branding and microcelebrity which were defined in the introduction to this thesis.

Recently, brand influencers on social media have become important, especially those who promote lifestyle videos. To advertise for brands and make the brand well known, influencers post content to social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or Facebook (Glucksman, 2017). Influencers share advertisements on their social media pages in exchange for money, free items, or free services (Abidin and Ots, 2015). Whether influencers are paid or not has been debated by scholars such as Duffy (2016) and Hearn and Schoenhoff (2015), who argue that digital labour does not necessarily produce financial gains. They believe that self-branding emerged in a worn-out capitalist economic situation, and it does not necessarily result in any financial development but rather aggravates established social and class inequality. Hearn and Schoenhoff (2015) note that social media influencers are often not paid – they are instead offered complimentary commodities or receive invitations to special events for their support.

2.4.1 Beauty and Lifestyle Influencers

Beauty and lifestyle media production have gained popularity in the last few years (Torjesen, 2021). In 2019, it was reported that 80% of influencers were women (Gesenheus, 2019). Beauty and lifestyle influencers are covered in this section because of the popularity of this genre among the Algerian influencers I selected for this research.

Beauty, fashion, and lifestyle vlogs are becoming one of the most viewed types of content on social media (Jerslev, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). Vlogs "represent a format of narrating everyday life or giving opinions through a combination of text and image, or video and sound, respectively" (Jorge, 2019, p.2). YouTube videos consist mainly of monthly favourite videos or hauls that aim to show new clothes, jewellery, shoes, and beauty products (Jeffries, 2011). Monthly favourites videos are those that show the most liked items used in the last month. Tutorials – also called How-To videos (Garcia-Rapp, 2016) – are generally used to teach a skill, such as how-to put-on makeup or how to style hair.

Another popular genre on social media platforms is the lifestyle genre, in which women make their everyday lives the main topic of their posts. The key aspect of this genre is that influencers share private details about their lives (Abidin and Ots, 2015). In these videos, influencers demonstrate mundanity, closeness, and authenticity (Marwick, 2013; Abidin and Ots, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2017; Jorge, 2019).

The success of these videos depends on many factors. For example, it depends on the positive reaction of audiences towards them (Berryman and Kavka, 2017). Other strategies that influencers use on YouTube include asking audiences to subscribe to their private channel at the end of a shared video or offering some products to their followers to engage with them (Garcia-Rapp, 2016). The more times a video is viewed, the more the influencers gain money or receive promotions from brands (Berryman and Kavka, 2017).

2.4.2 Femininity and Social Media Influencers

As can be seen in section 2.4.1, with the emergence of digital media, various forms of social media production have appeared from the conventionally feminine fields of beauty, fashion, crafts, and domesticity (Duffyand Hund, 2015). My research focuses on beauty and lifestyle influencers, a category of content creators who are believed to be feminized due to their focus on fashion and beauty (Duffy, 2016). Influencers who fall under the umbrella of beauty and lifestyle are exclusively women in Algeria.

Self-branding in this genre relies upon women and girls presenting an authentic persona (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Thus, an important question in this context is the degree to which "visibility gets articulated through normative feminine discourses and practices" (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p.64). Influencers are believed to present diverse types of ideal femininities, accomplished through different beauty practices and dressing styles (Abidin, 2016). These femininities - because they are technologically mediated - are framed as "cyber femininities," or "the portrayal and performance of the female gender as mediated via the internet and digital technologies" (Abidin, 2016. p.184). The self-representations that women strive to achieve online often comply with existing traditional ideas about femininity and gendered practices (Dobson, 2015). Thus, female influencers often follow normative practices of femininity, for example in their use of makeup, dressing in specific ways, or adopting in feminine postures (Abidin, 2016).

Abidin and Thompson (2012) argue that influencers use modelling, role-modelling, and role-playing to reproduce normative feminine practices. Abidin (2016) explains that modelling involves the influencer exhibiting herself and the product intended for advertisement pleasingly

and appropriately. In this phase, influencers tend to capture themselves uniquely to stand out from other influencers, for example through wearing unique clothes, makeup, or certain hair-styles. In role modelling, the influencers attempt to establish standards about body and beauty appearances, as well as behaviour for the followers; this may include implying that there is preferable body size or dressing style and providing advice about the standards of a healthy relationship. In role-playing, Abidin (2016) argues that influencers perform different femininities to engage their followers. Role-playing involves engaging in behaviours of normative femininity already established in society (Wiederman, 2005). For example, an influencer suggesting certain types of clothes are designed for specific occasions and contexts (blazers are for work environments and picture the woman as strong and independent) is role-playing (Abidin, 2016). Branding the self in manners that are predominantly accepted by women communicates the idea that the receiver`s body should also correspond to those same normative femininities (Abidin and Thompson, 2012). These processes suggest that influencers adopt Goffman`s (1956) concept of impression management. In this case, social media platforms become "a stage for performing (role-playing) the Influencer's persona" (Abidin, 2016, p.206).

2.4.3 Types of Cyber-Femininities in Social Media Influencers

In this section, I summarize the types of cyber-femininities that influencers perform. These types were introduced by Abidin (2016) in her research about influencers in Singapore. They are relevant for my research because similar gendered performances were found among Algerian influencers. Abidin (2016) identified six types of cyber-femininities that influencers embody: the family girl, the material girl, the fashionista, the globetrotter, the party girl, and the rebels. I discuss each in turn below.

Some influencers may present themselves as "family girls" by displaying their closeness to the members of their family and acting as the loving and caring daughters of the family. Femininity here is framed as compliance, validation seeking and sensitivity to male role models. The second type is the "material girl". Influencers in this category focus on showing off their luxurious possessions to their fan base through visual means. Femininity here is modelled as "materialism and pleasure-seeking through the consumption of luxury goods, often

purchased at smart prices, and a posh lifestyle"(Abidin, 2016, p. 211). The third category, the "fashionista", is represented by influencers who share posts about fashionable trends, brand ambassadorships, and personalized beauty techniques. Here, femininity is framed in terms of beauty and fashion. The difference between them and the material girls is that the latter seek to collect luxuries and may seem to have poor taste. However, the fashionistas present their materialism as an individual preference and lifestyle, which may hide their greedy character. The fourth category is "globetrotter", which is related to influencers who show themselves as constant tourists by recording their vacations to presumably spotlight their unique experiences all over the world. Femininity here is modelled as the frequent desire for universal ways of living and adventures that may seem unique and distinct from the norm. The fifth category consists of the "party girls": influencers who share pictures of themselves at important events such as the opening of new brands and private parties. These influencers tend to model femininity by wearing revealing clothes and provocative body positions. The final category is the "rebels", who are represented by influencers who affirm their rejection of conventional beauty practices. These influencers model femininity by rejecting conventional beauty standards such as body weight and altering their physical appearances through extreme tattoos or piercings. Most of the Algerian influencers can be identified in some of the previous categories. For example, many of them present themselves as fashionistas, family girls, globetrotter, party girls, and rebels. However, Algerian influencers don't only fall into one group; rather, they exhibit characteristics from all of them.

In the next section, I introduce feminist debates around women`s online visibility. The postfeminist perspectives on women`s visibility online, described below, pave the way for explaining followers` attitudes towards Algerian female influencers. This concept helps to explain their understanding of influencers` self-representations, and the meanings these self-representations hold today.

2.5 Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and the Emergence of Female Influencers

In this section, I first introduce the term postfeminism, its relation to neoliberalism, and then provides details on its relevance to my research.

The concept of postfeminism is a term used to describe gender relations to feminism. Post-feminist discourses first emerged through media in the early 1980s; and has a history of being interpreted in this context as a sign of freedom from the ideological restraints of what was seen by some as an antiquated feminist movement (Gamble, 2001). The term “post” often means “after”, implying a change or shift that occurred after second-wave feminism (Milestone and Meyer, 2012).

The term postfeminism is used to indicate a broad variety of phenomena (Gill and Scharff, 2011). According to Gill and Scharff (2011), the term is used in four different ways. First, it can be employed to indicate a shift in feminism's epistemology. Second, postfeminism can also refer to a historical turning point that occurred after second wave feminism (Gill and Scharff, 2011). According to Negra (2007), postfeminism is built on a group of presumptions that were proclaimed in different forms of popular media, which suggested that feminism is an outdated movement. The third definition of postfeminism is seen in its use as a backlash against feminism (Gamble, 2001). Faludi (1991) describes postfeminism as an opposition to the achievements made by second-wave feminism. Postfeminism, according to Faludi (1991), is the backlash, a criticism of the feminist movement rather than being an outwardly hostile reaction to it. In the latter, some of the postfeminist discourses suggest that feminism is the source of women’s unhappiness; they often assert that women have acquired all the necessary rights, and thus they cannot have everything (Faludi, 1991).

However, Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism can also be understood as a sensibility with some distinguishable characteristics rather than as a cohesive political stance, historical turning point, or anti-feminist backlash. Postfeminism here not only acknowledges and considers previous feminist approaches but also rejects them (McRobbie, 2004). This perspective thus underlines how postfeminism entangles anti-feminist and feminist subjects (Gill, 2007). The term “post” is sometimes used by scholars to refer to all popular gender constructions that promote women’s empowerment, yet undermine feminism and feminist achievements (Gill, 2007; Tasker and Negra, 2007). In the following section, I will introduce how women`s visibility in digital media is related to postfeminism.

2.5.1 Post-feminism and Women's Visibility in Digital Media

The politics of visibility refers to "the process of making visible or questioning the visibility of a political group (such as gender or race) that is and has been historically marginalized in the media, law, policy, etc" (Banet-Weiser, 2015, p55). As stated above, many researchers, such as Gill (2007), Thornham (2007), Pozner (2010), Ross (2010), and Sarkeesian (2013) have shown that women are frequently sexualized in the mass media and often depicted as inferior to men. But with the emergence of digital media, including seemingly 'participatory' social media platforms, it was hoped that, if women engage in the process of media production, their misrepresentation would become less frequent (Dobson, 2015). Modern representations of femininity become prevalent not only in advertisements, music, movies, but also in celebrity culture (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Douglas, 2010; Harris and Dobson, 2015). Modern media representations of young women include confident, ambitious, strong, but often still sexualized feminine bodies (Dobson, 2015).

The emergence of new modes of celebrity, including microcelebrity and selfie culture in young generations and on social media platforms increased the call for women`s visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Marwick, 2015). Selfies, for example, became a form of self-expression (Banet-Weiser, 2015), viewed as a means used to empower self-representations (Lee, 2005). With the emergence of participatory cultures, in which people not only consume content but also produce it (Jenkins, 2006), women`s participation in digital culture and media production became framed as potentially empowering (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Brandes and Levin, 2013).

However, women`s visibility on social media can come with a cost (Dobson, 2015). First, women as content creators - which was often framed as empowering, and liberating from patriarchal labour systems - were debated and criticised because social inequality in digital labour still entrenches (Proctor-Thomson, 2013; Duffy, 2016). The relationship between producers and consumers remains complicated (Jenkins, 2006), in part because online content production became encouraged in exchange for financial gains by companies (Dobson, 2015). The strategies used in producing content on social media require women to perform and present themselves as if their "entire existence is built around work" (Gill, 2010, p.249). To create a visible self in digital media, women must present themselves as a commodity and position

themselves as a brand (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The price of content creation in digital media comes with "high barriers to entry, unstable employment, occupational flexibility, and the pervasive mentality that 'you're only as good as your last'" (Duffy and Hund, 2015, p.2).

Although digital cultures offer a space for women to represent themselves, their self-representations are often derided and viewed as not worthy (Dobson, 2015). The nature of women`s visibility in digital media is continuously debated, judged, assessed, or examined (Banet-Weiser,2015). In the history of media and from the perspective of high culture, feminized mass entertainment is seen as inferior and devalued (Hall, et all, 2013). Women's media production in modern consumer cultures are also viewed as frivolous and undervalued (Duffy et al, 2022). In the influencers' domain, their visibility has exposed them to public judgements and sometimes to the incitement of hateful comments (Duffy et al, 2022). These debates about the complexity of women`s visibility on social media are relevant to my research, as they explain why some followers are critical of female influencers in Algeria. As I demonstrate in the empirical chapters of this thesis, the visibility of the Algerian female influencers was also contested, evaluated, and investigated by some followers, which is consistent with the claims made by earlier academics.

2.5.2 Postfeminism in Neoliberal Times

The limitations of the gender equality practiced in today's popular media culture are significant: they are characterised by the celebration of female accomplishment in traditionally masculine sectors and the appreciation of surgical and other disciplinary methods that "allow" (that is, demand) that women preserve their youthful demeanour and looks throughout their lives (Spigel and McRobbie, 2007). Because they contain both feminist and anti-feminist elements, challenge some gender norms while upholding others, and regard feminism as common sense while rejecting it at the same time, postfeminist gender representations and discussions concerning empowerment are problematic due to their entanglement and paradoxical nature (McRobbie, 2009). For example, postfeminism asserts that women's value is not exclusively derived from their appearances and that they shouldn't be evaluated simply on the basis of those appearances; however, the fashion, lifestyle, and beauty industries continue to be important for maintaining women's status and confidence (Tasker and Negra,

2007). According to Tasker and Negra (2007), a major goal of postfeminist culture is to commodify feminism by using the image of the woman as an empowered consumer. Postfeminist culture also attempts to absorb, assume, or normalise certain facets of feminism. Hence, postfeminist society places a strong emphasis on giving women and girls access to professional and educational opportunities, as well as freedom of choice in terms of employment, domesticity, and parenting, as well as physical and especially sexual empowerment.

The interpretations of contemporary gender relations offered by postfeminism are highly antagonistic: while contemporary young female representations are praised for showing themselves as the “can-do” generation and their bodies are depicted as objects of sex, nonetheless, this also exposes them to criticism and hostility (Gill, 2008, p. 442). Postfeminist cultures praise women's agency and consuming abilities (Tasker and Negra, 2007). Women`s consumption nowadays has become an emblem of their empowerment and independence (Cole and Crossley, 2009). Young female generations became the focus of advertisers, famous brands, and popular culture (Projansky 2014; Banet-Weiser 2007). The phrase “girl power” on different types of clothes describes young women`s as strong consumers, representing mainly women who earn their own money (McNeal 1992; Banet-Weiser 2007).
Nevertheless, women`s integration of digital labour, such as in the influencer domain, is problematic. Digital labour frequently pushes strategic self-branding techniques on individuals, which are based on the norms, procedures, and commercial logics of traditional mainstream industries (Hearn, 2008). Such mediated labour requires building a very exceptional persona in a highly competitive work market and constantly showing an authentic self (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Women`s work in such domains is often deemed non-valuable and unpaid, regardless of the latter being essential to the capitalist system of production (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Women are frequently under pressure to keep an eye on themselves, maintain discipline, and constantly change who they are because postfeminist discourses are deeply ingrained with discussions about empowerment, self-determination, and empowerment (Gill, 2017).

Gill (2008) further argues that the oppositions are what give rise to the sensibility; it is a sensibility where the concepts of autonomy, choice, and personal growth coexist with discipline, surveillance, and the demonization of those who make the "wrong" or "bad" choices. These

ideas are likewise fundamental to neoliberalism and imply a close connection between post-feminism and neoliberal ideology (Gill, 2008). In general, many feminist researchers use the idea of postfeminism as a cultural sensibility to consider how feminism and neoliberalism are entwined (Rottenberg 2014). For Gill (2008), the previous ideas are likewise fundamental to neoliberalism and imply a close connection between postfeminism and neoliberal ideology, because neoliberalism is also interpreted as an ideology "constructing individuals as entrepreneurial actors who are rational, calculating, and self-regulating" (p. 443). In this mediatized rhetoric, female empowerment is always traded for consumption (Tasker and Negra, 2007). According to Marwick (2013, p. 13), "a successful neoliberal subject is focused on self-improvement, pays attention to fashions, and purchases goods and services to achieve "self-realization". Individuals feel at ease applying market logics to a variety of spheres of life, such as relationships, parenting, and education. Stated differently, the quintessential neoliberal citizen is an entrepreneur (Marwick, 2013).

According to Gill (2008), neoliberalism and postfeminism have a strong resonance. First, both seem to be shaped by individualism that has nearly completely superseded ideas of the social or political, as well as any belief that an individual is susceptible to external influences, pressures, or limitations. Second, it is evident that the active, free-choice, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism and the autonomous, rational, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism are strikingly similar. These two parallels imply that postfeminism is a sensibility that is at least partially shaped by the ubiquity of neoliberal concepts, rather than just a reaction to feminism. Finally, women are expected to exercise self-control and self-discipline in popular cultural discourse. More so than men, women are expected to improve and change who they are, be in charge of every part of their behaviour, and present every action as something they have freely chosen. In this context, Gill (2008) questioned whether women are designed to be the ideal subjects of neoliberalism, which is inherently gendered, and thus suggested investigating this close relationship further in order to shed light on postfeminist media culture as well as modern neoliberal social relations.

2.5.3 Applicability to Muslim Influencers' Self-Representations

The postfeminist discourses and sensibilities described so far in this section apply to my research about female influencers in Algeria, despite their authors' focus on Western contexts and cultures. First, drawing on Gill (2007), femininity as a bodily property is one of the noticeable features of postfeminist media culture, along with the body being a source of empowerment that requires discipline, altering, and surveillance by spending money to fit in with the restrictive standards of female beauty and femininity. Hijab fashion, or modest fashion, which is also addressed in this, is one example of femininity being a bodily property. Muslim women face pressure to perform an idealised version of femininity in the contexts of postfeminism and neoliberalism, in addition to being pressured to portray Islam positively (Peterson, 2016). The latter is achieved through the representation of women as strong consumers. The consumption skills of the younger female generation are perceived as empowering, as demonstrated by the Muslim Algerian female influencers (see Chapter 3). The financial prosperity and social media visibility of the influencers were perceived as empowering in the context of my research (see Chapter 5).

Second, a focus on self-surveillance and discipline is also observed in my research. Gill (2007) argued that self-surveillance and self-evaluation have long been prerequisites for exhibiting successful femininity. Femininity has always been portrayed in women's magazines as needing examination and hard work. From fixing your makeup to putting together the ideal attire, from throwing a great dinner party to concealing pimples, wrinkles, age spots, or stains, Peterson (2016) argued that the prevalence of influencers` lifestyle videos on YouTube serves as an example of women being pressured to control their behaviour, appearance, and bodies in the postfeminist era. In similar veins, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, Algerian influencers post similar lifestyle videos in which they apply makeup, demonstrate waxing techniques, curate perfect outfits, talk about body transformations, and occasionally even employ aesthetic procedures like Botox or filler. Gill (2007) stated that self-surveillance in postfeminist cultures has intensified but is also presented as something that women have fun or pleasure doing. Magazines provide girls and young women with advice on how to carry on the feminist movement while maintaining an air of complete confidence and being detached from how others see them.

With a focus on individualism, choice, and empowerment, concepts of choice, self-expression, and self-pleasing are fundamental to the postfeminist mindset permeating modern western media culture (Gill, 2007). Gill (2007) argued that women are portrayed as independent, free from hierarchical inequalities, and that their practices are a free choice. Similarly, portraying the self as powerful and independent was also a major theme in this thesis (see Chapter 5). Some of the Algerian influencers portray themselves as strong, independent women with the freedom to select their lifestyles. However, the followers and participants I interviewed questioned the authenticity of the influencers' online personas. First, given Algeria's dire economic circumstances, they questioned the lavish lifestyles they lead. They also questioned some of their fashion choices and lifestyles, which were perceived as going against the conservative and Muslim culture in Algeria. Collectively, these criticisms demonstrate that despite influencers' idealised, empowered portrayals, economic, patriarchal, and religious constraints still exist. In Algerian society, women's lives are still hindered by religion, patriarchy, and traditions (refer to Chapters 5, 6, and 7).

Furthermore, this research focuses on both veiled and unveiled Algerian female influencers. The mixture provides a wide variety of femininities. As I will explain in Chapter 3, Algerian influencers use identical self-branding and microcelebrity strategies that other influencers use, including western ones. Therefore, I argue that postfeminism intersects with the influencers self-representations in the Algerian context, considering that self-branding is a fundamental logic of postfeminism and neoliberalism (Duffy, 2010; Senft, 2013; Marwick, 2013; Duffy and Hund, 2015; Dobson, 2015).

2.6. Audiences and Audience Research

As my research focuses on the audiences of Algerian social media influencers, in this section I turn to media audience research, and debates about the roles of audiences.

2.6.1 The History of Media Audience Research

The term audience refers to “a situated role that people temporarily perform” (Butsch, 2008,

p.3). Traditionally in media research, audiences were seen as crowds or publics, and other masses of people (Butsch, 2008). In Western terms, using the term 'the public' to refer to an audience denotes positive values and democracy, whereas terms like 'the crowd' or 'the masses' have negative connotations (Butsch and Livingston, 2013). However, Livingstone (2003) argues that these divisions are no longer appropriate for contemporary societies, in which audiences are publics, users, fans, and followers (Mathioudakis and Koudas, 2009; Livingstone, 2015; Gillian, 2016). Gillian (2016) states that 'audience' refers to people who watch particular media content, while 'fans' engage actively with various media. Fans are not only those who watch a specific programme, they are those who express and share their feelings and ideas about that programme (Jenkins, 1988). Audiences as users are thus perceived as engaging actively with content, whether by being selective or sharing views (Livingstone, 1999).

Over the years, the field of media audience research has seen many different opinions in terms of how audiences construct meaning, the degree to which media influence their audiences, and the broader relationship between media and their audiences (Katz, 1980; Livingstone, 2015). Livingstone (2003) argues that audience research tends to take one of two stances: liberal and critical. In the liberal approach, audiences in Western developed communities acquire knowledge and common cultural values through their contact with media (Livingstone, 2003). Critical researchers view audiences as consumers controlled by influential media organisations, manipulated politically and/or exploited by commercial businesses (Livingstone, 2003).

In the 20th century, the development of broadcasting resulted in debates about how media may affect people and communities, as well as its effects on politics. Initially, many scholars held a deterministic view of media (Butsch, 2011), believing that media had a strong impact on audiences, and thus implying the latter's passivity (O'Neil, 2011) with audiences being only consumers of media messages (Gillian, 2016). However, the media's impact (direct or indirect) on individuals is a complex matter, as most people self-select their exposure to media content (Bird, 2003; Livingstone, 2003; Moe et al., 2016). Investigating how audiences engage in media therefore requires not only consideration of the diversity of people's individual choices

with regard to media consumption, but also attention to socio-economic status, gender, class, race, and to people's spare time and labour activities (Livingstone, 2003; Moe et al., 2016).

In the 1970s, scholars started to perceive audiences as active agents with the power to select media content (Webster, 1988), and in 1980, a change occurred in the field with the introduction of the encoding/decoding model of communication coined by Hall (1980). Encoding refers to the production of a message, and decoding is the process through which audiences understand such messages (Hall, 1980). Hall's model introduced a new theory that articulated this process to highlight how media audiences actively engage with media messages, rather than being passive receivers (Hall, 1980). Hall's theory advanced the study of decoding positions and remains highly influential in audience research (Cavalcante, 2018). According to the model, audiences decode media messages either by agreeing with a message (preferred reading), opposing it (oppositional reading), or negotiating its meaning (negotiated reading) (Hall, 1980).

However, Hall's model has several limitations (Pillai, 1992). The argument that decoding has only the three previously mentioned positions does not recognise the fact that a text may have multiple meanings and possible interpretations (Wren-Lewis, 1983). Furthermore, the decoding positions were only theoretically, rather than empirically, developed, which is argued to diminish their validity (Morley, 1992). Thus, for audience researchers, the supposition that the process of decoding is confined only to three positions was problematic (Pillai, 1992). Furthermore, individuals may simply decline to engage with media content, thus completely bypassing the decoding process (Morley, 2006).

In the field of media, researcher adherence to this model and the heavy focus on TV audiences has inhibited the development of audience research for a long period, as media researchers investigated the influence of primarily news media on audiences (Livingstone, 1999; 2015; Cavalcante, 2018, Barker, 2006), adopting ethnography as their preferred methodology (Morley, 2006; Gillian, 2016). However, the spread of soap operas, talk shows, and reality TV programmes all required researchers to develop new perceptions of audiences as important cultural actors (Hill, 2002; Livingston, 2012). The following section will discuss how the focus of audience research shifted with the emergence of digital media and Web 2.

2.6.2. Audience Research, Web 2.0, and Digital Media

2.6.2.1 Audiences in the age of digital media

The rise of Web 2.0 has altered how individuals interact with the media, and audiences have also become the producers of media messages (Nightingale and Dawyer, 2007; Gross, 2009; Bird, 2011). Social media has thus created a shift in the role of audiences in terms of audience research (Bird, 2011). Scholars believe that these modern audiences of digital media are generally active users (Bailey, 2002; Cover, 2004; Shefrin, 2004). While this is not necessarily a new position, digital media audiences are imagined to be 'active' in a particular way, in that they have become *creators* of digital content in more sophisticated and widespread ways (Livingstone, 2012), as my discussion of the rise of social media influencers above indicates. The growth of the internet therefore prompted scholars to reposition audience research, introducing new concepts and debates into the field (Das, 2017). For example, audience research in the age of social media requires researchers to reconsider their methods (Athique, 2018). Researchers in the field of media (Livingstone, 2005; Gray, 2017) have determined that different methods for audience research are required; these methods should acknowledge that audiences are different, that media content can be interpreted differently, and that social environment is a crucial factor affecting how people employ media and the consequences of such use.

Reviewing the state of media audience research in 2006, Barker (2006) stated that while progress has been made, the field of audience research was not flourishing. Audiences are important, yet media scholars still do not focus on them, and fundamental questions about audiences had still not been answered (Morley, 2006; Livingstone, 2015). In particular, specific audiences in different locations and contexts had not been investigated (Livingstone, 2015). Furthermore, media researchers tend to apply the context of one culture to another, ignoring the fact that individuals decode media messages differently based on aspects including culture (Morley, 2006). Specifically, audience research is fundamentally focused on Western audiences (Takahashi, 2007). Accordingly, investigating the audiences (online and off) of social media influencers in Algeria - a Muslim, Arabic, and multicultural country - should contribute to de-Westernising audience research by filling a gap in the field. The benefit of a de-

Westernising strategy with regard to audience research is the acknowledgement that audiences in different contexts are diverse (Barker, 2006).

2.6.2.2 The Emergence of Participatory Culture

In this section, I discuss participatory culture as a key theoretical concept associated with my research, a term usually used to refer to followers who actively engage with content and its creators.

Participatory culture is frequently used to describe how users, audiences, customers, and fans are involved in the production of culture and content, such as co-editing a Wikipedia article, posting photos to Facebook or Flickr, sharing YouTube videos, and writing posts on Twitter or Weibo (Fuchs, 2013). According to Jenkins (2007), in a participatory culture, there are fewer barriers to artistic and content creation as well as civic participation than in previous cultural formations. Content creation and sharing are encouraged, and participants in participatory cultures not only feel that their efforts are important but also have a sense of social relationship with one another—at least enough to be concerned about what others think of their creations. Jenkins (2006) mentioned three trends that interact to shape participatory culture: modern technological tools that allow the annotation, recording, appropriation, and publication of media content; the promotion of the do-it-yourself (DIY) media genre; and companies that require more engaged forms of visual content, stories, and pictures via diverse media platforms.

Some scholars have criticised the concept of participatory culture. Fuchs (2013) argued that participatory culture downplays issues relating to platform and company ownership. Corporations that own platforms such as Facebook and Google heavily mediate Internet users' cultural expressions, and the commercial decisions of the companies are not made in the interests of Internet users (Fuchs, 2013).Fuchs (2013) argued that most of Jenkin`s work about participatory culture claims that contemporary media empowers consumers, who in turn successfully defy corporate control, thus ignoring corporate hegemony in popular culture or online.

Jenkins (2008) also argued that participatory culture can possibly enable cultural diversity by offering diverse communities the possibility of participation where barriers are reduced. Fuchs (2013), however, claimed that this statement fails to acknowledge that not all voices are equally powerful, and voices and content may be marginalised due to the fact that visibility online controlled by powerful companies. Writing about media roles and participation, Carpentier (2007) asserted that it is important to understand the distinction between participation “in” and "through" media. Participation “in” media involves non-professional individuals creating content and making structural decisions. The possibilities for broad engagement in public discourse and for self-representation in public domains are addressed by participation "through" the media. Neither of these options is open to all. Therefore, individual participation in media, as Fuchs (2013) and Carpentier (2007) explained, is not necessarily equal.

Another way in which Jenkins concept of participatory culture is viewed as reductionist is because it ignores the influence of capitalism (Fush, 2013). Modern digital media and social media platforms are inherently capitalist in that they promote creativity, which in turn commodifies the users, through the monetization and exploitation of their work and their data (Fush, 2013). Verstraete (2011) further contended that a detailed examination of the term "participation" is often absent. Jenkins (2014) affirmed the need for a more thorough understanding of the many mechanisms of involvement associated with the concept of participation.

Finally, in a similar vein, Turner (2011, p. 686), argued that the literature about participatory culture has projected realities that do not exist, and as a result, when the term first emerged, it was "about 20 percent fact and 80 percent speculative fiction." The arguments made regarding the importance of participatory culture were thought by some to be exaggerated, For Turner, one problem was the danger of extrapolating generalisations from particular markets (Turner, 2011). As I show in the paragraphs that follow, there are particular conditions which impact upon particular people’s – in my case, young women’s - ability to participate in digital media cultures. The circumstances include some Islamic practices, cultural norms, and patriarchy that are deeply ingrained in Algerian culture (see Chapters 6 and 7). However, they also have an impact on how women participate in creating content online. In many cases, the previous factors hinder or diminish women` participation in digital media creations.

Nevertheless, the content and the comments related to my research are somehow interactive and participatory. As demonstrated in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, social media platforms provided a space for the influencers to create content and for followers to participate in discussions regarding the influencers in various ways, as the first research question of this thesis investigates (What are Algerian women's attitudes towards female Algerian social media influencers?). Through the participatory nature of the influencers` content and the followers` comments, I was able to identify certain attitudes about the influencers.

Not surprisingly, the data I collected on social media shows that influencers and followers interact with each other. Some influencers respond to their followers comments by answering the followers` questions about brand names or the application of products. Some influencers also respond to comments to show appreciation for their followers by praising their content, their dress, or their beauty. In the data, there was also some interaction between the followers. The vast majority of the interaction was with followers answering other followers` comments about products. On YouTube for example, followers answer each other's inquiries about product names, where to acquire specific products, how to use specific products, or to give their opinions about specific goods or services they have used. For example, followers who had tested a beauty product advised others to purchase it or not. In some instances, the followers also engaged in a conversation about the influencer's dress or hijab choice. The majority were critical, and only a few of them advocated for the influencers' freedom to choose their own attire. A few influencers admitted that they remove hateful or critical comments from their posts. Some influencers acknowledged shutting down the comment sections in response to followers who actively offer criticism on various aspects of their appearances and styles. For example, the influencer @shirineboutella has many times acknowledged being a victim of cyberbullying. The influencers admitted that the harsh criticism she receives from her community pushed her to even restrain from posting on social media for several months.

2.6.3 Gender and Audience Research

Feminist media scholars have shown how some forms of media , like women`s magazines or soap operas, are culturally perceived to be 'feminine'. In section two of this chapter, I explained how the influencer domain is also highly feminized. Digital media in modern capitalist societies uses aspirational labour structures to engage women and "ensure that female participants remain immersed in the highly feminized consumption of branded goods" (Duffy 2015, p. 3). In addition, many feminists have argued that various media productions, such as soap operas and women's magazines, are categorized as feminine and thus intended to female audiences (Hall et al., 2013). Regarding the feminization of digital media productions, similar claims have been made (Duffy, 2015; Abidin, 2016).

With the emergence of social media platforms, audiences become active users and are conceptualized as "commodity audiences", because they are viewed as potential consumers in the target market of many companies (Shepherd, 2013). In section three, I explained how women integrate modern labour on social media through self-branding. The concept of women`s visibility online is indeed seen as empowerment, but because their participation in media production requires a degree of self-commodification, their participation confirms the presumption that women are consumers of particular gendered media productions mainly fashion and beauty (Duffy, 2015).

Investigating how audiences engage requires not only close consideration of cultural diversity, but also an awareness of the effects of socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, class, race, and spare time and labour activities (Livingstone, 2005; Moe et al., 2016). Therefore, investigating the attitudes of young Algerian women towards Algerian influencers will contribute to understanding how audiences engage with new media since several studies have been undertaken on Muslim social media influencers and their audiences have not been addressed.

2.7. Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that Western and Algerian women were often represented as inferior to men in traditional media. The negative representations of women in traditional media are argued to have shifted to more positive ones thanks to women's self-representations on social media. Women now engage in microcelebrity practices and create a form of celebrity capital by becoming different types of internet celebrities such as influencers. Influencers mainly the category of beauty and lifestyle influencers use social media platforms to produce various types of femininities. The visibility of women online was debated by various feminist scholars as women online are often scrutinized, evaluated and judged in various ways.

In the last section about audience research, the chapter showed that exploring audiences requires close consideration of the context under study. The chapter demonstrated that non-Western audiences have not been the focus of much media audience research. investigating the audiences (online and offline) of influencers in Algeria, a Muslim, Arabic country, should contribute to de-westernising audience research by filling a gap in the field as a way to acknowledge the diversity of audiences in different contexts. Furthermore, most research was focused on the Muslim influencers themselves, and their audiences have not been addressed. My research contributes to filling that gap by investigating influencers` audiences (followers) in Algeria. In the following Chapter, I introduce Algeria, veiling and Algerian influencers to provide more context for my research.

Chapter Three: Algerian Social Media Influencers in Context

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides background to the Algerian context, in particular the political sphere and the Family Code, to explain how women's position in Algerian society oscillates between traditionalist and modernist. It also explains how geographical diversity has affected women's everyday roles in Algeria. I then introduce the concepts of traditional and modern modesty and provide a summary of the main veiling practices experienced in some parts of the Muslim world. I do this to understand how followers debate the influencers` veiling practices and how they experience hijab in Algeria. I finish the chapter by introducing the influencers who were the focus of my research. Despite the fact that my research focuses on followers, it is necessary to provide a context and a background for the influencers to situate them and pave the way into the following chapters.

3.2 Politics and the Family Code in Algeria

The first independent Algerian state came into being in 1962 under President Ahmed Ben Bella, at which time the National Liberation Front (FLN) was the dominant political movement (Potter, 1994). From 1965 to 1978, Houari Boumediene, the second president, presided over the growth of the country's economy, fuelled by oil and gas revenues (Potter, 1994). However, after Chadli Benjedid became president in 1979, the economic situation regressed: the country's income dropped from $13 billion per year to $8 billion in 1985, creating a severe economic crisis (Potter, 1994). This caused an increase in unemployment, corruption, and education shortages, and also increased the state's dominance of different aspects of the country, including the Algerian media. The Algerian TV and press both came to be controlled and regulated by the Algerian state (Potter, 1994; Hadj-Moussa, 2003).

In response to poor economic conditions, Algerian citizens demonstrated against the government in October 1988 (Potter, 1994; Lazreg, 1994; Vince, 2015). To address the criticisms that led to these demonstrations, in 1989, the president Benjedid established a new constitution that converted the Algerian one-party political system into a multiparty system. The

dominance of the FLN came to an end, and several political resistance movements emerged (Potter, 1994; Addi, 1992).

Among the most influential political movements in the history of Algeria was the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) (Addi, 1992; Potter, 1994; Vince, 2015; Lazreg, 1994). The FIS as a political group was founded in 1989 and aimed to establish a government based on Islamic principles (Potter, 1994; Ghanem,2019), with its main concern being to reject Western principles, traditions, languages, and religions (Croisy, 2008). The party thus also aimed to abolish democracy (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992).

In 1991, the FIS's power increased after local municipal elections. To prevent its victory at a national level, the Algerian military cancelled the elections in late 1991 (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992). Because of this military action, the FIS was dissolved (Potter, 1994). However, Algeria was then torn between democracy and extremist Islam (Samuelson, 1995). The military interruption of elections led the country into a period of violence, terror, and insecurity (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992). In 1992, the FIS's two insurgent armed military groups (the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Salvation Islamic Army (AIS)) performed a violent outbreak in which many people were murdered. Several key places including airports were bombed, and many women were kidnapped and raped (Martin, 2011). The use of force against Algerian local inhabitants caused over 100,000 deaths between 1992 and 1999 (Martin, 2011; Vince, 2015).

Some Algerian scholars, including Djerbal and Ait Hamou (1992) and Croisy (2008), noted that unsatisfactory economic circumstances caused many Algerians to view Islamic values and traditionalism as the solution to the injustice of authority. According to Potter, the FIS's emergence can be seen as demonstrating the Algerian people's lack of faith in the existing regime rather than their desire to construct an Islamic government (Potter, 1994).

The political Islam practised in Algeria during the civil war (1990-2002) was adopted from the middle east, mainly Saudi Arabia, and it is known as Wahhabism (Lazreg,2009; 2021). Wahhabism emerged in the 18th century and is a very conservative and fundamentalist form of Islam associated to the Muslim scholar Mohammed Bin Abdul-Wahhab. Its opponents are called

Salafis (Alrebh,2017). Wahhabism is a form of Islam based on the belief that Islamic religion should be practised strictly without any changes in its origin (Alrebh, 2017). After the civil war in 2002, the Algerian state promoted a new form of Algerian Islam based on Wahhabism, described as being unsusceptible to politics, and not encouraging any form of violence (Lazreg, 2021). This happened as an attempt to replace the previous form of political or radical Islam practised during the civil war and which resulted in violence, mainly towards women (Lazreg, 2021). Political Islam is conceptualised as the use of Islam by Muslim activists for political grounds (Hirschkind, 1997). Thus, after the civil war, the Algerian state adopted a form of moderate or in Arabic "wasatiya" Islam, which views religion as moderate and rejects extremism (Lazreg, 2021).

Following its independence in 1962, Algeria spent 22 years establishing a Family Code as part of this struggle between Muslim fundamentalists and modernists (Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999). The Family Code refers to the set of regulations that determine the direction of families and marriages in Algeria (Metz, 1993). The first attempt to establish a Family Code was undertaken behind closed doors in 1981, by the national commission of the FLN (Lazreg, 1994). The principles it declared were contradictory to the fundamental laws of the constitution of 1976 (Lazreg, 1994; Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999), including stating that women could not initiate divorce, having the right "to ask for divorce" only in situations such as lack of financial support, physical abuse, or sexual disease (Lazreg, 1994). Further, Article 39 stated that women were subject to their husbands and could not receive financial compensation after divorce. It also required authorisation from the fathers to become caretakers of their children (Smail Salhi, 2003). Polygamy was legitimized for men (Article 8), and they retained the right to divorce or repudiate their wives without any particular cause (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992).

According to Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar (1999), this Family Code worsened the position of Algerian women, reducing their liberty and professional opportunities, and making them subject to unfair marriage and divorce impositions. At its core, it gave men substantial power over women (Lazreg, 1994). Despite authorities maintaining that the Family Code emanated from Islamic principles, some commentators argued that it originated from the patriarchal nature of Algerian society and the misogynistic character of the country, representing an

attempt to reinstate the social relations of a past epoch (Smail-Salhi, 2003). Women's rights were thus lost to traditionalism (Lazreg, 1994) in this version of the Family Code.

In response, Algerian women demonstrated against the Family Code in 1981. In June 1984, it was implemented with only minor amendments to its articles (Lazreg, 1994). Article 7 set the legal age for marriage at 16 for females and 18 for males; polygamy became possible only with justification and the agreement of the first wife; and a woman could not marry without the consent of a guardian, such as a father or judge (Lazreg, 1994). Repudiation was still official, though a divorced woman was given her children's guardianship, up to the age of 16 for boys and 18 for girls in cases where she did not remarry. The father was also obliged to provide expenses for his children in case of divorce. Women were also no longer required to gain consent from their husbands to work (Lazreg, 1994). The political change and Family Code described above had several consequences for women in Algeria, which I turn to in the next section. In the following table, I present a timeline of the major political events in Algerian history:

1962	Independence, first Algerian state comes into being under the FLN political part
1965 - 1978	Houari Boumediene presides over the country
1979	The election of Chadli Benjedid as the president of Algeria
1981	Establishment of the first Family Code and women protest against it
1984	The Algerian state established a new version of the family code
1985	Economic crisis under the president Chadli Benjedid presidency
1988	Riots against the country`s poor economic situation
1989	Establishing a new constitution and converting the Algerian one-party political system into a multiparty system
1989	Emergence of the FIS as a resistance political movement
1991	The FIS winning Municipal elections
1991	The Algerian military cancelling the election of the FIS in late 1991
1992-2002	Algerian civil war

Table 1: The main political events in Algeria's history

3.3 The Effects of Politics and the Family Code on Algerian Women

Since Algerian independence in 1962, the FLN has invited women to be active participants in education and manufacturing (Slyomovics, 1995). In terms of politics, a small number of women have been integrated into minor political parties (Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999). However, while members of the Algerian state ostensibly invited women to help reconstruct the country, their presence was negligible: only ten out of 194 members in the first National Assembly meeting in 1962 were women, and this declined to only two out of 138 members in the second National Assembly meeting in the same year (Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999). Furthermore, the stated desire to include women in education and industry was not supported by fundamentalist Muslims (Slyomovics, 1995), who aimed to reinstate a patriarchal system to guarantee male domination, as liberated women were seen to represent modernity (Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar, 1999; Slyomovics, 1995). Despite the desire of traditionalists in Algeria to maintain the role of women as homemakers, however, the economic problems of the period forced them into work (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992).

Furthermore, thanks to worldwide industrialisation, increases in educational opportunities, and their rights under the constitution, a minority of women had access to workplaces that men had abandoned, such as universities and the medical and judicial professions (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992). Nevertheless, in 1990, Algerian women's rights were still heavily restricted. Only 8% were employed whereas, in comparable countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, the proportion of women in employment was 25% (Djerbal and Ait Hamou, 1992).
In 1991, the situation for Algerian women became even more complex as they became the victims of both religious and secular extremists (Slyomovics, 1995). The FIS prevented unveiled and employed women from entering public spaces, except for mosques (Slyomovics, 1995). Simultaneously, veiled women were victimised by the Organisation of Free Young Algerians (OJAL), the FLN's secular wing. The members of this organisation invited unveiled women to visit all the public locations that the FIS had placed off-limits (Slyomovics, 1995). The conflict between the FIS and the state was a competition for power, and the FIS relied on extremist Islamic principles while the state offered a secular ideology at this particular time in Algeria's history (Samuelson, 1995). A power battle thus emerged from a combination of patriarchy, cultural beliefs, and extremist Islamic views (Mebtouche Nedjai, 2013).

Despite these struggles which took place after Algeria's independence after 1962, Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar (1999) argue that the situation for women progressed during that time – the 1963 constitution clearly announced equality between the sexes, as did the 1989 constitution. Presidents Ben Bella (1962-1965) and Boumediene (1965 to 1978) insisted on the importance of women in the reconstruction of Algeria (Vince, 2015). Amrane-Minne and Abu-Haidar (1999) note that women had the right to work, were protected from discrimination and had the right to equal pay. More recently in Algeria, statistics for the Inter-parliamentary Union suggest that in 2018, around 26% of participants in the Algerian lower chamber parliament (National People's Assembly) were female, as were 7% of upper chamber participants (Council of the Nation).

Thus, throughout the history of modern Algeria, women's lives have been shaped by battles between traditionalism and modernism, the consequences of which have affected how women have lived for many years, myself included. This picture of contested ideologies forms the context for the current research, as these oppositional ideologies inform Algerian women's attitudes towards social media influencers, including their veiling/dress practices.

3.4 Dress, Veiling and Modesty in the Muslim World

The context described above plays a major role in shaping the experiences of Muslim women in Algeria, particularly with regard to the notion of modesty. This section reviews the concept of modesty by introducing the Islamic dress code and traditional and modern notions of modesty. It then reviews the politics of veiling and its significance in various parts of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region to understand how modesty is constructed in different Muslim countries. Finally, it explains veiling and dress in relation to influencers, and then provides a summary of how veiling is perceived in Algerian society. This provides context for understanding how followers view the practices of veiling among influencers and how women from three different Algerian cities experience veiling in their specific geographical environment.

3.4.1 What is Islamic Veiling?

Islamic veiling is a religious practice which underpins notions of and debates about modesty (Lewis, 2015). Shariah, which refers to the fundamental laws of Islam that emanate from both the Quran and the prophet's traditions (hadiths), established a dress code comprising a set of rules that women should respect as an act of worship and devotion to God. According to the Islam Web (2022), the instructions about Islamic veiling that women are required to respect are as follows: first, women must cover the whole body except the face and hands. Garments should be loose-fitting and non-transparent, meaning that they should be thick and opaque so as not to display skin colour or the form of the body. Women's appearance should be modest, without flashy clothes. Furthermore, women's clothes should not imitate other people's faiths or men's clothing to show they are proud of their femininity and religious identity. The Islamic dress code forbids extravagant clothes, to discourage vanity and humiliation. Finally, make-up is not allowed in public or in front of non-mahram men. Mahram men are members of the family with whom marriage would be considered illegal, such as brothers, uncles, and grandfathers. In general, women can be unveiled and wear make-up only in front of mahram men.

Nevertheless, what constitutes appropriate Islamic dress, and the definition of modesty are contested (Tarlo, 2010; Tarlo and Moor, 2013). Islam does not provide specific instructions about what is considered Islamic or non-Islamic forms of veiling and clothes. As a result, interpretations of modesty are open and diverse (Siraj, 2011; Lewis, 2013). Islam provides some instructions on the characteristics of an Islamic dress, including covering the hair and the neck or wearing loose and non-flashy outfits, but does not indicate whether a Muslim woman should wear a dress instead of a skirt, for example. Consequently, the different dress types of Muslim women across the Islamic world are mostly influenced by the customs and traditions of the country (Tarlo, 2010).

The complexity of the concept of Islamic modesty has resulted in the emergence of different types of Islamic dresses and veiling styles (Tarlo, 2010). It has been demonstrated (see for example Tarlo, 2010; Lewis, 2013; Bucar, 2016) that veiling practices in the Muslim world are diverse and complex, highlighting that veiling is not simply a personal dressing style, a gender

norm, or a political hallmark, but rather a combination of several elements (El Guindi, 1999; Tarlo, 2010; Bucar, 2016). What's more, in Islam, modesty is not only applied to clothes or the external appearances of both men and women, but it also sets other standards like behaviour, speech, actions, and lifestyle (Boulanouar, 2006). As a consequence of the variation outlined above, veiling exists in different forms and styles across the Muslim world and some Western countries (El-Geledi and Bourhis, 2012; Hoodfar, 2003). Veiling or a veil can refer to the hijab, which entails covering the body and the hair without the face, or to other styles such as the niqab, which entails covering the full face without the eyes, or the burqa, which hides the full face including the eyes (Everett et al., 2015). Another style is the chador, which is generally a long black cloak covering the head and the body (Amer, 2014) (see examples in Figure 1):

Figure 1: Types of veiling in Islam.

Source: EUdebates Team, January 2023.

For my study, I use the term hijab to refer to a style of veiling that covers the head and neck without covering the face. This was the term most frequently used by my participants. For the new forms of veiling that some influencers practice, including modest fashion, I refer to them as the modern hijab. This particular term emerged in both the qualitative content analysis and the interview data to refer to any type of hijab that is not strictly Islamic, or that modifies the Islamic dress code in any form.

3.4.2 Debates about the Origins of Traditional Modesty in Islam

In Islam, veiling is believed to be a religious practice established by the Quran (Syed, 2010). The Quran mentions veiling and women`s dress in two main verses. The first one is:

> O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their jilbab over their persons (when abroad): this is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is oft forgiving, most merciful (The Qur'an, 33: 59).

The second verse is:

> And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their khumur over their bosoms and not display their beauty. . . And that they should not strike their feet to draw attention to their hidden ornaments (The Qur'an, 24: 31).

According to Ruby (2006), the Arabic word used in the first verse is jilbab (in English, outer clothes), and in the second verse is khomoore, a word derived from khimar (translated into English as veiled or covered). These two verses, including the two words khimar and jilbab, are the foundation Muslim scholars used to create an Islamic dress code (Barlas, 2019). Muslim scholars argue that veiling must be worn by Muslim women to avoid creating fitnah, which translates to temptation in English (Roald, 2001). Nevertheless, the words khimar and jilbab have different meanings (Ruby, 2006; Lazreg, 2009). Some Muslim scholars believe that jilbab and khimar mean covering the body without the eyes, whereas others believe that women should cover all their body parts except the face and the hands (Ruby, 2006).

Scholars like Mernissi (1987), Amer (2014) and El Saadawi (2015) have argued that the practice of veiling is a tradition that existed before the emergence of Islam in the seventh century. In the early stages of Islam, women are believed to have left their faces uncovered while in public (El Saadawi, 2015). In essence, modesty was initiated to protect women from sexual exploitation (Syed, 2010). According to Amer (2014), veiling evolved in the Assyrian Empire in 1200 BCE. In the Assyrian Empire, women's dressing styles were used to evaluate their status in society as well as their sexual practices. Female slaves and non-married prostitutes were

the only women who moved in public without veiling. As such, veiling was associated with women with high social status (Amer, 2014).

3.4.3 Veiling: Devotion or Oppression?

Women's veiling has been conceptualized into two contrasting ways (Khan, 2014). Feminists, including local and Western feminists, often associate veiling with oppression (Bhowon and Bundhoo, 2016). This perspective proposes that women who dress modestly and follow the Islamic dress code are compelled to do so or pressured by their social environment (Amer, 2014; Abu-Lughod, 2015). Other scholars, mainly Muslim scholars (see for example Abu-Lughod, 2015), argue that veiling in all its forms is a practice of choice (Brown, 2012).

The existence of multiple interpretations of the Quran verses reflects the complexity of modesty and Muslim dress and their openness to various interpretations (Lazreg, 2009). Ruby (2006) argues that modesty was initially introduced in Islam for women's protection, as I explained above. However, after the death of the prophet Muhamad, the concept of modesty was interpreted through a patriarchal lens (Syed, 2010). According to Barlas (2019), Quranic texts are polysemous, and people tend to confuse them with their tafsir. After the death of the prophet Muhammad, the Quran was reinterpreted using formal language to aid in the understanding of the Quranic writings, which is known as Tafsir. It is important to note that the interpretations and translations of the Islamic texts in the history of Islam are undertaken by men (Barlas, 2019). This results in men using the Islamic religion to support their own rights and needs (Mernissi, 1991).

Lazreg (2009), for example, argues that the previous Quranic verses never mentioned the word modesty. Furthermore, the interpretation of the verses is context-dependent, and how they are translated from Arabic to other languages differs (Lazreg, 2009). Barlas (2019) suggested that some readers may interpret the first verse as an instruction to the Prophet`s wives only, thus limiting wearing a jilbab to these women alone (Barlas, 2019). Khaled (2001) criticized the fact that many Muslim scholars relate the word fitnah, which means temptation, to women's sexuality, which is believed to be expressed through women being unveiled publicly. He argued that the word fitnah in the Quran is used for other temptations, including, for

example, money. As a result, associating women's sexuality with men's fitnah is arguably inaccurate and denies the fact that men also have some responsibility for controlling their sexual desires (Khaled, 2001) – this is evident in the fact that Islam instructs men to be modest and lower their gaze when interacting with women (Ruby, 2006).

Other scholars (see, for example, Mernissi, 1991; Lazreg, 2009) argue that veiling is not an obligation in Islam. They argued that the verses of the Quran which mention veiling refer only to Muslim women of the Jahili period: that which came before the revelation of the Qur'an for the prophet Muhammad in Islam. The Jahili period is characterized by communities based on owning slaves used veiling to distinguish between free veiled Muslim women and slaves subject to sexual and other abuse. In this context, veiling became an emblem for honour, modesty and respect (Mernissi, 1991; Barlas, 2019; Lazreg, 2009; Gerner, 2015). Muslim women could thus avoid sexual abuse by men only if they covered up (Barlas, 2019).

Applying the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts to the concept of modesty, women`s mobility and visibility are restricted by these understandings of modesty (Mernissi, 1987; Syed, 2008). Patriarchal interpretations of modesty have multiple consequences, including gender segregation and the restriction of women`s involvement in public sectors such as employment.

Some Muslim scholars consider veiling to be a form of oppression for women, as covering the body leads to oppression of the self (Mernissi, 1991; Lazreg, 2009). Veiling is viewed as a sign of gender inequality that marginalizes women and gives men unwarranted and unearned power (Mernissi, 1991; Lazreg, 2009). As veiling is argued to protect women from sexual abuse and to help them avoid attracting men, in some societies women are subsequently obliged to disappear from public space, at least visually (Lazreg, 2009; Addi, 2005).

3.4.4 Veiling in the Muslim World: Conflicts between Traditionalism and Modernism

Modernity is a term used to describe modern societies or industrial civilizations (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p. 94). According to Giddens and Pierson (1998), modernity is characterised by three main aspects. First, a belief that human intervention can change the world. Second, a network of financial institutions centred on market economies and industrial production. Third, modernity also relates to a variety of political structures, such as mass democracy and

the nation-state. On the other hand, Weber (1946) claims that the hallmark of modernity is the substitution of a religious and cosmological worldview for a secular one. My research focuses on representations and perceptions of the hijab in its different forms, which is a crucial religious practice in Islam, and as such introducing the concept of modernity is crucial.

In light of these debates about modernity, many scholars addressed Islam and modernity. As noted by Zoubir (2015), western literature about Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries has explored whether Islam is incapable of adopting modern and democratic lifestyles (Salvatore, 2009). According to Hunter (2015), there are two main competing interpretations of Islam in the Islamic world today: one discourse is referred to as liberal or reformist Islam – these could be defined as modern – while the other is called conservative, traditionalist, or literalist Islam. Some reformists believe that the core of the Islamic religion should be preserved, thus limiting the reinterpretation to Islamic laws that do not meet the requirements of modern Muslim societies. Others, broaden the scope for rereading fundamental Islamic texts in light of novel situations and drastically revising or even abolishing Islamic laws they deem antiquated and inapplicable to the needs and goals of contemporary Muslims. In the 19th and 20th centuries, women`s clothes also became a major source of dispute between modernizers and traditionalists in the Muslim world (Laborde, 2006). Throughout this thesis, I will refer to any form of hijab that does not adhere to the Islamic dress code as “modern hijab”. Modern hijabs refer to hijab styles that have been modified via the use of modern fashionable or trendy clothes. Modern in the context of hijab aligns with fashion (fashion hijabs). I will discuss the topic of fashion hijab and modest hijab in the following sections.

3.4.4.1 Hijab, Modernity and Fashion

As I previously mentioned, in the Muslim world, women's clothing has been a major source of conflict. Modernist discourses in countries such as Turkey and Iran denounce the oppressive and outdated practice of veiling as a powerful symbol of numerous antiquated restrictions on women's freedom, whereas traditionalists in countries such as Egypt strive to resist the forces of modernization and maintain (or recreate) an idealised Muslim community (Haddad and Esposito, 1998; Moghadam, 2003). According to Rahmana (2018), modernity also manifests in less strict styles of hijab, according to Muslim reformists, and thus signals a

gradual departure from customs. The main concern in such debates is that women who give in to temptation and become corrupted into “modern”, nonnative lifestyles are held accountable for not upholding the honour of the group (men) (Laborde, 2006). The debate over whether the modern hijab is fundamentally non-Islamic or violates the essence of the Islamic dress code—that is, modesty—is what initially sparked the earlier concerns.

Since 2000, with the emergence of the internet and digital media, new forms of Islamic modesty, have been produced (Lewis, 2015). In recent years, many Muslim women have demonstrated their stylish modern interpretations of the hijab by pairing it with modern clothes (Nistor, 2017). The fashionable styles that some Muslim women wear are referred to as “hijab fashion” (Hassan and Harun, 2016) and “modest fashion” (Lewis, 2015). Muslim women are adopting contemporary Western fashion with other styles from the Muslim world, i.e., they are fashionizing the Islamic dress code to make themselves look more modern (Woldesemait, 2012). According to Grine and Saeed (2017), due to the influence of contemporary clothing fashion, the hijab has experienced new developments through construction and deconstruction. The construction of the hijab manifests in the variety of modern styles that have emerged, while its deconstruction occurs when the hijab is reinstated to comply with the requirements of the traditional Islamic dress code (Grine and Saeed, 2017).

Fashion and its association with Western modernity became visible in Islamic dress practices, and the traditional modest Islamic dressing began to exist alongside more fashionable forms (Moors, 2013; Saeed et al., 2020). As a result, veiling became modernized to align with modern times and fashion trends (Karakavak and Özbölük, 2022). The modernization of veiling resulted in a huge increase in Muslim fashion blogs and the emergence of female Muslim influencers (Peterson, 2016).

Modest fashion, or Islamic fashion, refers to the combination of Islamic dress practices with modern fashion (Gökariksel and Secor, 2013; Lewis, 2007, 2013). Islamic fashion consumerism aims to satisfy individuals who desire to practice their religion but simultaneously detach themselves from secular fashion and dress practices (Sandikci, 2017). Islamic consumerism includes, for example, halal products, services and fashionable clothes (Hassan and Harun, 2016). Halal in Arabic refers to products that Islamic laws allow to be used, and haram includes

all the products that Islam forbids (Sugibayashi et al., 2019). Halal beauty products are free from certain ingredients such as pigs, dead animals, blood, human organs, carnivorous animals, and reptiles (Sugibayashi et al., 2019).

As I explained in Chapters one and three of this thesis, to achieve modesty, Muslim women are expected to cover their hair and hide their body shape with loose clothes; their overall appearance should be modest and not flashy. The traditional Islamic clothes all over the Muslim world include, for example, abayas (see Chapter 7 for more details), jilbabs (see Chapter 6 for details), and niqabs (see Chapter 3 for details), in addition to other types of clothes such as the Malaysian, Indonesian, and Thai "baju kurung", which is a loose-fitting, full-length dress with a skirt and blouse. In Algeria, the most common types of hijabs are jilbabs, long, loose dresses, long skirts, and loose blouses with loose trousers. On the other hand, fashionable hijab includes styles and attire that do not fulfil the requirements of the Islamic dress code. For example, wearing bright colours, exposing some hair underneath the headscarf, wearing a turban that doesn't cover the neck, pairing a headscarf with tight clothes such as jeans and t-shirts, and applying a lot of makeup.

In discussion about Islamic dress codes, modesty and fashion are often situated as binary concepts (Moors and Tarlo, 2013). Here, fashion is perceived to be dynamic, whereas religion is viewed as a fixed system of beliefs within a cultural environment (Nestorovic, 2016). Hijab fashion draws inspiration from the newest developments in mainstream fashion (Hassan and Harun, 2016). Therefore, while modern fashion frequently encourages people to show off their beauty and attractiveness through clothing, Islam instructs women to be modest by covering their body and hair and hiding their beauty in public to avoid men's stares (Nestorovic, 2016; Karakavak and Özbölük, 2022).

Fashion is a term used to describe popular and widely accepted styles (Ara, 2021). Fashion is a constant stylistic shift in clothing (Parkins and Sheehan, 2012). Fashion is a dynamic process that generates cultural meanings and interactions (Niinimaki, 2010). Many of the shifts that have come to characterise modernity, such as the expansion of popular media and visual culture and the rise of mass production and consumption, are entwined with fashion (Parkins and Sheehan, 2012).Modernity' is dynamic and is characterised by the need for change,

especially those of modern industrial capitalism, which can be seen in the non-conventional styles expressed in fashion in modern days (Wilson, 2003). Therefore, modernity and fashion can be defined by their shared emphasis on continual change (Wilson, 2003). Under the modernization of veiling, its religious meaning may be altered (Saeed and Grine, 2017). The meaning of veiling thus changes from a religious practice to a fashion trend (Almila, 2016; El-Bassiouny, 2018).

In the context of this discussion about fashion and modernity, hijab fashion or modest fashion, I will refer to any style of hijab that does not meet the traditional Islamic dress code as "modern hijab" throughout this thesis. In this thesis, modern hijab is used to describe any form of hijab style that is new and trendy in Algerian society. Modern hijabs denote the forms of hijab styles that were altered by using trendy or fashionable clothes. I use the term modern hijab because, in the Algerian context, trendy hijab styles are referred to as "حجاب عصري", which translates into "modern hijab in English".

3.4.5 Dress, Hijab and Muslim Female Influencers

Several studies have focused on Muslim social media influencers (see for example Gökarıksel and Secor, 2010; Lewis, 2010; Jafari and Süerdem, 2012; Hassim, 2014; Peterson, 2016; Pennington, 2018; Warren, 2018; Mas'udah, 2018; Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018). The focus of the existing literature is on how Muslim social media influencers specifically engage in social media activities to create modern representations of Muslim women. By wearing colourful and modern fashion, it has been argued that some Muslim influencers attempt to dispel the negative representations of veiling and portray themselves as integral members of society with a strong sense of fashion (Gökarıksel and Secor, 2009).

Muslim influencers are believed to engage in social media activities in an attempt to create new and modern identities for Muslim women. Some Muslim influencers associate fashion with Islamic modesty as a self-identity construction process to shape how Muslim women are represented (Jones, 2010; Beta and Hum, 2011; Kamel, 2014). This new Muslim female identity is created through teaching Islamic values with the combination of other concepts such as modesty and beauty (Gökarıksel and Secor, 2010). They use online spaces to communicate

their opinions and redefine the negative dominant discourses and stereotypes about Muslim women and veiling (Piela, 2013; Hassim, 2014). For example, in a study of two popular Muslim social media influencers on YouTube (Amena Khan and Dina Torkia), Peterson (2016) argued that these influencers combine Westernized beauty practices and clothes with Islamic principles, by using lifestyle videos to instruct their audiences on how to be fashionable and wearing makeup, but also teach them some Islamic religious principles such as giving advice on Ramadan and prayer. Such online representations challenge the stereotype of Muslim women being oppressed and unable to integrate into Western contexts (Peterson,2016). In other Muslim contexts such as Indonesia, some influencers are argued to use Instagram as a means of demonstrating middle-classness through *dakwah*, a practice that involves calling on others to apply Islamic values (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018).

It has been argued that dress can function as a system of communication (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1962; Lee, 2015; Almila, 2019). Dress can communicate age, gender, ethnicity, and social role (Lee, 2015). Scholars such as Stone (1962), Goffman (1976) and Craik (2003) explain that appearances, including dressing practices, can convey people's identities when meanings are attributed to them.

These meanings however are context- and time-dependent and continuously transforming (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). Scholars such as Eicher (1995); Lynch and colleagues (1995) believe that dress and identity are complex processes because they are not static and transform over time through transnational processes such as immigration and contact with people from other ethnicities and cultures. In this context, although dress is context-dependent; its meanings can change, be rejected, or negotiated (Almila, 2019).

Furthermore, dress is historically gendered in that how women dress has more often been judged than men and dress has also been used to control women's sexuality, mainly in religious societies (Arthur, 2020). For example, women's clothes are more often judged as immodest than men's clothes (Tseëlon, 1997); and when they are perceived as immodest, they are described as immoral or non-religious because they are associated with their sexuality (Entwistle, 2015). This happens because dress and the bodies that it covers are embedded in

their cultural context, they are thus interpreted and judged within that context (Entwistle, 2015).

In Islamic contexts, women are often judged for the way they dress because a perceived incorrect application of the Islamic dress code is associated with following immoral and superficial purposes to appear more attractive, rather than reflecting the inner purity associated with the Islamic dress code (Jones,2010; Mir,2014). In some modern Islamic communities, there is a shift from conventional Islamic dress to more modern styles, and this is often viewed as a violation of religious principles (Tarlo and Moor,2013).

In the context of online spaces, Lewis (2013) believes that how dress and modesty are judged echoes the traditional offline popular religious debates. However, social media accentuates the phenomenon, leading to critical and corrective comments calling for women to embrace the standards of their religion. According to Lewis (2015), the emergence of modest fashion and its synchronicity with new media such as social media platforms provide a space where modest clothes and women are either judged, disputed, or accepted. This happens because modern modest fashion communicates diverse and contradictory messages about style and faith. In this thesis, I explore this range of judging, disputing or accepting Algerian social media influencers, because of their dress, veiling practices and other aspects of their social media content.

3.4.6. The Status of Hijab across the Muslim world

Muslim women are subject to many different regimes and thought patterns across different countries and regions. Thus, consideration of national and regional differences is necessary when exploring the status of veiling in Algeria. Algerian history demonstrates the country's diversity and its differences from other countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, particularly in terms of the range of cultural and religious beliefs within the country.

In Turkey, veiling has acquired a strong political meaning over the years (Gökariksel and Mitchell, 2005). Turkey was a very traditional Muslim country under the Ottoman regime (1299-1922); however, this culture shifted when a new Turkish secular republic was

established in 1923, which resulted in the adoption of new cultural beliefs and laws related to women (Atakav, 2007; Akturk, 2015). The new secular government motivated women to remove their veils and portrayed its ideal woman as a counterpoint to the traditional Turkish veiled woman (White, 2003; Atakav, 2007). This secular state thus excluded women who did not adhere to modern ways (Atakav, 2007), while traditionalists viewed this ideology as immoral (White, 2003). Gökariksel and Mitchell (2005) note that although the members of the Turkish secular state had such attitudes towards veiling, it was generally limited to the establishers of the new state, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and the urban middle class (White, 2003). Nevertheless, the Turkish traditionalists were not fundamentalists, and they were keen to find a middle ground between their interpretations of Islamic values and modernization (Atakav, 2007).

The concern of the Turkish traditionalists was that modern, educated, employed women would be a threat to the foundations of traditional family and social values (White, 2003), while the view of the new state was that modern versions of femininity represented a civilized community and a democratic government by mimicking Western ideologies (Tekeli, 1988). Those who encouraged veiling viewed it as an Islamic duty and identity, a custom, a political affirmation, and a representation of modern Islamic values (Gökariksel and Mitchell, 2005).

Veiling in Tunisia took on a similar status as Turkey. When Tunisia was a French colony (1952–1966), women often wore a safsari (a long piece of cloth used to cover the head and body), as this type of veiling represented resistance to French oppression (Ghumkhor, 2012). However, after the independence of Tunisia, veiling again became a point of conflict between modernists and traditionalists (Palmas and Stagi, 2018). In the post-war period, veiling shifted towards being a sign of backwardness and subjugation, and the state introduced a new form of veiling in the hijab that only covered the head as well as encouraging unveiling as a form of modernization (Ghumkhor, 2012). However, Charrad (1998) notes that veiling in Tunisia retained its meanings of empowerment, resistance against Western culture, and solidarity with other Muslims. Veils thus helped Tunisian women to demonstrate their convictions, and many veiled women took their place among Tunisian modernists (Ghumkhor, 2012).

In Morocco, veiling has also undergone several changes. In the past, women wore the Moroccan traditional hijabs, which cover the head and the face; more recently, however, women have tended to wear a hijab (Leila Hessini, 1995). Veiling is arguably a symbol of gender oppression and male dominance in Morocco as a result of the state's use of Islamic values (Mernissi, 1991; 1987). However, Hessini (1995) states that many Moroccan women wear veils voluntarily and consider veiling to be a major part of their identities, allowing them to feel simultaneously more respected and liberated.

Finally, in Saudi Arabia, a traditional and very conservative state, veils are culturally necessary for women in public spaces (Ertürk, 1991). Traditionally, the state required women in Saudi Arabia to wear a full niqab (a cloth that covers the face and body). Although some women wore abayas and hijabs (outer cloaks, usually in black, with a scarf on the head, leaving the face uncovered) (Quamar, 2016), Veiling in Saudi Arabia is claimed to be a symbol of women's high status, though it is believed to restrict their participation in society (Ertürk, 1991). In practical terms, however, Saudi Arabian women's rights are diverse, and the region where they live determines their status (Quamar, 2016). Saudi Arabia, however, has witnessed diverse transformations regarding women`s rights since 2018, including allowing them to drive and not covering in public (Anishchenkova, 2020).

3.4.7 Modesty and Veiling in the History of Algeria

Like the countries discussed above, veiling in Algeria has gone through different phases due to political and historical events in the country. Veiling acquired different connotations, mainly before the independence of Algeria and during the civil war. This section reviews the status of veiling in the history of Algeria.

During the War of Independence (from 1954 to 1962), the white haïk - a long piece of fabric that covers the face, and the body – was the most common form of veiling among Algerian women (Fanon, 1989; MacMaster, 2020). In the same period, the French colonizer attempted to “Frenchify” Algerian society through a campaign referred to as the “Emancipation de la Femme” by convincing women to unveil (Fanon, 1989; Ghumkhor, 2012; MacMaster, 2020, p. 92). The French colonial power attempted to convince Algerian women that the only way

to discard men's dominance and their supposed “backward” lifestyle was by unveiling (MacMaster, 2020, p. 92). Fanon (1989) called this process “unheard violence”, in which France implied that it was a liberator of Muslim women from oppressive traditions (Vince, 2005). Under the campaign, in 1958, “unveiling ceremonies” started, in which many Algerian women, mainly educated and upper-middle-class women, were recorded removing their veils and burning them (MacMaster, 2020).

However, the desire to unveil Algerian women resulted in veiling becoming more symbolic (Smail Salhi, 2008). To win back their identities and honour, patriarchal forces in Algeria kept women indoors and under greater restrictions (Smail Salhi, 2008). Veiling became a form of resistance against the French colonizers as well as supporting the Algerian tradition of separating men and women (Fanon, 1989).

At the same time, during this period, many Algerian women who participated in the war of independence removed their hijabs. Taking on a European appearance was beneficial in allowing them to move around more easily to smuggle weapons, false identity documents, and bombs around the country without being noticed by the French army (Fanon, 1989). Women adopting a Western style were assumed to be an emblem of civilization and modernity and thus had the French colonizers’ trust (Vince, 2005).

After the independence of Algeria in 1962, veiling lost its rebellious meaning and became confined to older, uneducated, and poor women (Lazreg, 2009). Most female veterans remained unveiled, and many ordinary women followed the unveiling trend (Fanon, 1989; Lazreg, 2009). Then, during the Algerian civil war (from 1990 to 2002), due to the fundamentalist ideology of the FIS, Algerian women were forced to wear the veil, ostensibly to guarantee their security and safety, as the FIS prevented unveiled women from moving freely in public places with acts of violence against them (Slyomovics, 1995). Unveiled women in this period were restricted from being in public because their presence was interpreted as a sexual provocation by men (Lazreg, 1994). Under distorted interpretations of various Islamic texts that the political movement promoted after the independence of Algeria in 1962, unveiled women become a threat for the existing socio-political system of the society that needed restoration (Lazreg,2021).

In her research about Algerian women, Lazreg (2009) argued that the status of veiling in Algeria is influenced by the history of the country. Lazreg (2009) suggested that veiling's social significance is as important as its underlying religious connotations, in that Algerian women adhere to veiling to demonstrate that they are from honoured families. A veiled woman was often seen as showing good behavior and being a woman without the intention to have sexual relations. Such a woman represents the idea of a good wife and mother for Algerian men (Addi, 2005). In this way, veiling could be interpreted as representing women's desire to be respected in the public sphere (Addi, 2005). At the same time, unveiled women are sometimes said to be 'Westernized' because it is believed that to be a Muslim, a woman cannot be unveiled (Lazreg, 2009). In another study, Mebtouche Nedjai (2013) concluded that some Algerian women wear a veil as an obligation, as much to avoid being socially criticized as to obey their husbands, while other women refuse to wear it as a form of resistance against the fundamentalist nature of their society.

It is not always possible to distinguish between women who wear the veil either voluntarily, as a customary habit, because they are forced to, or even as a fashion statement (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Gerner (2015) believes that, although women in Islamic societies have often been portrayed as veiled, isolated, and confined to domestic activities, these images do not necessarily represent the reality of Muslim women in modern times. The underlying complexity of veiling may mean that Muslim women are perceived to be alienated and oppressed, whereas their real-life experiences contradict these views (Ghumkhor, 2012). Any one-dimensional view of veiling in Algeria also ignores women from different ethnic groups, social classes, and regions. For example, Egyptian Bedouin women used to voluntarily put black headcloths on their faces when meeting old people as a sign of respect in 1970 and 1980 (Abu-Lughud, 2013). One-dimensional views of veiling in Algeria are therefore reductionist. The Quran, Sunna (the traditional and legal practices of Muslims), and Hadith (stories about the Prophet Mohammad's sayings) are not automatically practiced equally in all Muslim societies. The existence of multiple interpretations of religious texts therefore demonstrates how these undergo modifications within various cultures, and patriarchy also has an impact on such interpretations (Saadawi, 1982; Smail Salhi, 2013; Gerner, 2015). Islamic values are entwined with local systems of belief and traditions and, as a result, it is difficult to differentiate between Islamic

religion and cultural or geographically specific traditions (Haeri, 2002). Thus, suggesting that Islamic values necessarily result in gendered oppression is not appropriate. On the contrary, Islamic religious texts do not prevent women from working: they ban forced marriages and give women several other rights (Saadawi, 1982; Gerner, 2015).

The attribution of gender inequality to Islamic principles is also problematic because Islamic principles are not applied consistently across the Islamic world. The position of women in secular countries such as Tunisia and Turkey differs from that in Iran (Moghadam, 2003). Most Arabic-Muslim countries in the MENA region (except Lebanon) use Sharia (Islamic law) as a basis for their family law. However, how this is used and interpreted differs widely (Smail Salhi, 2013). For example, polygamy is prohibited in Tunisia but allowed in Algeria and Morocco (Smail Salhi, 2013). Women's social roles in Islamic societies are similarly diverse (Moghadam, 2003). In addition to the differences in the history of each country, current circumstances and economic situations vary (Gerner, 2015), and women's positions in these ostensibly Muslim societies are heavily directed by local culture and history rather than religion alone (Smail Salhi, 2008).

Diversity exists not only between Muslim countries but also between regions of the same country (Smail Salhi, 2008). Any investigation of women in the MENA implies the recognition of diversity in the region (Moghadam, 2003; Gerner, 2015), and this diversity is not only confined to geography. Women differ in terms of social class, ethnicity, age, and educational levels. Some support liberal ideologies, while others are more fundamentalist. Some are against religion and discard traditions, while others accept these as a part of their identity (Moghadam, 2003). Social class, in particular, influences women's position in society. Many middle-class women receive Western-based education, and this in turn affects their freedom and mobility (Moghadam, 2003; Abu-laughed, 2013; Gerner, 2015). For example, in Algeria, the Great Kabylia – an Algerian region that extends from the south-east of Algiers to the south-west of Jijel and is composed of Berber people who speak their native language (Berber), have their own culture and traditions – is known for being strongly influenced by the French education that was put in place there before the Algerian War (Roberts, 2014). Women in this region are thus believed to be more emancipated than women in other Algerian Arabic cities (Vince, 2015), and most of them do not wear the veil (Hessini, 1995).

McDougall (2017) also notes that women in some Algerian cities have a Western sartorial style, whereas in others, they are more conservative. Algeria represents a society with diverse lifestyles and cultural beliefs that must be considered in studies such as mine (Lazreg, 1994; McDougall, 2017). This again demonstrates the diversity across Algeria that must be taken into consideration in my research.

3.5 Introducing Algerian Influencers

The discussion so far in this chapter has outlined the range of cultural and religious factors which shape the context in which Algerian social media influencers emerged. In this section, I introduce the influencers themselves. The Algerian influencers for my research are in the beauty and lifestyle industries. Lifestyle influencers represent a new form of content creators who provide information on social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram and Facebook (Thelwall, 2021). Lifestyle influencers provide information about different topics, including fashion, beauty, and makeup (Mardon et al., 2018). This category is relevant to my research because it is the dominant one in Algeria. Furthermore, this category of influencers shares relevant posts about hijab including modern and Islamic, meaning their content was the most relevant to answer the research questions of this study. Like many other influencers in the field, they create a wide range of content, including make-up or hijab tutorials, fashion hauls, and beauty content, and they produce commercial content where they promote products for different brands. However, Algerian influencers often do not specialize in creating one specific type of content. For instance, they do not identify themselves as influencers in the beauty industry; rather, they collaborate to produce content on a variety of topics, including business, travel, parenthood, food, and beauty. Many of the influencers I've selected have also created their own personal clothing or cosmetic brands, beauty centers in addition to being influencers. What characterizes Algerian female influencers, then, is their diversity. While some of them are veiled, others are unveiled, and both categories have different types of dress and veiling customs. In what follows, I introduce some of the influencers to provide background to my research about their followers.

3.5.1 Veiled Algerian Influencers

The veiled Algerian influencers with the highest numbers of followers are @amira_riaa (6.3 million followers) and @noor_m_officiel (2,5 followers). On their Instagram profiles, Amira and Noor share similar content, such as hijab and cosmetic instructions, personal life stories, information about business and education, outfit and makeup tutorials. As they both have families, they also discuss topics like parenthood and marriage. The influencers use both Instagram and YouTube, but Instagram is their primary platform.

Noor and Amira have different dressing and veiling habits. Noor wears more modest religious dress, including a headscarf that covers her hair and neck, and clothes that fit the Islamic dress code to some extent. For example, Noor wears loose and long dresses with a headscarf that covers all her hair and neck (For more examples of Noor`s dressing style, please refer to her Instagram @noor_m_officiel). According to the Islam Web (2022), the Islamic dress code calls for complete body coverage except for the face and hands. To conceal skin tone and the shape of the body beneath them, clothing should be loose-fitting and non-transparent, which means that it should be thick and opaque. A person's entire appearance should be modest, so wearing brightly coloured clothing that can draw attention is discouraged. In addition, Muslim women should not dress like women of other religions or in men's clothing. Finally, wearing make-up, especially a lot of it, in public or in front of non-mahrams (a person with whom marriage is permissible in Islam) is prohibited. The influencer Noor appears in a few of her posts wearing different clothing items, such as trousers, T-shirts, long skirts, abayas, and blouses.

Amira, however, often wears more modern forms of hijab. She often wears a turban, which is a long cloth that is wrapped around the head with jeans, blazers, and T-shirts. What differentiates Amira from Noor is that Amira rarely wears a hijab that conforms to the Islamic dress code, including a form of headscarf that does not cover the neck. Only a few of her pictures depict her totally covering her neck or wearing an Islamic abaya (a simple, long and loose robe dress, worn by Muslim women). Her neck and some of her ears are not completely covered (For more examples of Amira`s hijab style, please refer to her Instagram page

@amira_riaa). It is also worth noting that both of these influencers use make-up, regardless of the style of hijab they are wearing.

3.5.2 Unveiled Algerian Influencers

Unveiled influencers also have diverse dress habits. While some dress in long dresses and skirts that almost cover all their bodies, others prefer more stylish outfits that show their bodies, such as shorts, short skirts, and swimsuits. Most of the influencers in this category wear make-up. For example, the Algerian influencer @shirineboutella often shows herself wearing sleeveless dresses, short dresses, swimsuits…etc. Other influencers such as @ines-beautys wear more modest clothes that do not show a lot of her body, for example, she wears long skirts and dresses, jeans with shirts…etc.

3.5.3 Instagram and YouTube Activities of Algerian Influencers

Algerian influencers employ the same microcelebrity strategies as other influencers. The primary online self-branding techniques used by Algerian influencers on social media are outlined in this section. First, showing an authentic persona is a crucial method that influencers implement. Regardless of their popularity, influencers appear to demonstrate their true selves on social media (Jerslev, 2016; Abidin, 2017). This helps influencers portray themselves as trustworthy and sincere to followers and to establish credibility (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Glucksman, 2017). An example is sharing videos of morning rituals such as washing their faces, putting on skincare products, and having breakfast, is one example, or posting pictures without makeup (Jerslev, 2016), which Algerian influencers frequently do (see for example the influencer Maroua morning routine on her YouTube channel @TheDollBeauty).

Algerian influencers also use digital intimacy techniques to build closeness with their followers (Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Baym, 2012). Digital intimacy is created, for example, by using techniques such as communicating private information, engaging in exchange of comments with followers, showing their rooms, talking about their health issues, presenting their partners in very ordinary language, and appearing like an ordinary person (Abidin and Thompson, 2012; Jerslev, 2016; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). For example, the influencer Shirine Boutella posted a video on YouTube (@ShirineBoutellaoff) in which she responds to questions from

her followers regarding her professional background, personal life, and opinions on many subjects. Another influencer, Imene shetae shared a video on her Youtube channel (@imeneshetae2577) where she tells her followers about her mental health struggles ,explaining how to overcome them . Similarly, the influencer Maroua, introduced her partner in a YouTube video (@TheDollBeauty) to answer her followers` questions about their relationship.

Successful influencers are often sponsored by popular brands (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Grave, 2017; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). Influencers advertise products by incorporating them into their everyday routines to show that they are affordable for ordinary consumers (Glucksman, 2017). Influencers seek to improve brands` reputations and attract their followers to a targeted product or service (Booth and Matic, 2011). Algerian influencers also use similar techniques by sharing pictures and videos where they use products from specific brands . For example, they are sponsored by Makeup Forever, Huda Beauty, Nyx Cosmetics, L'Oréal Paris, Tarte Cosmetics, Anastasia Beverly Hills, Marc Anthony, Estée Lauder, Boohoo, and many other brands and fashion retailers. When they share pictures of the products on Instagram, they also tag the companies in the captions. In this way, their followers can access them quickly, and thus may become potential clients (Glucksman, 2017).

Influencers also show themselves in events as VIP guests and accepting awards in recognition of their large followings (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Abidin, 2016; Jerslev, 2016; Duffey and Hund, 2015). Many Algerian influencers share videos and photos of special events, such as the opening of shops in Algeria or hotels, or fashion shows. Additionally, to create strong connections with their followers, influencers use the "give away" technique, where they offer some products for their followers (Berryman and Kavka, 2017). Influencers are also known for creating their personal brands or lines (Strugatz, 2016; Berryman and Kavka, 2017), a strategy that several Algerian influencers use. The influencer @amira_riaa, for instance, introduced the clothing line "amirariaacollection" for veiled women, and @thedollbeauty introduced "DADOLLinc".

Finally, influencers also show their opulent lifestyles by traveling abroad, eating expensive food, or dressing in designer clothing (Abidin, 2016). Marwick (2013) suggested that

influencers use of luxurious products is an attempt to portray a high social status. In addition, they also tend to present themselves as being able to be successful wives and mothers while having a professional careers. They do this by emphasizing their capacity to handle multiple roles. This is accomplished through social media posts that show them with their family, working or traveling (Leban et al., 2020). They present themselves as the 'superwoman' by showing their exceptional abilities to simultaneously manage their appearance, relationships, success, intelligence, and knowledge (Chae, 2018; Devos et al., 2022). For example, the influencer @ziya_inspiration often shows herself as a successful businesswoman, wife, and mother by sharing posts where she takes care of her appearance and takes care of her children and partner.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this Chapter, I showed how Muslim women engage in microcelebrity practices to create modern and positive representations for themselves by combining concepts such as modesty and beauty, and potentially dispel the negative associations of Islam. Many studies of Muslim female influencers analyse their posts and focus on identifying how they use social media to claim a new modern identity by analyzing for example their dress styles, the type of veiling they wear, their behavior, body language, and even their public behavior. However, little research was dedicated to understanding the followers` views on the influencers` diverse self-representations. Therefore, my research brings a new perspective to the literature by exploring audiences` attitudes towards Algerian influencers and asking: what are young women's attitudes towards female Algerian social media influencers? (RQ1) and which themes and topics are brought up in internet users' comments beneath Algerian female social media influencers' posts on Instagram and YouTube? (SRQ1 A).

In this chapter, I discussed how women in Islamic contexts are argued to often be judged on their dress and veiling practices; mainly because incorrect dress and veiling habits are sometimes associated with immorality and violation of religious principles. Muslim women`s dress is often either judged, accepted, or debated. It also highlighted a shift from conventional Islamic dress to modern ones in today's Islamic communities. This concept was also applied in online spaces, mainly with the emergence of modest fashion that many Muslim influencers

engage in now. Therefore, my research explores how followers react to the influencers` dress/veiling practices, and ask: what are followers' responses to the influencers` different types of their dressing and veiling practices? (RQ2).

This Chapter has also discussed the experiences of Algerian women within the political context of the country and explained how their lives have swung between secularism, Islamic fundamentalism, traditionalism, and Algerian Islam. These tensions in turn have affected the status of veiling in Algeria. Additionally, it has explained how the status of veiling depends on the country, social class, ethnicity, age, and educational levels of Muslim women. Veiling experiences of women in Algeria are important. It has also been argued that studying women in the Algerian context requires the consideration of the diverse lifestyles and cultural beliefs across the country. Furthermore, this Chapter has shown that studies about veiling practices in Algeria fail to recognize both unveiled women and those who voluntarily wear the hijab. Existing studies on Algerian women were mostly conducted during a period when the political situation of the country was fragile, whether during the Algerian War of Independence or the Civil War. In contrast, women in modern Algeria are relatively under-researched. Through my research, I acknowledge and recognize the diversity of Algeria by investigating the status of veiling in three different Algerian cities to partly address this gap. As such, research into women`s experiences of hijab in modern Algeria are needed to complement the previous studies that were undertaken in a different political context and timeframe. My research thus asks: what is the status of hijab in different Algerian cities? (RQ 3).

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology I used in my research. I first explain the research approach and why qualitative methods are suitable to investigate my research topic. I then introduce the qualitative content analysis I used to examine the comments under influencers' posts, including a discussion of my sampling strategy and approach to data analysis. The next section explains the interviews I conducted with Algerian women, with a specific focus given to the challenges of the research, such as the language used in the comments. I finish my Methodology chapter with reflections on my role as a researcher and ethical considerations related to my research and my participants.

4.2. Research Design

The nature of my research questions requires the use of qualitative methods, as they explore followers' attitudes towards Algerian influencers, the underlying reasons for their attitudes, and the status of veiling in different Algerian cities. Qualitative research may help in viewing the social milieu and other events through the participants' eyes (Bryman, 2012; Nieuwenhuis and Smith, 2012). As a result, these methods helped me identify the diverse attitudes of followers towards influencers. To understand the underlying reasons behind their attitudes, qualitative research methods enabled me to examine "the beneath surface appearances" (Bryman, 2012, p. 400) and help me in "understanding of the processes, the social and cultural contexts, which shape various behavioural patterns" (Nieuwenhuis and Smith, 2012, p. 126). I used qualitative methods as they offered understanding of Internet users' assumptions and their behaviour on different social media platforms (Marwick, 2014).

Qualitative research methods gather people's words to comprehend how they experience a certain reality (Brennen, 2021). Qualitative methods thus allowed me to understand the phenomenon of influencers in the conservative Algerian and Muslim context. My research aim was to understand the diversity and complexity of followers' attitudes towards social media influencers, including how followers interpret influencers' visibility on social media and their diverse content online. Media content should be studied and interpreted in the cultural and

historical context in which it occurs (Jensen, 2002; Morley and Silverstone, 2002), and so in my research, it was crucial to understand the followers' attitudes in the Algerian context. Qualitative research methods were thus suitable for my research aims, as they enabled reflection on the multifaceted meanings and values of media content (Brennen, 2021). I used two core research methods to collect my data: phase one of my research involved conducting a qualitative content analysis of comments on Algerian influencers' posts, and phase two focused on semi-structured qualitative interviews with Algerian women.

For this research, I adopted interpretivism as an epistemological position to understand attitudes towards influencers from their followers' perspective. Interpretivism acknowledges that social actions are subjective (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivism is "an epistemology that advocates that the researcher must understand differences between humans in our role as social actors" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 106). Because people experience reality and the world in diverse ways, how they understand a situation or a social phenomenon is also different (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998), and interpretivism thus offers a way of understanding variance in people's experiences (Bryman, 2016). Followers' attitudes towards influencers are subjective. Individuals view others - such as influencers - in different ways, and each person may construct an opinion about them differently. Interpretivism recognizes and acknowledges the diversity in people's interpretations of meaning (Scotland, 2012) and acknowledges that the meanings of human actions are interpreted in the context in which they occur (Fay, 1996) – which, in the context of my research, is Algeria, a Muslim conservative society.

4.3 Data Collection

4.3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)

To address my research questions about young women's attitudes towards female Algerian social media influencers and audience responses to the influencers` different types of veiling, I first used qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is "a research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories" (Berger, 2018, p. 125). The qualitative content analysis allowed me to systematically identify the dominant themes, patterns, and debates in the comments

under influencers' posts (Macnamara, 2005; Mayring, 2010). The data generated from the qualitative content analysis was then used as a foundation to build the main questions for the semi-structured interviews.

4.3.2. Sampling for the QCA

4.3.2.1 Selection of Social Media Platforms

As I explained in Chapter one, the reason for selecting Instagram and YouTube was that both are leading social media platforms used by Algerian influencers. Algerian social media influencers are active on Instagram and Youtube, making it relevant for my research. The two platforms were selected to enable the analysis of a greater volume of data, which I hoped would feature a wide range of attitudes toward Algerian influencers.

4.3.2.2 Selection of Algerian Female Influencers

With the first research question (RQ1), I aimed to identify the key themes in followers' comments under the influencers' posts, and in the second research question (RQ2), I wanted to investigate followers' responses to influencers' veiling habits. I used purposive sampling to select the influencers and their posts on Instagram and YouTube. In purposive sampling, the participants or cases are selected based on specific criteria (White and Marsh, 2006; Bryman, 2012) which are described below. Qualitative content analysis works on selected features of the data that are limited to answering the research questions and, in this respect, it helps to classify a large amount of data into themes (Schreier, 2012). Thus, the researcher is required to strategically select the unit of analysis (Neuendorf, 2002; Wimmer and Dominick, 2006; Schreier, 2012). The criteria for selection are determined by the researcher based on the information needed to answer the research questions (Patton, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004; Schreier, 2012). Therefore, purposive sampling helped me select participants strategically to make the sample appropriate to answer the first and second research questions.

As there are a large number of Algerian influencers, a sample was purposefully selected for this study based on the following criteria: First, because this study is concerned with female

influencers and veiling, the sample was composed of both veiled and unveiled Algerian female influencers. Second, the influencers selected for my research were those with high numbers of followers in the Algerian context (exceeding 250,000 followers on Instagram). The high number of followers also indicates that the influencer is popular (Tuten and Solomon, 2017). I observed that Algerian influencers with a high number of followers obtain more comments on their posts than influencers with small numbers. My research uses comments as a unit of analysis, so it was important to select influencers who had many comments under their posts to provide rich data to answer my research questions.

When conducting qualitative content analysis, it is crucial to consider the context of the study to understand the data; as such, personally knowing the culture is one of the strategies that helped me in this process (Schreier, 2012). As an Algerian researcher, I knew that several influencers were highly debated among the Algerian online community and were widely discussed across different platforms (e.g., Facebook and Instagram pages related to Algerian celebrities and popular public figures). Following these pages helped me to learn the names of many influencers, and I checked their pages on Instagram to classify them based on the number of followers.

The initial list included 117 female influencers (35 veiled and 82 unveiled). As explained above, the types of influencers I selected for my research were lifestyle and beauty influencers, since most female Algerian influencers belong to this category. Furthermore, influencers belonging to these categories share content related to clothes and beauty, which helped me answer my research question about followers' responses to influencers' veiling habits.

Some influencers were excluded from the sampling for various reasons. First, a few belonged to the category of "health influencers", and I excluded them because their content was not suitable for the aim of my research. Some Algerian public figures, including singers and actors, shared similar content as other forms of influencers, such as promoting products for brands. When I was collecting my data, I observed that these traditional celebrities are also called "influencers" by many of their followers and other Algerian Facebook pages. Such public figures were not included in the sample because they are traditional celebrities who have already accumulated large numbers of followers and popularity on social media due to their

professional careers. I excluded this category because extant research on influencers – along with this thesis - defines influencers as "everyday, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetise their following by integrating 'advertorials' into their blog or social media posts" (Abidin, 2015, p.1).

The remaining influencers in the categories of beauty and lifestyle were not all suitable for the aim of my research. I excluded some of them because of their content – some influencers hide their identities and do not share their pictures or videos, but their social media pages were still used to promote products and services. On these accounts, the number of comments under their posts was very low and mostly about the products and services they promoted. Another category of lifestyle and beauty influencers I excluded were those who had many followers on social media but did not share any content. After observing some of them, I noticed that they rarely shared posts on their feeds, or when they did, they later deleted them. Although these influencers frequently share stories on Instagram, this feature doesn't allow users to leave comments. I therefore excluded these influencers from the sample. After classifying all the influencers based on the above criteria, I reduced the initial list to nine female Algerian influencers introduced in the previous chapter:

Influencers` Names/Usernames	№ **of Followers on Instagram in 2020**	№ **of Followers on Instagram in 2023**	№ **of Followers on YouTube in 2020**	№ **of Followers on YouTube in 2023**
Amira *@amira_riaa*	4 M	6.2 million	1,25 million	1.45 million
Noor *@Noor_m_officiel*	1,7 M	2.5 million	593k	625K

Maroua *@Thedollbeauty*	2,2 M	3.1 million	2,09 million	2.16 million
Ines *@Inesbeautys*	1,2M	1.5 million	468K	543K
Shirine *@Shirineboutella*	2,3M	2.3 million	520k	560k
Ziya *@Ziya_inspiration*	476K	737K	943k	1.42 million
Ryma *@Ryma_beautyad-dict*	1,7 M	2.3 million	5570K	605k
Imene *@Imeneshetae*	714 k	763K	46,2K	45.2k
Mina *@Minahabchi*	278K	477 K	Not shown	29.4k

Table 2: A list of the influencers, and their usernames

4.3.2.3 Sampling for Instagram Posts

The first criterion for the selection of the posts was time. The selected Algerian influencers had hundreds to thousands of posts on their social media pages, making it necessary to select a timeframe to gather a manageable amount of data (Macnamara, 2005; Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). I decided to only analyse the Instagram posts shared in 2020, which synchronized with the year of my data collection. After checking the influencers' former posts, I

observed that the number of comments on these posts had grown over time, likely as their follower counts rose. In table 1, I include the number of followers they had when I collected the data, and again at the time of writing (May 2023), which in all cases had grown.

My next step was to classify the remaining posts shared in 2020. I classified all the posts and then decided which posts to exclude as units of data collection in this study. These posts do not provide data to address the research questions of this study. In the following table, I introduce the type of Instagram post that was excluded from the corpus:

Type of Posts	**Reason for Exclusion from the Corpus**
Instagram posts related to advertisements	The comments on posts where the influencers advertised products such as clothing, makeup, electronic products, and services focused mainly on the brands, products, and services being advertised instead of the influencers themselves.
Group pictures (with friends, children, or husbands)	These posts generated many comments related to the other members instead of the influencers themselves.
Influencers' posts that were related to 'contests' and 'giveaways'	Contests or giveaway posts are used by influencers to ask their followers to tag their friends or family members to win free products or services. The comments were mostly tags (when social media users mention others by adding the @ symbol to a person's profile in a post or a comment), and these types of comments are therefore unsuitable for addressing the research questions of this study.
Instagram pictures without comments	Influencers turned off the comment sections under some posts, so these posts were also excluded from the sample, as there was no unit of analysis to be analysed.
Instagram pictures with comments that are mainly emojis	My research investigates attitudes, emojis were not deemed to be an appropriate way to obtain them.

Instagram pictures where the influencers added specific captions	The caption influenced the type of comments. When the influencers posted a picture and added a caption such as a motivational quote, or a specific question to their followers (such as how your day was, what is your favourite colour), the followers mostly responded to the caption in the comments, this type of comments do not serve the aim of my research.
Instagram pictures where the influencers announced their birthdays	The comments under such posts were predominantly birthday wishes.
Instagram pictures where the influencers announced and celebrated reaching a certain number of followers	These posts generated comments in the form of applause and congratulations.
Instagram pictures where the influencers shared special announcements such as pregnancy, engagement, or marriage	The comments under such posts generally came in the form of congratulations and motivating the influencers for their work.

Table 3: The type of Instagram posts and the reasons for excluding them from the corpus

After having classified posts and decided which to include in my study, I selected two Instagram posts for each influencer. This captured the diversity among Algerian influencers while also ensuring I had a manageable amount of data for my qualitative approach to analysis. Selecting two different posts provided diverse types of comments. I previously explained how Algerian influencers have diverse fashion styles. In both Chapters Three and Six, I define dress and veiling for my research as "a spatiality located practice" (Almila, 2017, p. 231). In my research, I treat dress and veiling as meaningful social practices that are influenced by the Algerian context. Consequently, I selected two posts for each influencer in which they were wearing two different types of dresses and/or headscarves. In the following table, I introduce the types of Instagram posts that were included in the corpus:

Type of Influencer	Type of Instagram Post Selected for my Study
Veiled influencers	The first post I selected was a picture of the influencer dressed in an Islamic way (see Chapters 3 and 6 for the criteria of Islamic dress code), and the second picture showed them wearing modest fashion clothes (see Chapters One and Five for the definition of modest fashion).
Non-veiled influencers	The pictures were selected based on the notion of modesty. As they were unveiled (not wearing a headscarf), I focused on modesty in their dress practices. In Chapter Three, I discussed that modesty in Islam consists of different layers. The Islamic dress code sets general guidelines for Muslim women's modesty. The criteria include covering the body shape, clothing must be loose enough so as not to outline or distinguish the shape of the body, thick clothes, and not being flashy. Applying these criteria to the unveiled influencers' dress practices, I selected two pictures for each influencer. The first picture showed unveiled influencers wearing clothes that fit Islamic modesty to some extent. For example, they were wearing clothes that covered most of their bodies such as long dresses or skirts. The second picture, however, showed them in the opposite spectrum i.e.: the influencers were wearing the non-modest forms of clothes, such as very revealing clothes.

Table 4: The Instagram posts selected for the QCA

4.3.2.4 Sampling for YouTube Videos

Comments relating to two specific areas were examined: veiling tutorials (styles of veiling) for veiled influencers and makeup tutorials for non-veiled influencers. As above, the tradition of veiling is one of the most prominent methods of identifying a Muslim woman. However, the use of makeup is discouraged in public environments by Islam as it is deemed to be a way of attracting male attention (Islamweb, 2022).

Selecting a sample on YouTube was challenging due to the small number of videos that the influencers shared. Furthermore, most of the videos were travel vlogs, home tours, cooking or cleaning videos, marriage or wedding celebrations, answering followers' questions, videos about a couple's life, and videos where they carried out a specific challenge. The comments under such types of videos were not suitable to answer my research questions as the followers were addressing the theme of the videos. Another challenge was influencers deactivating the comment sections beneath some of their videos.

In addition, the influencer @Minahabchi did not share any videos on YouTube at the time of collecting my data. This resulted in excluding her from the sample and reducing the number of influencers to eight. The type of videos @Ziya_inspiration shared challenged my sampling strategy, as Ziya did not create makeup tutorials on YouTube. Instead, her videos were mostly about cooking and/or cleaning, how to be a mother, and travel vlogs. During the sampling process, I had to carefully examine her YouTube content to find a video featuring a makeup tutorial. I found only one video about her morning routine where she showed her makeup routine, and I selected it for my research. After excluding the previous videos, I was confined to a small number of videos, and I selected one video for each influencer.

4.3.3 Data Collection Procedure for the QCA

Due to Instagram restricting access to its public Application Programming Interface (API) in 2018 (Facebook, 2018), I collected comments under influencers' Instagram pictures manually. For YouTube, I collected comments using the Netvizz software (https://tools.digital-methods.net/netvizz/youtube/). The software functions by inserting the ID of any public YouTube video and clicking on the submit button. The software then generates all the information about the video in a table, including the usernames of the followers who liked the video and the comments (see Figure 2).

This software, however, did not give me the option to save the comments. To store the comments, I, therefore, used the print option, and I saved the link in PDF format on my computer. Afterwards, I converted all the PDF documents into Word format to be able to copy and paste the comments and to guarantee that I removed all the usernames to protect the anonymity

of users. I conducted this phase on a secure personal laptop and stored the data on the University of Sheffield server (Google Drive).

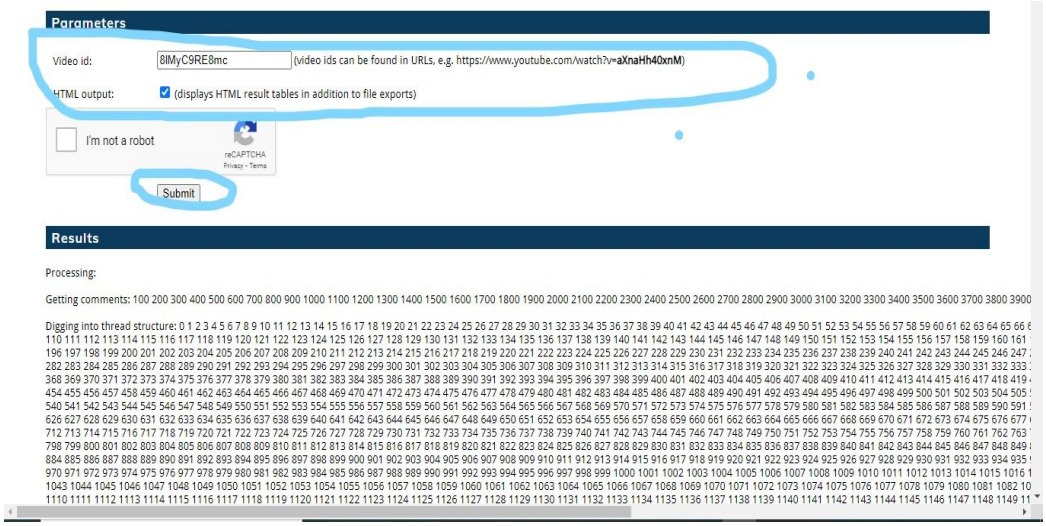

Figure 2: Screenshot of the Netvizz software for generating data from YouTube

4.3.4 Data Management in QCA

Following the collection of comments from YouTube and Instagram, I started the process of selecting relevant material for my research. Relevant material is the data that answers the research questions of the study, while irrelevant data does not serve the purpose of the research (Schreier, 2012). Using a coding frame was the strategy employed in my research to select the themes that were relevant to answering my research questions (Schreier, 2012). I initially coded all the comments under relevant and irrelevant material before selecting only the codes that contributed to answering my research questions (see Appendices 7 and 8 for lists of the codes). For instance, I categorized the comments where followers requested particular cosmetic product information from influencers as irrelevant, as they do not express an opinion about the influencers' hijab or dress style (one of my research objectives). 2224 comments in total were manually collected on Instagram. 11,282 comments were generated in total using the Netvizz software on YouTube, and I categorized them into relevant and irrelevant data as follows:

Social Media Platform	Total Number of Relevant Comments	Total Number of Irrelevant Comments
Instagram Picture	893	1331
YouTube Video	2140	9142

Table 5: Number of comments on Instagram and YouTube

4.3.5 Data Analysis in QCA

The first phase of analysing my social media data was the preparation phase. I started to develop familiarity with the data by reading the comments several times (Selvi, 2019). I did this by classifying the comments on Instagram in tables (in Microsoft Word) based on language (Arabic, French, English, and a special language used by Algerians that involves writing Arabic words using Latin letters). This helped me with the later process of building a coding frame. Building a coding frame entails the selection of material, structuring and generating categories, the definition of the categories, and revision and correction of the coding frame (Schreier, 2012). The analysis process is summarized in the following table:

Phase	Description
Selection Phase	In this phase, I created the first version of the coding frame by classifying the data into relevant and irrelevant. This was driven by the research question and the topic of the research (Selvi, 2019). I created a table for relevant and irrelevant data. I added a third category to classify any type of data where I was not yet sure about its significance. The relevant data was all related to the themes of attitude of any kind, dress, hijab, and self-representations. The irrelevant data included emojis, unclear comments, or those that discussed topics that were not related to the influencers in any way.
Structuring and Generating Phase	The purpose here is to generate the main categories and subcategories (Schreier, 2012). I combined both data-driven and concept-driven approaches. For some of the main categories, I used a concept-driven method as I had initial knowledge about the topic through my research questions and Algeria, which is the context of my research. Then I used the data-driven method to generate the subcategories. I introduce the categories and subcategories in appendices 5 and 6. The units of analysis for the comments were generally short sentences that did not require segmenting into smaller units. To build my categories, I clustered the comments into tables based on their meaning. I gathered all the comments that reflected the same attitude or theme in one column and counted their frequency. When a comment reflecting the same theme/attitude was repeated often, I marked it as a potential category. To build a coding frame, I used the progressive summarizing technique (Mayring, 2010). I started by paraphrasing the comments I previously classified. Then, streamlined (Schreier, 2012) each paraphrased passage by deleting the

	additional information around the main idea of the paraphrased passage. I then went back to compare the paraphrased passages to find similarities between them. After finding the similarities, I paraphrased the passages again to generate one idea. Once I reached the desired level of paraphrasing and abstraction, I then generated a category, and later a definition for each category. However, before applying the coding frame to all my data, I initially used trial coding (Früh, 2007) to identify potential shortcomings, such as unclear categories or definitions, and to familiarize myself with the coding frame. After correcting the coding frame and the definitions, I completed my analysis with the remaining data. This process was conducted twice in two periods of time (after 14 days) to allow me to have a better understanding of the coding frame (Schreier, 2012).
Defining Phase	In this phase, I first named the categories and the subcategories. Afterwards, I described all the categories and their subcategories in a table (See appendices 6 and 7).
Revising and Expanding	In this phase, I revised the coding frame by examining each main category and subcategory. I examined whether I had used a category more than once and whether they were mutually exclusive (Schreier, 2012).

Table 6: The analysis process for the qualitative content analysis

4.3.6 Ethical Considerations for QCA

As social media research environments are the focus of this project, various unique ethical matters require addressing. For the content analysis, obtaining consent from Algerian social media influencers was not required, in line with directives from other researchers (Eysenbach and Till, 2001). When performing online research, a consideration for consent is whether participants are posting on public communities, whether they are seeking public visibility, and

how many platforms they post on (Eysenbach and Till, 2001). Social media influencers represent a group of Internet celebrities in that they can appeal to huge audiences. They also have the power to retain the attention of those audiences through social media platforms (Abidin, 2018). Influencers "work to generate a form of celebrity capital by cultivating attention and crafting an authentic personal brand via social networks" (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016, p. 194). Algerian influencers are no exception in that they work in the public domain, and their Instagram pages and YouTube channels are both intended to attract millions of followers. Researchers including Roberts (2015), Malik and Coulson (2013), and Seale et al. (2010) believe that in such cases, no informed consent is required. Since it is believed that using what others produce in public domains by anonymizing their producers may result in violating copyrights, this decision not to gain consent was also made to avoid copyright and intellectual property issues (Willinkson and Thelwall, 2011; Kurtz et al., 2017).

In compliance with the University research ethics` guidelines (Policy Note No. 14. Research Involving Social Media | Research Ethics and Integrity | Student hub (sheffield.ac.uk), which emphasizes the need to consider a topic's sensitivity and participants' possible vulnerability, I have decided to not include the influencers` images in this thesis. I did this for a number of reasons. First, my research covers sensitive topics including religion and politics. When research involves sensitive topics, it is more likely to cause harm to participants. Second, social media research has the ability to bring attention to posts or people who may have otherwise been “lost in a crowd”, and this attention could be harmful. I did not include the influencers' pictures because I recognized that some of them wore types of clothing that are viewed as inappropriate (please refer to Chapter 6) for a Muslim society. I made this decision to avoid drawing unfavorable attention to them. Third, influencers who did not wear religious clothing at the time of my research may decide to change to more conservative styles at a later date. This is another reason to avoid drawing attention to their earlier social media images. In fact, one influencer did this during my viva. The unveiled influencer @rymabeautyaddict publically announced becoming a veiled woman and requested everyone to delete previous pictures of her without a hijab. In compliance with ethical guidelines, and to protect the right and data of the influencers, I have not included their pictures in this thesis. This decision is also in accordance with the UK GDPR guidelines (Art. 17 GDPR – Right to erasure (‘right to be forgotten’) – GDPR.eu), which state that people are entitled to have their personal information

deleted, also referred to as “the right to be forgotten”. (Please refer to the influencers Instagram pages using their usernames included in table 2, Chapter 4 of this thesis to view the influencers` pictures).

Of course, it is influencers’ followers who are the main focus of my thesis, and as they are not internet celebrities, and so using their comments as research data raises different ethical concerns. With that said, followers are commenting in public spaces, meaning that their comments are public and open to being copied and re-used. Although followers of influencers may not intend their comments to become research data, it would of course be incredibly difficult to obtain consent for each comment from followers of social media influencers due to the sheer volume of followers. Following guidance from other researchers (Markham, 2012; Hewitt-Taylor and Bond, 2012; Bond et al., 2013; Malik and Coulson, 2013; Roberts, 2015), anonymizing users’ names is considered an ethical practice that protects online identities. To prevent identification and traceability through search engines, I paraphrased any comments included in this thesis. This ensures confidentiality for my participants (Markham, 2012; Hewitt-Taylor and Bond, 2012).

4.4 Qualitative Interviews

Interviews were an ideal research method for my study as they enabled me to explore the data derived from the content analysis in more depth. The interview questions originated from trends observed in the data from the qualitative content analysis. Interviews generate “context to other data, offering a more complete picture of what happened” (Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3) and enable researchers to “explore the interviewee’s individuality and see the world through his eyes” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 264). Qualitative interviews provide an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena and give valuable insight into participants’ ideas and behaviour (Mason, 2018; Boyce and Neale, 2006, p. 3). Qualitative interviews help in obtaining opinions and data related to people’s lives within society (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003; Bryman, 2012). Qualitative interviews suited my research questions, which address the role of Algerian influencers in women’s attitudes to the influencers’ veiling habits and the status of veiling in different Algerian cities.

While interviews were an appropriate research method for my study, there are issues that need to be acknowledged about the type of information they generate. Skeggs et al. (2008) argue that interviews are performative because they do not naturally disclose what exists but rather "generate the conditions of possibility that frame the object of analysis" (p. 20) . For my research, the participants were aware that I was a researcher, and this may have resulted in them developing certain interpretations of me. Furthermore, they were also aware that I live in a Western context, which contradicts several Algerian Muslim traditions and values. Most importantly, my identity as an unveiled Muslim woman would also shape perceptions about me. Since my research included some sensitive religious discussions, such as Islamic veiling, how the participants would communicate their attitudes towards the influencers, mainly the unveiled ones, or those veiled in modern ways, would be affected by my own identity.

I used semi-structured interviews, which involve "the use of some pre-formulated questions, but with no strict adherence to them" (Myers, 2019, p. 187). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore more complex attitudes towards the Algerian influencers and gain a rich understanding of the participants' experiences with veiling in Algeria; they gave participants more flexibility to express themselves (Given, 2008). A wider range of responses may emerge during the interview because the researcher may ask new questions during the exchange (Myers, 2019). I recorded the interviews and made notes to be transcribed later.

4.4.1 Recruitment for Qualitative Interviews

My initial sampling approach was purposive, and I then used a technique known as snowball sampling to recruit more widely (Neuman, 2015). All the participants in this study were Algerian women aged 18 to 38 years. This age range comprises the millennial generation, which represent those born between 1982 and 2002 and living with the rise of digital technology (including social media) and its increasing spread into everyday life (Bedard and Tolmie, 2018). As the aim of this research is also related hijab, which is a religious practice for women. I recruited thus Algerian female millennials who followed Algerian influencers on Instagram and/or YouTube accounts. I started the participant recruitment process in March 2021. I initially planned to travel back to Algeria to recruit women there. However, due to the COVID-

19 pandemic, flights to Algerian were not operating and I had to use online resources such as Facebook and Instagram to recruit potential participants.

The first Algerian women I interviewed after the pilot phase were contacted via Instagram. I initially contacted eight users on Instagram from the list of usernames I collected from the QCA. The users mentioned certain information on their Instagram bio (the small area under the username where users can share some details about themselves), like their city, gender, and age. However, five of them did not respond, and one did not wish to participate in my research. The only participants I was able to recruit using this method were Maria and Souhaila (whose names have been changed for ethical reasons). Although Maria and Souhaila's Instagram profiles were private, their bios indicated that Maria was from Bejaia and Souhaila was from Algiers. After speaking to them via Instagram messages, introducing myself, and explaining my research, they confirmed their interest in participating in an interview. After interviewing Maria and Souhaila, they suggested their friends as potential participants, and I was able to recruit seven women from Bejaia City and an eighth from Algiers through snowball sampling.

Recruiting participants using this method was very challenging, as the majority of the users do not show any information on their Instagram bios. Therefore, I decided to use Facebook groups dedicated to Algerian women as a recruitment space. After posting on one of them, I was able to recruit two women (Samra and Kamilia) from Jijel, and both directed me to other potential participants. The total number of interview participants was 22: seven participants from Bejaia City and Jijel respectively, and eight participants from Algiers.

During the recruitment process, I did not create a separate account on Facebook or Instagram and instead used my profile to establish my credibility as a researcher and as an Algerian woman. I generally do not disclose personal information on any social media platforms because I come from a conservative Muslim community where women's visibility is still risky. However, during the recruitment process, I used my identity markers like my real name, profile picture, gender, cultural background, and added my University profile , and link to my Academia. Edu profile on my Facebook and Instagram bios. Even after disclosing such information, some women did not agree to participate because they did not feel able to trust me.

Some of my participants told me that, if their friends had not directed them as a part of the snowballing sampling strategy, they would not have agreed to participate in my research. Although recommended by friends, some requested to follow me on Instagram or add me on Facebook to gain more trust, and I accepted their requests.

The majority of the women I spoke with admitted to hiding their identities on social media by, for example, using fake profile images and usernames where they mix their first name with another (like their first name and their mother's or daughter's first name combined). Additionally, they don't always share images of themselves. This was mostly out of fear of being recognized by male relatives who would disapprove of women sharing their pictures on social media. In other cases, some women were scared to be criticized by society for sharing their pictures. Therefore, disclosing my identity was a helpful technique to gain their trust.

I took measures to protect my privacy on Instagram and Facebook. For example, I changed the visibility of my friend list and profile picture on Facebook to 'only me'. On Instagram, I decided to delete all pictures identifying myself other than my profile picture. I must admit that the decision was uncomfortable, as disclosing my identity as an Algerian Muslim woman could result in harsh criticism from my community, but it was essential to gain people's trust.

4.4.2 Obtaining Informed Consent

After recruiting my research participants, I obtained their informed consent to be interviewed. The participants were given an information sheet in either Arabic or French. I left the participants to choose the language they were most comfortable with. The information sheet explained the nature of the research, the fact that their participation in the interview was voluntary, and information about the storage and distribution of the generated data for my research (see Appendix 2).

A challenge I faced with the research participants was their inability to give me written consent. Twenty participants gave oral consent, whereas only two gave written consent. Some participants told me that they did not have a laptop to open and sign the consent form; others tried to do it on their phones but were unable to complete the form due to technical

problems. As a result, they preferred oral consent. Two told me that signing the written consent was a time-consuming task because they had toddlers. One of the participants informed me that, as a married woman living with her in-laws, she had a busy schedule as she spent her time either working or serving them, so it was almost impossible to sign a written consent form. Four participants told me that they did not know how to use Microsoft Word, so oral consent was the only solution.

Although some participants did not give written consent, I gave them enough time to read the paperwork before the interview to understand it. Before the interview, I asked the participants whether they had any questions about the consent form. Then, I read the consent form to them and recorded them giving consent. The two participants who gave written consent returned their signed consent forms via personal email addresses.

4.3.3 Conducing the Interviews

Each interview lasted between about 60 and 100 minutes. I conducted semi-structured interviews via phone instead of video because participants would not agree to their images being recorded. This happened for various reasons, including privacy concerns, and participants living with many family members that hindered their comfort. Furthermore, when being interviewed, some veiled participants were inside their houses, where they do not wear a headscarf, and they did not want to be interviewed on video without a headscarf. Telephone interviews allowed the participants to maintain a degree of anonymity, helped them to feel emotionally safe, and removed the necessity to dress in a specific way (Irvine, 2010). Another reason related to language: I wanted to conduct the interviews either in standard Arabic, French, or Berber: the three main languages used in Algeria. However, the choice of language was my participants' decision, as I did not want to make them uncomfortable speaking a language, they were less comfortable with. Before the interviews, most participants informed me they would use Algerian dialects (Arabic in Arabic regions or Berber/Amazigh in Berber regions)—the language they used in everyday life—and a video interview would cause them distress. I discuss this particular challenge later in this chapter. Finally, three of the interviewed women informed me that they could only participate in telephone interviews because they were married, and their husbands would not allow them to be interviewed on video for

either cultural or religious reasons. For ethical reasons and to protect my participants' privacy, I decided to use phone interviews as standard.

One of the criticisms of telephone interviews is the reduction of visual cues. The interviewer does not see the interviewee, so body language and other non-verbal communication cannot be used as a source of extra information (Opdenakker, 2006, p. 5). However, telephone interviews were the most suitable for my study given that my participants' geographical location was not accessible for face-to-face interviewing and because of their desire to maintain privacy and freedom of dress. Asking the participants to engage in video interviewing would have risked causing distress for them, and so the telephone interviewing technique allowed me to obtain data that may otherwise not have been possible.

4.3.5 Interview Schedule

I started the interview process by interviewing an Algerian woman and her sister (introduced to me by my friend). The interviews were conducted over the phone and served as an opportunity to pilot the interview questions. After transcribing the two interviews, I assessed the feedback I received from the Algerian women and amended my interview questions accordingly. I found that two questions were repetitive and thus removed one of them from the interview guide. Some of the questions were complex and difficult to understand, so I paraphrased them into simpler sentences. I also added very simple questions to the first section of the interview instead of direct questions to make my participants comfortable (see appendix 1).

The interview schedule was structured following the results of the QCA conducted on Instagram and YouTube. It included two types of open-ended questions: main themes and follow-up questions. The main themes emphasized the main content of my research. As part of the main themes, the participants were encouraged to express themselves freely (Kallio et al. 2016). The questions focused on three main areas: social media use and influencers; attitudes towards hijab/dress and influencers; Influencers` role and the role of social media with regard to Algerian women . This helped to complement the QCA, which highlighted themes around the three previous areas.

As a strategy to get the participants comfortable, questions about the interviewees' personal traits and social media usage habits were first asked. The researcher can gather significant background material during this stage, which is crucial for establishing trust with the interviewee (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012). Afterwards, the participants were asked questions about their favourite Algerian influencers, their reasons for liking them, which aspects they like about the influencers' content, and their reasons for the latter. Then, they were also asked about their opinions regarding veiled and unveiled influencers, with a focus on the reasons for each opinion.

To help the participants understand the themes and steer the discourse toward the research topic, follow-up questions were incorporated into the interviews (Baumbusch, 2010). A handful of the follow-up questions were based on my reactions to the participants answers, but the majority were planned in advance. The participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on topics that came up during the interview process through follow-up questions.

4.3.6 Language and Translational Approaches for the QCA and Interviews

The interview data and comments collected on Instagram and YouTube were rarely in the English language. As a result, my research involved translating from different languages to English, as the thesis is written in English. As a quadrilingual researcher (I speak fluent Berber, Arabic, French, and English), I translated my data myself. However, the large volume of data I collected made it impossible for me to translate everything, so I decided to translate only the sections I needed to use as direct quotes.

Arabic has three forms: classical Arabic (the language of the Quran), modern standard Arabic (the formal written and spoken versions of Arabic that people learn in formal education) and spoken Arabic (the Arabic used in everyday conversations, but which varies from one country to another, and even from one city to another) (Abdelali, 2004). In Algeria, however, some cities are Berber (non-Arabic regions), and the Berber people of the regions speak a language called Berber or Amazigh. Bejaia, one of the cities from which I recruited participants for my research, is also Berber.

The translation process was challenging for several reasons. First, in the QCA, the comments on both Instagram and YouTube were written in different languages. This included French, modern standard Arabic, English (rarely), and a new form of language where the words are in Arabic but written in Latin letters. For the interviews, the transcripts were a combination of spoken Arabic and French. Participants from the two Arabic cities (Algiers and Jijel) used spoken Arabic, whereas those from Bejaia city used French. However, the participants from Bejaia City mixed Berber with French, mainly when they wanted to express their ideas in a better way to me.

Communicating experiences across different languages can lead to misinterpretation as the translation of exact meanings regarding ideas, feelings, and thoughts may not always be achievable due to specific terminologies in each language (Regmi et al., 2010; Van Nes et al., 2010). Furthermore, translating from one language to another raises questions about the researcher's roles and positions (Temple and Young, 2004). There is a risk that meaning will be lost in the translation process, having a negative impact on the resultant qualitative research (Regmi et al., 2010; Van Nes et al., 2010). I acknowledge that it is impossible to be completely neutral as a translator because, in the process of translation, it is almost impossible for translators not to leave their marks (Temple and Young, 2004). Furthermore, capturing the full image of experiences generally requires the use of narratives and metaphors (Polkinghorne, 2005). Metaphors change from one culture to another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), and this was one of the most challenging tasks during the process of translating from Algerian-spoken Arabic to English.

What's more, it is also important to acknowledge that "there is no single correct translation of a text" (Temple and Young, 2004, p. 165). The understanding of texts is influenced by the readers' beliefs and experiences; as a result, people would not understand all words in the same way once they have been translated (Temple and Young, 2004). As such, it is important to look at the meanings of texts within their contexts (Spivak, 2021).

To overcome translation limitations, I made an effort to articulate participants' voices as precisely as I could when translating their words. I achieved this by reflecting on meaning as I translated (Jootun et al., 2009). In the initial phase of translation, I returned to translated texts

until I was satisfied with the level of accuracy in the translation (Van Nes et al., 2010). Finally, I also used back-translation to transfer meaning from Arabic or French to English (Gawlewicz, 2016).

4.3.7 Ethical Considerations for Interviews

My research was conducted in compliance with the ethics policy of the University of Sheffield and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (Gov. UK, 2018). My research obtained ethical approval from the appropriate ethics reviewer in the Department of Sociological Studies at Sheffield University in March 2020. I was very careful to ensure that my research did not have the potential to cause any physical or emotional harm to my participants.

The participants were informed about the aim of the research, what their roles were, how their personal information would be used, and that the interviews would be recorded. After distributing the consent forms and information sheets, interview participants were recruited voluntarily. All participants were aware that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time without needing to give a reason. I also offered the chance for them to ask questions before the interview began and throughout the research process. I obtained both written and oral consent from the participants, as noted above.

The risks associated with the interviews included some questions about the religious and cultural beliefs of the participants, which had the potential to cause psychological or emotional distress. To overcome this, I asked the participants before starting the interview if there were any questions that they did not want to be asked about. I also tried to make them feel comfortable during the interview process by giving them the freedom to talk as much as they wanted without insisting on any topic that would make them uncomfortable. I strived to conduct the interviews sensitively and carefully (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009) by showing acceptance and respect for any of the participants' opinions and attitudes.

I also planned to provide the women I interviewed with contact cards and details of Algerian associations related to the protection of women's rights in case they disclosed any sensitive data related to abuse or violence. Some of my participants disclosed that they were forced to

wear a hijab by male relatives. One participant, Sidra, thought that her rejection of veiling came from the fact that she was young and did not know about its religious meaning. However, during the interview, she was fully accepting of her hijab because she believed that it was a religious duty. Kamilia, who had similar experiences to Sidra, acknowledged that it was tradition and society's system of belief that put pressure on men to instruct women to veil, and as a result, they believed that the blame fell on traditions and society in general. I listened carefully to my participants and asked them whether they needed support from special services for Algerian women, but they decided they did not need it. As a researcher and complying with the University of Sheffield ethics policy, I had to respect their desires and decisions.

All personal identification information was removed or changed during transcription by providing pseudonyms for each participant, as noted in the ethical approval application. Some of my participants selected their pseudonyms, but the majority asked me to select one for them. After the transcription, I checked and compared the documents against the original audio recordings again and then destroyed the original recordings. All the data was securely stored in a password-protected file for electronic information or a locked and secure filing cabinet. The consent forms (written and oral) were all kept separately from the anonymized transcripts in a password-protected file for electronic information accessible only to me.

4.3.8 Data Analysis

I applied a thematic analysis to my interview transcripts. The thematic analysis helped with highlighting keywords, recurrent expressions, and linguistic patterns within my data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The interview data was complex to understand due to the diversity of participants' attitudes towards Algerian influencers. When I started the generation of data, I also started interpreting it early to have a better understanding of it. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), Creswell (2014) and Mason (2018), the process of formal data analysis involved the following steps.

First, I transcribed all the interviews and organized them based on the participants' cities (three different cities were represented). Then I read the transcripts multiple times to gain familiarity and to understand and reflect on their meanings. I followed this by taking notes

and creating my initial ideas on each transcript to highlight the most important patterns for the participants.

To generate codes, I used both inductive and deductive approaches. I started by looking at the codes that I initially found in the QCA and using my research questions to find specific codes related to them. Then, I moved to the inductive approach by looking for other codes within my data. After that, I coded the data to manually develop initial themes because of the different languages the participants used. As explained above, the participants mixed various languages when speaking, and the form of language they used (e.g., spoken Arabic, Berber mixed with French) did not help me when using the NVivo analysis software as it does not support languages such as spoken Algerian Arabic and Berber, which were the most dominant languages my participants used.

The final steps of the data analysis involved revising the themes, interpreting, and producing the written analysis, revising the data for the last time, and finalising the selected extracts. I discuss the themes that I settled on in the subsequent chapters. Themes in the thematic analysis are often believed to 'emerge' within the data. However, the researcher also needs to make choices about which themes are of interest and report them to the readers (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes I identified for my research were associated with my research questions. The analysis also involved comparing the data from the QCA I conducted on social media, and this resulted in producing diverse kinds of knowledge through the interviews and the QCA.

I classified the data into three sets based on cities (Algiers, Bejaia, and Jijel). My final research question investigates how culture and geographical context influence the status of veiling in Algeria; as a result, I also undertook a comparative analysis to gain insight into the experiences of women with veiling in different Algerian contexts, including how patriarchal concerns and the degree of religious conservatism in each city affect the veiling practices of women.

I spent a long time reading and editing the data to identify codes, develop themes, and understand the relationship between the themes. This helped me group the themes into arguments that are discussed in the empirical chapters of the thesis. I had to make choices about which data to include and exclude for this thesis, as it was impossible to present all the themes

within the thesis. The themes I included were integral to the aims of this research only. I further acknowledge that the process of data collection and analysis is not purely objective because factors such as the researcher's background and theoretical orientation intervene during the process (Mason, 2002).

4.5 Situating the 'Self' in Research: My Positionality as a Researcher

I acknowledge that my cultural and ethnic background influenced all stages of the research, including my choice of research questions, the collection of data, the analysis, the interpretation, and the presentation of the data. In this section, I explain how my background and my personal experiences influenced the research (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). This also affects how participants view the researcher has an impact on their narratives (Neal and Walters, 2006).

I am a young Berber Muslim Algerian female who moved to the UK when I was 23. I completed a Master's degree in education before commencing my doctoral studies – as such, I am neither a sociologist nor a media and communications researcher by background. I grew up in a Muslim family in Bejaia, an Algerian Berber city situated in a Mediterranean port on the Gulf of Bejaia. Algeria is a conservative Muslim country, where the degree of religious conservatism differs between cities. Growing up in a Berber community, Islam is the main religion for most people. However, in some parts of the city of Bejaia, there was a minority of Christian people who practiced their religion too. I learned Arabic in school when I was six years old, but my native language is Berber (Amazigh).

As a woman belonging to this city, I was surrounded by veiled and unveiled women. I was taught at an early age that hijab is a woman's choice. In my community, veiling and modesty are defined differently from other Algerian Arabic cities (here I do not refer to Arabic as an ethnicity, but I mean cities where Arabic is the native language of the inhabitants). My experiences with hijab are different as I grew up unveiled and am still unveiled, in a Berber community where women were not often judged for being unveiled. In other Arabic Algerian cities, hijab is crucial and sometimes obligatory for women to appear in public, but this is an experience I did not have.

From a young age, I had a strong interest in feminism, mainly Muslim feminism. The patriarchal nature of my country was the main factor that pushed me to read some interesting works about the lives of Algerian women in the past. The history of Algeria, including French colonization and the civil war of 1990, further aroused my interest. I must also acknowledge that the existence of different Islamic schools and scholars has created complex and nuanced feelings towards how religion is used in my country. Due to the existence of multiple Islamic interpretations of religious texts, I grew up noticing that women's lives were influenced in different ways. As Lazreg (2021) explains, Algeria moved between fundamentalist Islam and secularism, and this affected society in general, particularly women. The historical factors together created gender inequality, where men have more power over women (Lazreg, 1994). My research shows, some of my participants still believe that patriarchy, Islamic traditions, and Algerian culture hinder their freedom. In her books (1994, 2009, and 2021), Lazreg has argued that the historical, economic, and political situation of Algeria has affected the veiling practices of women. She explains that "not wearing a veil is sometimes perceived as a rejection of one's cultural background" (Lazreg, 2009, p. 37).

After the proliferation of female social media platforms and the emergence of social media influencers since 2016 in Algeria, I started to become more interested in veiling. In the past, women's visibility in the media is generally rare because a woman's appearance in the media is assumed to contradict the Islamic principle of modesty and challenges the Algerian traditional cultural system. Women`s visibility is often seen as an immoral act. Following Algerian social media pages, mainly on Facebook, I started to notice how female influencers were debated, including their visibility online and their dressing and/or veiling styles. I noticed that people had diverse reactions to them, and that diversity motivated me to conduct this research.

It was not my interest in the influencers themselves that motivated me, as I do not position myself as a fan. I do not personally view influencers as role models for several reasons, including my awareness that influencer marketing involves self-branding, and the commodification of the self through diverse techniques, including women's beauty. I am an adult, educated woman who feels that women's freedom and success should emanate from things that go beyond the commodification of beauty and personal lives on social media.

My initial concern when I started conducting this research was my position as a Muslim Algerian woman. I believe that the patriarchal system in Algeria and perhaps in many other Muslim countries has been used against women, by which I mean that Islam has been misused in several ways to gain power over women. I was concerned about conducting this research without being judgmental towards either Islam, Algerian culture, veiling, or even veiled women.

My concern was about the asymmetry of power between me as an unveiled Algerian woman and my participants who were veiled. As Valentine (2007) explains, the presence of the researcher in the interview process, asking the participants questions and listening to them, influences the narrative. My awareness that I might project my feelings onto participants made me work hard to avoid this outcome. I tried to be reflective on this issue and acknowledge my role during the interviews; I adopted the role of a careful listener (Mason, 2002). I also focused on building a connection with the participants before and during the interviews. I tried to demonstrate caring about their stories and interact with them, but I simultaneously gave them space to be reflective about their thoughts and experiences (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005). I tried to acknowledge both my participants' and mine during the process (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

However, most of the participants were keen to be interviewed, and I did not feel any discomfort speaking to them. They seemed to enjoy the exchange and openly expressed themselves and their experiences about the topic. I did not perceive that my position as a researcher living in a Western context or being an unveiled woman created asymmetrical power relations. Many of the participants expressed how proud they were to see an Algerian woman researching and giving other Algerian women the opportunity to speak about their experiences. I also have to acknowledge that phone interviews led to the lack of visual cues and the difficulty of obtaining nonverbal data. However, talking about themselves without direct interaction with me as allowed my respondents to disclose sensitive information while feeling at ease.

After the interviews, some participants asked me whether they could stay in contact with me on social media, which was unexpected. After each interview, I sent them a text to thank them

for their time. Many of the women I interviewed contacted me later to suggest new participants, demonstrating that they had been happy to share their experiences with me.
Nevertheless, in the recruitment process, I faced difficulties recruiting Algerian women for several reasons. Due to the conservative nature of Algerian society, women hesitated to participate. Some of them initially accepted the invitation but rejected it later because their husbands did not allow them to speak to me. Others believed that speaking to a stranger through social media was not safe.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methods I used to conduct this research. I addressed the research methods, including the QCA and the semi-structured interviews, and why they were suitable to answer my research questions. The chapter also covered the sampling for the QCA, the data collection, and the analysis. It also outlined the process of recruiting participants for the interviews. I then reflected on the challenges faced in both the qualitative content analysis and the interviews. This included the translation approach used in this research, the ethics related to both social media and the interviews, the challenges related to recruitment and the analysis, and my positionality as a researcher. In the following three chapters, I discuss the findings of the data analysis.

Chapter 5: Followers' Attitudes towards Algerian Female Influencers' Self-representation Strategies on Instagram and YouTube

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on 22 semi-structured interviews with young Algerian women, along with qualitative content analysis of comments under some Algerian influencers' posts. As discussed in Chapter 3, throughout the literature, there have been several studies about Muslim influencers (Hassim et al., 2015; Hassan and Harun, 2016; Kavakci and Kraepelin, 2017; Warren,2018) and influencers in Western contexts (see for example Khamis, et al., 2017; Berryman and Kavka, 2017). These studies are crucial as they explain how influencer marketing works and the techniques influencers use to build audiences and gain popularity. However, little is known about how followers understand and respond to influencers' self-representations, particularly in the context of Algerian Muslims, and my research addresses this gap. Through my data analysis, I identified five key themes raised by influencers' followers: (1) instructiveness, (2) inspiration and motivation, (3) wealth, (4) credibility, and (5) representativeness. In this chapter, I discuss these themes and the followers' views about them.

The opening section of this chapter explores the theme of instructiveness. It explains how followers view the influencers' content, embedding participants' diverse responses to it. This chapter then explores the theme of motivation and inspiration from the followers' understanding, and their diverse responses to it. Afterwards, it investigates the concept of wealthiness among influencers, and the followers' responses to influencers' lavish lifestyles. It then moves to explain the concept of credibility and followers' reactions to it. Finally, it tackles the notion of representativeness including followers' understanding and reactions towards influencers' self-representations.

5.2 Perceived Instructiveness of Influencers

My findings show that the influencers' content on Instagram and YouTube is often used to acquire knowledge and information. Many followers described the influencers as 'instructive'

(or similar terms). Instructive in the context of my research implies that some of the influencers' content is informative; it helps the followers acquire knowledge in different domains. The majority (13) of my interview participants said they used the influencers' content to educate themselves on a variety of topics, for example, how to launch a business, how to use particular products, where to buy products, and even how to practice self-development. As illustrated by Kaouthar, a 25-year-old pharmacy operator manager from Algiers, the main drive behind following the Algerian influencer @noor_m_officiel was to acquire knowledge:

> She (Noor) gives a lot of information about how to create your own business, how to strengthen your personality and become a strong woman, how to behave with others in society, this is why I follow her […] she gives us knowledge and very important information, and she avoids always showing her private life because I think that details about her personal life do not benefit us in any way.

In another conversation with Sabrina – a 30-year-old middle school teacher from Algiers - she similarly believed that the influencers she follows are instructive and help her in learning new information:

> I learn from them, I learned many things about products, and tips that I can use at home, and in my everyday life.

Similarly, Lydia – a 36-year-old caterer from Algiers – said that the influencers provide useful knowledge about different things she finds interesting, including education, organization, behaviour, personal relationships, and even mothering:

> I learned many things, for example, new languages. They also give me ideas about how to study, and how to organize my room. I also learned other things such as how to behave in a respectful way with others, how to educate children, and how to handle my relationship with my partner.

Serena, a 32-year-old housewife from Bejaia also find the influencers instructive:

> They provide good information and I learn from them about beauty, life, and even cooking sometimes.

These quotes suggest that, from the perspective of the previous followers, the role of influencers is not limited to the promotion of products aiming to impact individuals' purchasing decisions, as has often been assumed (Ki and Kim, 2019). The majority of participants described influencers as providing instructive knowledge about a diverse range of topics such as beauty, health, business, and self-development. Kaouthar, for example, mentioned that she gains knowledge related to career decisions such as how to build a business, create a project, and personal development. Similarly, Lydia and Sabrina view the influencers as knowledgeable, or even experts, in some domains, and thus use their content to acquire knowledge. The views of these participants may result from how some of the Algerian influencers present themselves online. Some scholars (e.g., Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016; Abidin, 2018) argue that influencers in general acquire celebrity capital by their online performances, through which they often present themselves as exceptional, knowledgeable, talented, and experts. The influencers selected for my research use similar techniques, in that they share specific content to educate their followers about diverse topics. For example, @amira-riaa and @ryma beautyaddict often provide advice about women's health, relationships, how to raise children, and many other topics. On their Instagram profiles, many highlighted stories – Instagram stories are the stories users chose to permanently feature on their profile to keep them trending for up to 24 hours – are dedicated to topics including women's health, and how to build a successful business, where the influencers provide details and answer questions about a particular topic. Because the influencers exhibit their knowledge and expertise in a variety of fields, some of their followers find them to be instructive and use their content as a learning tool.

However, four of my 22 participants did not view the influencers as instructive. For them, the influencers do not always provide knowledge or purposive information. In an interview with Kamilia - a 26-year-old Algerian English teacher from Jijel - she informed me that she admires some Algerian influencers because they are successful women who are determined and independent. However, she finds that their content is not always informative. For her, content about traveling or about the food the influencers consume is non-instructive:

> […] not all of them have instructive content. Like they post a lot about where they go, travel, or eat, and I don't benefit from it.

Similarly, Samra, a 30-year-old housewife from Jijel, who follows some influencers to gain knowledge about beauty topics, criticized the influencers' content as it does not always drive her to acquire knowledge. An example of this content is domestic tasks such as cleaning:

> Samra: […] but not always good content honestly.
> Amel: Can you give me an example of that, please?
> Samra: Yes, like cleaning, do people think that we do not know how to clean? It is something very basic and posting about it has no purpose and doesn't help me to learn anything new.

Influencers focus heavily on sharing commercial content where they promote products (Lou et al., 2019; Belanche et al., 2020; Kim and Kim, 2020). However, as my participants mentioned above, they also create non-commercial content (Audrezet et al., 2018; Ki et al., 2020). For example, cleaning, food, and personal life information are non-commercial types of content where they do not include any type of promotion. As my findings show, some followers such as Kamilia and Samra consider the non-commercial content of the Algerian influencers' they follow to be non-instructive because they do not benefit from it. In the case of Samra, she even feels patronized by certain content because, to her, cleaning is common sense. Although some followers view this latter output as non-beneficial, researchers such as Abidin (2015) and Berryman and Kavka (2017) believe that influencers generally use such content as a self-branding technique, where they share their everyday routines to provide a sense of closeness or intimacy with their followers. It is used to create a perception of familiarity and closeness (Marwick and Boyd, 2011) to sustain or build an audience (Khamis et al., 2017).

The reason some of my participants consider the non-commercial content to be non-beneficial and not instructive could be because most Algerian influencers, particularly those selected for my research, do not create content related to one specific domain of interest. In other words, many of the influencers combine diverse interests together and do not classify themselves as, for example, travel influencers only. Previous research (Kim and Kim, 2020;

Tafesse and Wood, 2021) showed that followers and commercial brands tend to prefer influencers who categorize themselves in one specific domain of interest – something that resonates with my own findings. Such research has also shown that followers have higher interactions and engagements with such categories of influencers (Belanche et al., 2020). It is further argued that influencers with a high number of followers, who simultaneously share content about a variety of interests, may cause some of their followers to feel disinterested because of its diversity (Tafesse and Wood, 2021). My research confirms this. Samra and Kamilia, for example, both appear disengaged with the non-commercial content the influencers share. In addition to the theme of instructiveness examined above, another recurrent theme was inspiration and motivation, discussed below.

5.3 Inspiration and Motivation

5.3.1 Influencers as Inspirational and Motivational Figures

My research showed that some Algerian influencers were seen as inspirational and motivational. Nine participants draw motivation and encouragement from their favourite influencers, who serve as role models for successful Algerian women. To illustrate, Kamilia cited some of the Algerian influencers as a source of motivation and inspiration for both financial and professional success:

> […] They (influencers) motivate me to become a successful woman too, they are role models for women because of their financial and career success […] For example, Amira worked on herself a lot to have what she has now, so, yes, they motivate us women to achieve our dreams and become what we want.

When I interviewed Mayliss, a 27-year-old marketing student from Algiers, she stated that watching some of the influencers helps her to learn techniques that are beneficial because she desires to become an influencer in the future. Mayliss is a content creator, sharing epigrams on Instagram; however, her plans include becoming a personal development influencer. As a result, she used influencers' content to observe their body language and learn

how to speak to attract followers. Mayliss expressed her admiration for @amira-riaa and her professional success:

> […] She is a successful woman, she started from nothing, I mean she had nothing before, but now she has created several shops for her brand, and this affects me because I want to achieve what she has achieved.

Similarly, Souhaila (a 25-year-old accountant from Algiers) said that the influencer @amira-riaa inspires women to succeed in their professional careers:

> […] For example, Amira was an ordinary woman but then she decided to create her own brand. By seeing her on social media, many women followed her path and started working in similar careers. The idea of women working becomes slowly accepted after seeing influencers such as Amira initiating it and succeeding in their careers. I really love the idea that these influencers helped in inspiring women to become independent.

In these quotes, Mayliss, Kamilia and Souhaila expressed their admiration for the Algerian influencer @amira-riaa and her successful career, implying that she is a role model. Amira's content motivates and inspires them to achieve professional and financial success. In my data, when describing influencers as role models, followers mentioned four particular influencers: @amira-riaa, @ziya-inspiration, @shirineboutella and @noor_m_officiel. The three influencers @amira-riaa, @ziya-inspiration and @noor_m_officiel share similar content, which includes fashion, business, beauty, motivational speeches, religious content, and motherhood advice, as all three are wives and mothers. They cover topics like how to balance being a good wife and mother while also having a successful career. They accomplish that by highlighting their abilities to manage various roles. This is achieved through social media posts such as videos, captions, and pictures where they present themselves with their families, in their business, or travelling (Leban et al., 2020), techniques that @amira-riaa, @ziya-inspiration and @noor_m_officiel frequently use. Scholars such as Duffy and Hund (2015) believe that female influencers generally strive to present themselves as enterprising women with the capacity to achieve success. Their presence online entails presenting the persona of the 'superwoman'

and presenting perfect lives by highlighting their unique capacities of being able to concurrently manage how they look, their relationships, success, intelligence, and knowledge (Chae, 2018; Devos et al., 2022). Unlike the previous three influencers, @shirineboutella shares a different type of content. She focuses on sharing content related to fashionable trends with very famous brands, makeup, parties with friends, and attending international events. The previous influencers are regarded as inspirational in similar ways despite their varied material.

In the comments I have analysed on YouTube and Instagram, some followers praised the influencers @amira-riaa and @ziya_inspiration in a similar way. For example, some followers praised the influencer @amira-riaa for her professional success as a young woman. The Youtube video was a hijab tutorial where she was sharing different styles of how to wear a headscarf. The headscarves she used in the video were from her own collection and brand. For example, a follower said:

> "This woman is an example to follow bravo Amira 🏵🏵🏵".

Similarly, another one said:

> To be honest, I see you as successful, you created your own business and project, and you knew how to develop it, although you are so young mashallah.

For the influencer @ziya_inspiration, 123 comments on her Instagram picture and 262 comments on one of her YouTube videos – which was about her morning makeup routine - were intended to express their admiration for her achievements, and how she serves as an inspiration to them in a manner similar to the examples given above:

> I just discovered your channel on YouTube, and I just adore you, cheers to the woman you are and thank you for your advice. You just inspire me to succeed, and you motivate me to become the better version of myself, I activated the notification bar for your channel, and I am impatient to watch more.

Another follower similarly said:

> I just decided to introduce your videos to my everyday routine, you are my inspiration, and I admire your success in life day after day, Good luck.

The view that Algerian influencers are successful women relates to the status of women in Algerian society. As discussed in Chapter three, for many years, Algerian women upheld a conventional role within the family system, with the majority restricted to that of mothers and housewives. This gender dynamic did not remain static, as after the independence of Algeria in 1962, more women gained access to education and then employment (see Lazreg, 1994). However, according to the Algerian National statistics office (2015), 16,4% women and 66,8% men are employed. This indicates that there is still a large gender gap in Algeria between the numbers of men and women in employment. In this context, the emergence of female influencers as a modern phenomenon in Algeria, and women stepping outside their traditional roles, resulted in the followers admiring the influencers' professional success, and to be seen as role models.

Therefore, we can see that the characteristics of Algerian society, which are founded on certain customs and religion, as well as the fact that influencers present themselves as carrying out diverse roles, contribute to their female followers' admiration of their success. In traditional societies like Algeria, women face diverse challenges to step out from the traditional roles assigned to them. In my research, I found that these challenges included patriarchy, traditions, and religion (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7).

5.3.2 Influencers as Non-inspirational or Motivational Figures

However, according to three of my participants, influencers are not always thought of as inspirational. Some followers view them merely as individuals who promote products for financial benefits. In other words, they follow the influencers only to learn about different products. For example, Naima, a 35-year-old television camera operator who lives in Algiers, stated that her social media following list is limited to only a few Algerian influencers such as @Ikram-main-d'or and @beautywithasma, as she trusts their reviews. During our exchange,

Naima was critical about most Algerian influencers because she believes that influencer marketing is highly competitive, and most influencers advertise products for money regardless of their price or quality. Naima stressed that she tried many products on which the influencers' feedback was mostly positive and was disappointed by their quality. This resulted in her unfollowing most of them and criticizing followers who praise them. Furthermore, Naima dismissed the idea that influencers serve as a source of inspiration or motivation – she believes that their financial success was established prior to gaining popularity on social media:

> […] I don't see anything that makes them examples of successful women to follow. They are just ordinary people who try to sell products for money […] they did not become successful because they work as influencers. If you followed them from the beginning of their careers, they showed that their parents were already rich. They became famous online because most followers are curious about their lives, not because they do anything special.

These participants were sceptical about the success of the influencers – they seemed to believe that influencers promote products and often receive compensation from sponsored brands, as explained by Selma, a 27-year-old commercial assistant:

> […] They don't inspire me because the majority of what they have is given to them for free as a part of their jobs; they keep the products for themselves. Mainly now, they tell which brands are sponsoring them, so it is naïve to believe that they worked hard to be successful because it is not always the case.

As these quotes demonstrate, influencers are not always viewed as inspirational or successful role models. Influencers engage in sponsored advertising content, a form of advertising whereby brands pay influencers to create content and share it on their social media platforms (Leaver et al., 2020). In recent years, all influencers have been required to mention the brands they are promoting (Ang et al., 2019). Influencers must now comply with new rules created by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), an American organization that aims to safeguard consumers from deceptive commercial activities (FTC, 2017). To stop misleading business

activities that negatively impact American consumers, the FTC collaborates with competition and consumer protection organizations abroad, both directly and through international networks, including in Algeria (FTC, 2013). To disclose the advertisement, influencers use the "paid partnership" feature on their Instagram business accounts (Leaver et al., 2020). This technique is used by many Algerian influencers, and followers like Selma are fully aware of its meaning.

Further, Naima believes that the most successful influencers already had access to wealth. Many Algerian influencers disclose information about their families either through sharing stories where they show parents' expensive houses or through answering followers' questions on Instagram. When I observed the influencers, I noticed that many followers asked them questions about their families' backgrounds or employment. Communicating this kind of private information with followers is believed to be a self-branding technique, referred to as digital intimacy in influencer commerce (Abidin, 2015; Hermanova, 2021). It is a strategy used by influencers to build a sense of closeness with their followers (Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Baym, 2012). However, Stubb and Colliander (2019) believe that individuals who understand marketers' strategies often respond differently to advertising persuasion techniques, as Naima demonstrates. According to Naima, influencers have gained visibility on social media but have not independently achieved any other type of success, such as financial. Here, some of my participants show that they do not perceive influencers as motivational and role models, as they already had access to wealth (another form of 'success').

5.4 A Rich Girls' world: Followers' Understanding of Influencers' lavish Lifestyles

Along with the themes covered in the preceding section, influencers' extravagant lifestyles were a key topic of discussion among followers. Influencers display their lavish lifestyles through overseas trips, high-quality food, or by wearing clothes from luxury brands (Abidin, 2016). Algerian influencers in general do not fall into the category of luxury brand influencers, but they occasionally integrate content that showcases wealthy lifestyles. Unlike luxury brand influencers, the Algerian influencers occasionally display their wealth while also portraying their everyday lives as ordinary people. Despite this, they received criticism for their content

which feature some indicators of extravagant lifestyles. In this section, I discuss the followers' attitudes towards Algerian influencers' lavish lifestyles.

12 interviews participants admitted that they were doubtful about the extravagant lifestyles that influencers frequently display. These followers criticized the influencers who share extravagant lifestyle such as luxury brands, trips, food, and prestigious clothes because they seem unattainable for many ordinary people. The shared lifestyles thus seem to be unreal for followers. Malika (a 27-year-old unemployed former accountant from Algiers) said:

> […] Influencers are trying to show that Algerian women live the life of upper-class people, which is not true.

During our exchange, Malika informed me that her favourite influencer is @divarebeccaofficiel. When I started my data collection, the influencer @divarebeccaofficiel did not have many followers, but, at the time of writing (May 2023), her Instagram account reached 2.1 million followers. Malika described Rebecca as a genuine, honest, humble influencer because she does not share an extravagant lifestyle. Malika went on to express her confusion about the reality she is living as an Algerian woman, and the influencers' extravagant content on social media:

> […] It is funny because I sometimes get the impression that there is another Algeria that the influencers are trying to show on social media where I do not belong. As if there is an Algeria that is unique to them, their world. And this has nothing to do with our reality as Algerian women and does not represent our life in reality […] Not only this, but we also know that most of us cannot afford many of what they show, except when you are from a very, very rich family, which is rare here as you know. It is just illogical, as I said, there is an Algeria that belongs to them.

Other followers also voiced their disappointment about the influencers who share expensive products that most followers cannot afford. For example, Samia, a 25-year-old architect from

Jijel, who follows influencers to learn new life experiences and beauty products, acknowledged her disappointment, explaining:

> I am disappointed by most of the influencers. At the beginning of their careers, they were humble. But they changed after becoming famous. Recently one of them was doing her make-up and showed her eyeshadow pallet from Huda beauty. They know that the brand is very expensive in Algeria, and they sometimes travel abroad to buy the products because they do not even exist here. But they are inconsiderate about ordinary people as they know we cannot afford to travel or buy such palettes.

The constant exposure to influencers' extravagant lifestyles negatively affected some followers' emotions. To illustrate, Sidra - a 27-year-old tourism officer from Jijel - explained that she had recently unfollowed most Algerian influencers, except @amira-riaa, who she described as a role model. Sidra said she unfollowed the influencers because she was constantly exposed to their content, which featured excessive spending of money, and purchasing expensive products, resulting in her comparing her lifestyle to theirs. The comparison caused her emotional distress. The difficulty in attaining the influencers' lavish lifestyles led her not only to feel badly about her own life, but also to question the influencers' credibility:

> When I see their extravagant lifestyle, I feel sick, honestly, believe me when I say sick; I feel that their lifestyles are simply different from ours. I question how much they are paid, the price of their clothes, the food they eat, and many other things. It is an exaggeration; we live in Algeria, and it is not even a rich country, their posts do not represent the reality of Algerian society, it is just a lie, and this is my opinion.

In the comments on the influencers' posts that I analysed, followers displayed similar criticism and scepticism. The critical comments were mainly under the posts of the Algerian influencer @ziya-inspiration. Ziya often presents herself as a wealthy woman: she is has a successful career , she is also a wife, and a mother of three children. Ziya is more active on Instagram

than on YouTube: she shares one YouTube video each month but updates her followers every day on Instagram, via stories. She shares content about how she decorates her expensive house, her investments, her company, how she raises her children, her beauty techniques and luxurious purchases, her trips, and her relationship with her husband. The comments I analysed on her YouTube channel were about her morning make-up routine. In the video, she showed her expensive bedroom, her breakfast, and how she takes care of herself each morning. Ziya focuses on creating a specific type of video, by which I mean her content is aesthetically curated in a particular way. She often produces videos with high-quality lighting, beautiful backgrounds, clear and good-quality sound, and titles.

Another common trait in @ziya-inspiration' videos is providing motivational speeches to other women, encouraging them to be strong, positive, and healthy. Through observing her posts, I noticed that Ziya does not often promote products for commercial brands. Rather, she shows what she buys with her own money. On her YouTube video, followers addressed her luxurious lifestyle. They criticized her for showing her extravagant possessions to others. To illustrate, some followers criticized her for endorsing unrealistic goals and lifestyles for other Algerian women:

> I love you and I love what you do, your advice, and your content most of the time, but sharing your beautiful expensive house and lifestyle in this way makes women who do not have the same social class as you feel bad because they experience a different reality from yours. So, maybe what you share is appropriate for rich people but not us, it would be good to reconsider what you share with us because you are making us dream about something no one can achieve in Algeria.

In another comment, a follower blamed the influencer for failing to reflect on the reality of most Algerian women:

> Are you serious? You want to persuade me that we can have such luxurious morning routines, while pretending to have no idea about how most Algerian women live?

In similar vein, another follower criticized Ziya for failing to consider the lifestyles of women who do not have access to luxurious possessions:

> When you have this house and such furniture, it is normal to receive admiration, it is really inconsiderate about ordinary women who have nothing to show.

Taken together, these observations suggest that some Algerian influencers present themselves as belonging to a higher social class by living a luxurious and elegant lifestyle (Marwick, 2015; Abidin, 2016). It has been argued that most influencers strive to present a rosy world by sharing expensive products, fun activities, and experiences (Hudders and Lou, 2022). Abidin (2016) suggested that influencers present themselves as one of a number of ideal figures, of which the 'material girl' is one. This figure represents the category of influencers who visually focus on sharing their luxurious properties with their followers (Abidin, 2016). In essence, influencers use specific strategies to present themselves in particular ways (Marwick, 2015). For example, by including luxurious material in their everyday lives, this category of influencers makes the impression that such extravagant properties are easily attainable to their followers (Abidin, 2016).

As seen in the previous quotes, the influencers' excessive sharing of lavish lifestyles induced negative feelings among some followers. This may happen because sharing luxurious lifestyles encourages followers to question how the content creator can afford them (Marwick, 2015). Furthermore, unrealistic presentations of lifestyles may induce negative feelings among followers who perceive themselves as being unable to achieve them (Chae, 2018). Extravagant images may cause social comparisons and negatively affect self-image (Corcoran et al., 2011; Lim and Yang, 2015), as in Sidra's case.

My research findings also indicate that frequently sharing extravagant and luxurious lifestyles may affect an influencer's credibility. The mediated intimacy or closeness that influencers develop with their followers may be lost as a result of excessive sharing of luxury lifestyles. As previously mentioned, most of the influencers selected for my research create a type of 'closeness' with their followers. They achieve this through presenting themselves as ordinary

people – a technique called 'persona intimacy' by Abidin and Thompson (2012). Abidin and Thompson (2012) explain that persona intimacy refers to the connection that is created as a result of financial interest between Internet celebrities and their audiences and is different from personal intimacy which is not generally motivated by business interests. Examples of these strategies include telling stories about their personal lives, showing behind the scenes when they record videos, and product giveaways (Abidin, 2015; Berryman and Kavka, 2017; Enke and Borchers, 2019), techniques used by most Algerian influencers. The success of influencers in marketing is often determined by how they engage with followers (Evers, 2019). As a result, to create a desirable image, they are required to strike a careful balance between sharing their extravagant lifestyles and simultaneously maintaining their relationship with audiences by creating a perceived commonality (Hudders et al., 2021). When this doesn't happen, such as in the case of the influencer Ziya, resulted in followers criticizing their content and questioning the credibility of their lifestyles. In what follows, I expand my discussion on influencers' credibility.

5.5 Influencers' Credibility

This section addresses the theme of credibility from the viewpoint of followers. Influencers' credibility is viewed as a crucial factor in influencer marketing (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Research (Teng et al., 2014; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2016) has shown that influencers' credibility emanates from their perceived trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. Credibility is important for followers because it affects their purchase intentions (Balaban and Mustatea, 2019).

In my research, just over half of my participants viewed the influencers as trustworthy and credible. Selma, a 27-year-old commercial assistant from Bejaia, explained that she follows influencers to view their feedback on beauty products. Selma also explained that her career as a commercial assistant has similarities to the influencers' profession. According to Selma, in order to be an influencer or a commercial assistant, a person must be credible when promoting products or services. Selma's trust in influencers stems from her conviction that their work is to introduce and recommend only genuine and good-quality products or services for followers, as she notes below**:**

> […] An influencer will not have fun promoting a product until she has tried it and knows it works. Because you know people after testing it will return to give feedback about her review. She will lose credibility as an influencer if her followers leave her a lot of critical comments, and this will negatively affect her reputation as an influencer. So, if she tests it, and talks about it to us, for me that's it, I trust her.

For followers like Selma, it is crucial that influencers test the products on themselves. It seems that because influencers test the products they recommend, followers believe they are credible. Another follower, Samia, who I previously introduced, explained that she trusts influencers for a similar reason. She informed me that her work as an architect is time-consuming, and thus watching the influencers' reviews about products guides her to select products more easily and effectively:

> […] Influencers guide me towards the right products because most of the time I do not have enough knowledge about brands, or how to use them. So, when they test products and tell us about their quality, I trust them […] I trust them because sometimes I directly ask the influencers about something and they answer me in the comments or even in direct messages, and that's kind and honest.

In the previous quotes, Selma and Samia described the influencers in two ways. First, they described them as knowledgeable or experts. According to them, influencers seem to know about the brands and how to use their products. This often happens because influencers, particularly those with high numbers of followers, present themselves as experts, having a high level of professionalism in their domain (Abidin, 2018). In addition, contrary to traditional advertising techniques where products are advertised in direct ways, influencers use advertorials where they integrate products into their everyday lives, showing them as ordinary people and creating a natural connection between them and their followers (Abidin and Ots, 2015). Secondly, Samia described the influencers as being 'kind' because they answered her questions either in the comment sections or through direct messaging. According to Marwick (2013, pp.118-119), micro-celebrities such as influencers interact with their followers to

"foster intimacy and a sense of duty to their audience". Through creating communicative or digital intimacy with followers, influencers may succeed in winning their trust (Abidin, 2015; Hermanova, 2021), as in the case of Samia. In influencer marketing, commodifying intimacy helps them to gain credibility among their followers (Khamis and Welling, 2017; Berryman and Kavka, 2017).

In Selma's view, a lack of credibility in influencers with high numbers of followers may result in damaging their reputation. Abidin (2016) argues that followers relate the influencers' numbers of followers with their reputation. Influencers with high numbers of followers are believed to have more responsibility when reviewing the quality of products, and as a result, they appear more credible (Abidin,2016) which corresponds to Selma`s narrative.

While Selma and Samia seem to believe that the influencers are credible, two participants do not share this opinion. One is Naima. Naima is a 35-year-old TV camera operator from Algiers. Naima claimed that she unfollowed many influencers because they seem non-credible. She seems to believe that many influencers in the early stages of their careers were credible, however, once they achieve fame, they lost their credibility. Due to the competitive and money-oriented nature of influencer marketing, the influencers' credibility becomes questionable, and their reviews seem to be less genuine, as Naima articulated:

> […] Influencers are competitive, each one of them is trying to look better than the others. When they propose a product, how do you know whether the brand paid them or not? Maybe she is paid, and she doesn't want to say that. Maybe the brand will pay one influencer more than the others, so the one who takes more money will review their product as effective and good. At the end of the day, influencers work for money, it benefits them not us; I think that they just review products to attract us to buy them […] I know that it is normal to earn money through promoting products, and she has every right to do so t, but not all of them are transparent and have work ethics as they try to show online.

Naima further explained:

> […] Because when the influencer tells me to use a natural product that I already have in my house, I feel that she is genuinely helping me, and it is not the same when she tells me to buy that specific brand. Because my friends and sisters can give me more genuine feedback about brands as I know that they will not lie about whether it is good or bad. When it is natural and everyone can have access to it, here I can trust her. I honestly bought some of their advertised products, but they were horrible and not nearly as good as they claim.

Naima is aware that influencers strive to build a good reputation to obtain economic profit or fame (Khamis and Welling, 2017) but, for her, this simultaneously resulted in her questioning their credibility. The financial benefits of success through brand sponsorships and paid reviews made the lifestyle influencer category extremely competitive (Thelwall,2021). It has been argued that many followers have high esteem for influencers who communicate that they promote products for passion rather than financial gain (Audrezet et al., 2020). As I was collecting my data, I noticed that some influencers such as @Ziya-inspiration constantly highlighted that being an influencer is a hobby rather than a profession. Ziya claims that what drives her to be an influencer is her desire to motivate women to be successful. However, as I outlined in the previous section, under her posts, followers were critical of her content which often shows her luxurious possessions. Thus, communicating that being an influencer is a hobby is not always believed by followers. In Naima's case at least, the people in her life, people who are close to her provide more credible reviews than the influencers. Because she purchased products promoted by some influencers and they were not effective as had been suggested in influencers' reviews, she has re-evaluated the influencers' credibility.

According to Naima and other participants, popularity affects the influencers` personae and work strategies. In the early stages of their careers, she described them as more humble and thus more credible. However, as their audiences grew, the influencers' content started to feature more brand-related advertisements and commercial content. Furthermore, they were believed to integrate less content about their personal lives and interact less with their followers than they used to:

> […] Maybe when they were beginners, I trusted them, they looked more genuine. Their life revolves more and more around promotions and business as they gain more followers. They no longer communicate with us in the same way or tell us their stories.

The influencers` excessive commercial content thus resulted in followers questioning their credibility.

5.6 Influencers' Representativeness of Muslim Algerian Women

Another major trend in my data was the view that influencers' self-representations should extend to other to Algerian women. Many participants (17) believed that influencers were responsible for representing Algerian women appropriately. However, appropriateness in the context of my research is a complex and diverse concept. The majority of the participants I interviewed believe that, because of the influencers` cultural and religious heritage, they should dress and veil according to Algerian and Muslim customs. Other followers suggest that in order to appropriately represent Algerian women, influencers need to demonstrate that they are educated and professionally successful. Some followers, however, articulated that influencers are not compelled to represent Algerian women in any manner.

The importance of the influencers' cultural and religious affiliation was highlighted by one of my participants, Kaouthar, a 25-year-old female pharmacy operator manager from Algiers. Kaouthar's favourite Algerian influencers are @Noor_m_officiel and @Shirineboutella. She admires Noor because she motivates her to be successful, provides good life advice, and she follows Shirine for her make-up tutorials. According to Kaouthar, Algerian Muslim influencers have a certain responsibility for how they present themselves on social media. When influencers share the same cultural and religious heritage, their online personae serve as representations of other women who belong to similar backgrounds.

> […] Yes, if she is Muslim and Algerian, she is responsible for how she is representing us to the world.

Similarly, Fatiha, a 28-year-old housewife from Bejaia, believes that influencers' online self-representations are crucial because their visibility is influential. This influence stems from having a high number of followers:

> […] The issue is that they are influencers on social media; when someone has thousands or millions of followers, she becomes responsible for the images she shows about Muslim women online. An influencer is someone who has the power to influence. If she carries herself in certain ways, she is also speaking for other women from Algeria.

Therefore, it is expected that self-representations communicate messages not only about the influencers but also about other Algerian women. Maria - a 25-year-old female student in the Sociology of Organizational Development from Bejaia - pointed out the importance of influencers' self-representations. Maria is unveiled and has a passion for fashion and clothes. Her future plans include becoming an influencer. During our exchange, Maria also argued that influencers` online personae communicate messages about Algerian women:

> […] Because as an influencer she represents a certain image, and she delivers certain messages about Algerian women through her image.

Similar to the perspectives of Maria and Fatiha, Noura (a 26-year-old female administrative officer and make-up artist) also argued that the self-representations of the influencers are crucial since their social media posts can spread quickly online. She further highlighted the importance of influencers` conduct online, particularly those with high numbers of followers:

> […] Yes, how they present themselves is important because of their role in society as influencers, mainly those with millions of followers. As influencers, their images come across thousands or millions of people.

These findings suggest that followers' interpretations of influencers' content lead to nuanced and intricate interpretations among followers. My findings suggest that the majority of followers understand self-representations not only as expressions of the self but also,

importantly as representations of the group to which the individual belongs. This may happen because influencers are believed to strategically use self-representation techniques to convey specific messages, including about cultural and religious groups (Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2013; Khamis et al., 2017; Abdin, 2018).

Researchers such as Tarlo (2010, 2013) and Arajana (2019) suggest that Muslim women have often been portrayed in Western media as victims, oppressed, silent, and backward. Tarlo (2013) and Beta (2019) argue that this motivated some Muslim women, such as influencers in modern societies, to represent themselves as modern, fashionable, and with agency. Some scholars (e.g., Peterson, 2020; Boudreaux, 2021) suggested that the aim of modern depictions of Muslim women, such as veiled influencers, is to demonstrate that Islam can be compatible with Western values and reclaim a new, alluring, and modern image. From the perspective of some followers, as shown in the previous quotes, how influencers represent themselves is important because these are also representations of other Algerian women. The findings reflect Van Es's (2019) claim that Muslim influencers are believed to become ambassadors for other Muslim women through their self-representations.

Muslim influencers becoming popular through sponsored brands, social media, and interviews resulted in their followers anticipating certain self-representations that aligned with their expectations. Boudreaux (2021), in her research about a popular Egyptian and British Muslim influencer named Dina Tokio, concluded that after becoming famous, the role of many Muslim influencers shifts, and they are expected to become "the public faces of their community" (p. 168). Tokio's followers started to set high expectations for her behavior and appearance as a Muslim woman, which aligns with my own research findings.

These findings relate to what other researchers (Lewis, 2017; Karakavak and Özbölük, 2022) have reported about religious communities, where female influencers are often evaluated and judged on how they represent themselves to others. Muslim influencers become the centre of attention in their communities and are evaluated according to the shared values of the Muslim context to which they belong; the shared values, however, were already fixed offline, and many of their followers seek to uphold their religious engagement through the influencers (Burns et al., 2021). Masquelier (2017) provided an example of this by explaining that

some Muslim influencers are often judged for their veiling and dress practices because modest behavior is often understood as a "matter of representation" (p. 159).

Abidin (2016) argued that influencers use role play as a technique to produce acceptable personas and behaviour among their followers to gain popularity and achieve high numbers of followers. My findings add to this by arguing that followers expect that the influencers play a role that produces representations that correspond and are accepted in the Algerian background. Expectations are nuanced and vary among followers, but they are typically shaped by the participants' social environment, which in this case includes Algerian culture, traditions, and Islam.

Followers' expectations of how influencers who share the same cultural and religious heritage are supposed to represent them result in findings related to the attitudes of followers towards the influencers' dress and veiling customs that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, two followers rejected the idea that the influencers' self-representations should also represent other Algerian women. For example, Selma stated that influencers represent only themselves. According to Selma, each individual has a unique personality, and thus influencers cannot speak for or represent other women. Furthermore, Selma does not interpret the influencers' content and activities as an attempt to represent Algerian women:

> No, they represent themselves, they cannot represent me or any other Algerian woman. Some influencers are on social media because they like it, and it is their passion. Them being on social media does not mean they represent Algeria or any woman; each person has an identity, and a way of dressing, so for me personally, I disagree that they represent anyone.

Another participant, Sarah (a 26-year-old architect from Jijel), also rejected the idea of influencers being representative of any kind:

> […] I have read comments claiming that influencers either positively or negatively represent us, but they don't; all I see in them is people who pursue a career on social media.

As previously explained, self-representations include pictures, behaviour, or body language. Updating followers through stories or a written status is also a form of self-representation (Rettberg, 2017). As I was collecting my data, I observed that influencers produce a variety of representations. Some of them, for example, demonstrate their culture and faith by wearing traditional Algerian clothes, preparing traditional Algerian food, or showing how they pray, fast, or celebrate Islamic holidays. The posts are usually accompanied by captions that demonstrate the influencer's affection for Algerian culture and Islam. On their Instagram stories, they also discuss how they seek to positively portray Algerian women to the outside world when they attend fashion shows or private events. For example, some veiled influencers share posts and stories about attending international events while wearing their hijabs or Algerian clothes, expressing how proud they are to be veiled among the other attendees.

However, the influencers' content is not all alike. For example, @Shirineboutella creates content that differs from that of other Algerian influencers, focusing mostly on acting and modelling. Additionally, she avoids mentioning Algerian customs or Islam while posting images of herself in strong make-up, tattoos, and non-religious clothes from well-known fashion designers. In her stories, Shirine frequently responds to the followers who shame her for her lack of efforts to represent Algerian women or Algeria itself. She emphasizes that her content does not reflect her cultural or religious background; her lifestyle is a personal subject that she does not want to discuss with the public.

These examples demonstrate how several interpretations might be made of the influencers' online personae, which are themselves diverse. The influencers` online personae elicit varied responses and opinions from their followers. This happens because what the influencers seek to convey varies and may not always line up with the followers' expectations and understanding (Van Nes, 2019), creating diverse interpretations for the influencers' self-representations, as shown in the previous quotes. We cannot know for certain whether influencers seek to produce representations of themselves or represent their cultural heritage, something we can only know through thorough investigation and consultation with the influencers themselves. The social background and religious convictions of the followers can have an impact on their opinions, something I discuss further in Chapter 7. At the same time, influencers'

presence on social media may not be sufficient for some followers to view them as fully representative of their community.

5.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings in relation to how followers understand and respond to influencers' self-representations. It was found that influencers were seen as instructive. Instructive implies that the content created by influencers is informative in helping followers to acquire knowledge in different domains such as business, education, and self-development. I argued, therefore, that the role of influencers is not limited to the promotion of products aiming to impact individuals' purchasing decisions. Influencers are viewed as instructive because they present themselves as exceptional, knowledgeable, talented, and experts. The findings also showed that non-commercial content, such as private life information and cleaning, can sometimes be viewed as non-beneficial and even patronizing. Therefore, non-commercial content that influencers use as a self-branding technique to provide a sense of intimacy and familiarity with their followers can create confusion and leads to followers' disinterest.

This chapter also showed that female influencers in Algeria are often viewed as role models because of their financial and professional success. Therefore, they are used as a source of motivation and inspiration. I identified two main factors that led to these interpretations. I first showed that influencers' self-representations often involve posts where the influencers show themselves to be enterprising women with the capacity to achieve success in everything. This explains why influencers are viewed as successful. The second factor is related to the position of women in Algeria. For years, women in Algeria maintained a traditional role within the family system, with the majority confined to the roles of mothers and housewives. According to statistics, there is still a significant disparity between the number of men and women in employment. As a result, I argued that the emergence of female influencers who promote themselves as independent, successful women stepping outside their traditional roles resulted in their followers admiring their careers, success, and financial independence. The diversity of the views regarding the theme of motivation and inspiration also showed that there are few cases where the influencers are viewed as individuals who promote products

for financial benefits and, in this case, are not regarded as inspirational or motivational. I argued that influencers disclosing information about paid partnerships, their sponsors, and information about their wealthy families led followers to believe that influencers promote products and often receive compensation from sponsored brands, implying that their financial success is not inspirational.

The findings also showed that unrealistic and extravagant lifestyles, including luxury products, trips, food, and clothes, seemed unattainable to most of the participants. Exposure to such content also led some participants to compare themselves to the influencers and thus create emotional distress. I argued that Algerian influencers engage in certain types of online performances under the rich girl persona. Influencers who include luxurious material in their content make such expensive properties appear easily attainable and normal to their followers. Nevertheless, in the context of my research, influencers who constantly engage in a luxurious type of content were perceived as inauthentic. The latter diminished the influencers` credibility among their followers. Followers' views about credibility are influenced by five factors: the influencers' presenting themselves as experts; their interactions with followers; their reputation in influencer marketing; the number of followers they have; and the followers' awareness of the competitive and money-oriented nature of influencer marketing.

The final section showed that influencers' self-representations extend to communicating messages about other Algerian women. I argued that Muslim influencers are often viewed as ambassadors for Muslim women. I also argued that in Muslim communities such as Algeria, women influencers are frequently morally evaluated in how they present themselves because it is perceived that they should represent their religion and cultural heritage. It also showed that the expectations of followers are often influenced by their social environment, culture, traditions, and Islam. Finally, existing studies have suggested that influencers strategically use self-representation techniques to convey specific messages to gain social capital. In Muslim contexts, some influencers are argued to use social media to reclaim a new, modern, alluring picture. However, the findings of this chapter show that how influencers present themselves may trigger multiple interpretations among their followers, who do not always view them as modern or alluring.

Some of what I found confirmed what researchers have said about influencer/follower relationships in other parts of the world. Influencers frequently show themselves as wealthy, credible, inspirational and motivational, and as a result followers view them in similar ways. In this sense, the specificities of the Algerian didn't matter. But some things are specific to Algeria – e.g., historical gender relations – do matter. And these in turn are shaped by patriarchal norms (which I talk about more in Chapter 7). For example, influencers viewed as a role model and successful women is shaped by Algerian traditions where most women had a traditional role of wives and mothers. Influencers stepping outside the traditional roles, resulted in followers viewing them as role models. Expectations about influencer representativeness are also culturally specific – i.e., in Muslim cultures, Muslim women influencers are expected to represent all Muslim women. I develop this point in much more detail in the next chapter, which focuses on attitudes to influencer veiling habits and dress. So, we can see that the Algerian context matters somewhat, especially in its interactions with Muslim/Islam and patriarchal cultures and norms. In the chapters that follow, I expand on these ideas.

Chapter 6: Followers' Attitudes towards Female Algerian Influencers' Dress and Veiling Practices

> We can never say that Algeria is represented by a woman with a modern hijab, or one with an Islamic veil, because it is not the case, and we cannot say that Algeria is represented by unveiled women because that's not the case either. What makes Algeria is the diversity of personalities, opinions, and cultures. (Nabila)

6.1 Introduction

The above quote suggests that there is a variety of veiling traditions in Algerian society. This chapter addresses followers' attitudes towards Algerian influencers' dress and veiling practices, covering both Islamic and modern hijab styles. It therefore answers my second research question: What are followers' responses to influencers' dress and hijab practices? This chapter also covers followers' attitudes towards unveiling. It draws on semi-structured interviews with young Algerian women and qualitative content analysis of comments under some Algerian influencers' posts. The chapter begins by addressing the role of influencers in relation to dress and hijab, arguing that influencers play a role in producing representations of veiling. It then explores followers' attitudes towards the influencers' Islamic hijab and the modern hijab before examining their responses to unveiled influencers.

Modesty is the essence of traditional veiling practices in Islam (Lewis, 2015). Shariah, which refers to the fundamental laws of Islam that emanate from both the Quran and the prophet's traditions (hadiths), established a dress code, comprising a set of rules that Muslim women should respect. According to Abdullah (2006), the requirements of an Islamic dress code that women must meet are covering the hair and whole body except the face and hands. Clothes should be loose-fitting and non-transparent, meaning that they should be thick and opaque so as not to display skin colour or the form of the body beneath them. The overall appearance of a person should be modest. Colourful clothes that may attract attention are discouraged because they contradict the notion of modesty. Furthermore, Muslim women should not wear clothes that resemble those of women from other religions or men's clothes in general.

It is assumed that not wearing other faiths' clothes and men's clothes shows that Muslim women are proud of their Islamic femininity and religious identity. Muslim women should also not wear extravagant or damaged clothes to discourage vanity and humiliation. Finally, make-up – especially heavy make-up – is discouraged in public and in front of non-mahram (that is, men who are not members of the family with whom marriage would be considered legal). This means that women can be unveiled and wear make-up only in front of mahram men (Family members with whom marriage is considered illegal such as brothers, uncles, fathers) (Islamweb, 2022). The term used to describe women who display their beauty in a manner that doesn't comply with Islamic dress code is "Tabarruj" (Arabic:تبرج) (Edet, 2019).

While some studies have focused on the ways Muslim influencers use their fashion styles to portray new identities (Beta and Hum ,2011; Piela, 2013; Kamel, 2014), little research has examined how their followers understand their diverse dress and veiling habits in Muslim contexts. My findings show that the majority of my respondents value the Islamic hijab over the modern one. The modern hijab is often viewed as a misapplication of the Islamic dress code, meaning influencers who wear the modern hijab are believed by their followers to produce inaccurate or poor representations of Islam and Muslim women. As influencers are believed to have the ability to shape public opinion about any subject, these criticisms of the modern hijab are significant.

As I outlined in Chapter 3, Muslim influencers are often believed to use modern fashion and clothes to promote positive representations of Islam (Beta and Hum ,2011; Piela, 2013; Kamel, 2014), In contrast to these claims, my research reveals that some followers do not view the connection between modern fashion and Islamic modesty as a means of dispelling negative misconceptions about Muslim women. They rather regard it as a loss of Islamic identity and values and a distortion of their religion. At the same time, my research also revealed that some followers value the modern hijab's aesthetic attributes, because it increases women's beauty and attractiveness and aligns with modern culture and fashion trends. In addition, my research shows that influencers who do not wear a headscarf to cover their hair were accepted when their overall dress habits are perceived to be modest. These findings reveal that modesty has different meanings for different individuals. Numerous interpretations of the Quranic verses addressing veiling in Islam have led to numerous views of modesty.

Followers' diverse attitudes are the result of Islamic laws not providing specific guidance about what constitutes 'proper' Islamic dress (Akou, 2010) and thus being open to interpretation.

Therefore, I argue that followers' reactions to influencers' hijab habits are influenced by both their personal interpretations of religious texts and Algerian customs (Mills and Gokariksel, 2014; Almila, 2019). I also argue that veiling in its different forms (modern and Islamic) holds diverse meanings for different individuals. This is because dress is context-dependent, and the meanings associated with it can change, be rejected, or be negotiated by individuals (Almila, 2019). Society provides a context for when a type of hijab is less accepted than others (Almila, 2019), which is the case with the influencers dress and hijab habits in this research. The nature of Algerian society, which is a Muslim country, influences how followers interpret the influencers` dress and hijab practices.

This chapter begins by addressing the role of influencers in relation to dress and hijab, arguing that influencers are able to create positive or negative representations of veiling. It then explores followers' attitudes towards the influencers' Islamic hijab and the modern hijab before examining their responses to unveiled influencers. Taken together, this chapter develops an understanding of how influencers' dress and veiling practices are viewed by their followers.

6.2 Influencers' Roles in Relation to Dress and Hijab

Influencers are believed to influence people's purchasing decisions. My research showed that their role extends beyond this commercial capacity. As I discussed in Chapter 5, for the majority of followers, visibility, which lies in building large audiences on social media, provides the influencers with perceived power. This power lies in their ability to create positive or negative representations of hijab, and consequently shape public opinion about Islam, hijab, or Muslim and Algerian women. When influencers do not follow the Islamic dress code or the accepted social norms of dress that are fixed in Algerian society, they affect the religious meaning of hijab, according to followers.

In Chapter 5, I also explained how Algerian influencers are believed to act as ambassadors for Islam and Algeria. The majority of my interview participants (17) not only believe that influencers represent Muslim Algerian women, but they also believe that this means that influencers should wear a hijab in the correct Islamic way. To illustrate, Fatiha – a veiled woman from Bejaia who describes herself as religious – informed me that her clothes are purely Islamic because she wears a jilbab. A jilbab is a type of veiling that is a long and loose piece of robe covering the both the head and the body. During our exchange, Fatiha said that Muslim influencers' roles extend beyond convincing people to buy products. She believes that influencers have high numbers of followers and when they do not wear appropriate forms of veiling, they may communicate incorrect images about Muslim women or Islam:

> Being an influencer means you can persuade others about anything. When you wear the wrong type of hijab, you are not giving a good image. I do not mean a good image about the Algerian woman specifically but about veiling in Islam generally.

Fatiha also distinguishes between ordinary people and popular people. She believes that influencers are famous, and, as a result, they need to adhere to the Islamic dress code to create positive representations about hijab in Algeria:

> You know what the problem is, there is a difference between an ordinary woman and a famous woman who has followers. If she is an influencer, that's different, she is responsible for what she shares to others, she is required to dress appropriately to avoid any negative images about hijab and Algeria.

Similarly, Sarah, a 26-year-old architect from Jijel, believes that influencers have a degree of influence on others and, as a result, can teach incorrect information about religion and hijab:

> You should not forget that they are influencers; they have followers, and in this case, they can easily teach others wrong things about Islam, I mean about hijab.

The majority of the women I interviewed believe that the influencers` visibility on social media makes their hijab practices important. Another participant, Hayat, a 29-year-old teacher of Economics and Business from Jijel city, argued that how the influencers wear a hijab can convey diverse meanings to others:

> Because their hijab communicates a message to their audience, I mean they communicate the real meaning of hijab in our religion, it also says a lot about how women live in Muslim societies, so wearing an Islamic hijab can make others see us in a good way.

Entwistle (2015) explained that clothes are not only individuals' personal preferences, but rather a combination of other elements, including what their social environment claims to be acceptable. Dressing practices are often influenced by cultural norms such as religion (Entwistle, 2015). In addition, religion and culture influence each other and thus shape specific social norms and cultural practices (Saroglou and Cohen, 2011). Those social norms and cultural practices in turn shape people's identities (Duderija, 2007). Within Algerian society, there are established dress codes and veiling customs that are influenced by Islam and culture. Because of this, many participants think that influencers must follow the existing social and cultural expectations of dress and hijab in Algeria.

For my participants, women's attire is also a form of self-representation that communicates the standards and values of the community to which they belong (Bucar, 2018). Some Muslim women believe that their cultural and religious identities are expressed through veiling practices (Hirschmann, 1997; Galadari, 2012). Particularly in Algeria, scholars such as Fanon (1994) and Lazreg (2009) have argued that clothes, mainly those constructed as part of traditions or customs, represent the distinctiveness and authenticity of society for most Algerians, making their society recognizable among others. In this case, the hijab for women is a tool used to display that they are proud of their religion and reaffirm their rights to be distinct and to deserve respect for being different (Lazreg, 2009). It is a way to represent the cultural group to which they belong (Fanon, 1994). These expectations about religious dressing practices are transferred to the influencers, turning them not only into ambassadors of Islam (Van Nes, 2019) but of wider Algerian society.

Thus, religious dressing styles are often seen as more representative of religion than a simple dressing style (Lewis, 2013). The attitude of followers towards hijab is shaped by how followers understand the role of the influencers. In what follows, I discuss followers attitudes towards influencers' Islamic hijab.

6.3 Attitudes of Followers towards Influencers' Islamic Hijab

6.3.1 Influencers' Hijab as a Consolidating Identity Performance

Previous studies (for example, Peek, 2005; Sandıkcı and Ger, 2007; Galadari, 2012; Bucar, 2018; Van Nes, 2019) have investigated how veiling practices are performed as a way of declaring Muslim identities to the world. Similarly, my participants discussed how influencers' hijab makes the Muslim Algerian identity visible. According to them, influencers' performance of their Muslim identities depends on their adherence to the requirements of the Islamic dress code. For most of the followers, hijab is understood as a proclamation of their cultural and religious heritage. For example, when I interviewed Maria (a 25-year-old Algerian student in the Sociology of Organizational Development), she illustrated how the Islamic hijab makes a woman's Islamic identity visible. Interestingly, despite being unveiled, Maria claims that the hijab makes Muslim women visible:

> An influencer with an Islamic hijab is something really good, I mean the fact that she kept it purely Islamic[…] because it shows who she is, it shows that she is Muslim.

Another participant, Hayat, who I previously introduced, argued that the performance of the influencers' Islamic identity is enhanced by them wearing an Islamic hijab:

> It shows her affiliation, I mean you can recognize her among many other women. If you are unveiled or even veiled in a modern way, it doesn't really say a lot about you […] I want to say that it shows your identity as a Muslim.

Most of the participants consider the Islamic hijab to be an essential religious practice. To illustrate, Samra - a former French teacher from Jijel, who left her job to become a housewife - acknowledged the religious importance of hijab:

> Yes, hijab is very important. As Muslims, we know that hijab is required for women to wear in our religion.

Similar to Samra, Kamilia (a 26-year-old English teacher) described hijab as a crucial Islamic practice, saying:

> […] Because in Islam hijab is obligatory for women

Samia (a 25-year-old architect from Jijel) stressed the significance of adhering to Islamic law in a Muslim society:

> We live in an Arabic society that practices Islam, which means we act in ways that align with the Islamic instructions. Allah says that a woman should cover her hair and neck, so we should do it.

Since these followers consider wearing a hijab to be essential, they also think that Muslim influencers should wear a hijab that is purely Islamic. To illustrate, on the influencer @amira-riaa's Instagram picture, where she covered all her hair and neck by wearing an 'abaya' – a loose, long dress that many women wear in different Muslim societies – a follower expressed their praise for this:

> "You look so much better with this type of hijab"

The influencer @amira-riaa often wears a modern hijab (a turban), and rarely a headscarf that covers all her neck. Another follower also prefers the influencer to wear an Islamic hijab and refers to the latter as "a legit hijab" (in Arabic, "حجاب شرعي"). A legit hijab is one that complies

with the requirement of the Islamic dress code (see the requirements in the introduction of this Chapter):

"I prefer you with a legit hijab like that".

In the comments I analysed, a few followers described @Noor_m_officiel as a good Muslim woman because she respects the Islamic dress code. In one comment, a follower used the phrase real hijab instead of "legit hijab" to describe Noor's style:

"This is a real hijab".

The previous quotes indicate that the Islamic hijab is seen by many followers as an essential religious practice that operates as a tool to display cultural and religious heritage. There has been extensive academic interest in how veiling is viewed as a hallmark of Muslim women's religious identities and cultural backgrounds (for example, Lazreg, 1994; Peek, 2005; Sandıkcı and Ger, 2007; Galadari, 2012; Bucar, 2018; Van Nes, 2019). Scholars such as Peek (2005), Sandıkcı and Ger (2007), Galadari (2012), Bucar (2018), and Van Nes (2019) argue that this is common: women often believe that wearing the Islamic hijab identifies them as Muslims. Researchers including Goerge (2010), Tarlo (2010), Siraj (2011) and Bhowon and Bundhoo (2016) note that veiling is viewed as a religious obligation and is a dressing practice through which some women make their conformity to Islam visible. This is because it represents their submission to the principles of the Islamic dress code. In her research about veiling practices in Algeria, Lazreg (2009) concluded that some women understand the process of veiling in similar ways, in that they view their hijabs as a tool to show their belonging to Algeria and conformity to Islam. Lazreg (2009) further explained that wearing a hijab is viewed as a tool that many Muslim women use to show they are proud of their Muslim background and simultaneously declare their individuality to the world.

My research confirms this. It shows that influencers' hijabs are often conceptualized as an identity performance tool. However, my research also revealed a variety of complex viewpoints on what an Islamic hijab actually is. An example of this can be seen in the diverse attitudes towards the hijab of influencer @Noor_m_officiel. Above, I have shown how a follower

identified her hijab as “legit” and correct, but another participant doubted it. Maria, whom I previously introduced, questions Noor`s hijab because she wears make-up:

> Noor is a good influencer; she is modest. Although she does not distort the meaning of hijab because she covers her hair and neck and wears modest items, she is not always wearing an Islamic hijab. Sometimes she shares videos with very heavy make-up that does not align with hijab. As you know, make-up is also immodest in Islam.

The diversity of opinions about what constitutes an Islamic hijab illustrates how the norms of dress are not only created by those who wear certain styles, but also by those who observe these styles (Bucar, 2016). The existence of multiple definitions of Islamic hijab from the followers’ perspectives could be because the Quranic verses referring to how Muslim women should dress are scarce, leaving Muslim scholars to interpret them in various ways (Tarlo, 2010). Some believe that Quranic verses only provide general instructions for women to wear modest clothes (Bucar, 2018), whereas others interpret them in very specific ways and advocate specific types of clothing (Tarlo, 2010). In addition, Islamic clothes are diverse in different Muslim societies; for example, women do not wear the same veiling styles in Turkey, North Africa, or the Gulf countries (Tarlo, 2010; Tarlo and Moors, 2013). Therefore, how followers define Islamic hijab is diverse, as there are multiple interpretations of the relevant Quranic verses.

Veiling in its different forms has been an important practice in Algerian society throughout its history. I discussed the historical evolution of Algerian women's dress customs in Chapter 3, including the haik and others forms. Regardless of the different dress practices women used, veiling and modesty were crucial for women in Algeria (Lazreg, 1994; Boussoualim, 2021). As a result, the importance of the influencers’ Islamic hijab are shaped by social and cultural factors, including the glorification of hijab in Algerian society. Boussoualim (2021) argued that hijab was glorified in Algerian society in many ways, including parents teaching daughters from a young age that hijab is necessary and several political parties promoting hijab as an obligation in schools. Dress and bodies are the by-products of culture and are interpreted

within this context; how they are judged is also influenced by that culture (Entwistle, 2015). This explains why the followers ascribed importance to the influencers' Islamic hijab.

6.4 Attitudes of Followers towards Influencers' Modern Hijab

6.4.1 'That's not a Hijab': The Emergence of 'Misveiling' Culture in Algeria

My research shows that modern hijab is the most criticized form of veiling. Followers on both Instagram and YouTube criticized the influencers` modern hijab practices. On both platforms, 436 were critical of modern hijab, whereas only 209 praised it, and 50 expressed mixed attitudes (when the followers praise and criticize the influencers` modern hijab at the same time). The influencer @amira_riaa is the only one among three veiled influencers who wears more modern forms of veiling, including a turban and often clothing that fits modest fashion. Modest fashion or Islamic fashion refers to the combination of Islamic dress practices with modern fashion, including being long and loose, having long sleeves, and a high neckline (see Chapter 3 for more details). A turban is a form of head covering hiding only the hair (without hiding the neck and the ears). She rarely posted pictures with an Islamic hijab that covered her neck and ears. Due to religious and aesthetic concerns, influencers' followers were critical towards modern veiling practices. The followers criticized modern hijab either because it violates some aspects of Islamic dress code or because it did not appeal to them aesthetically.

As an example, in the following quotes under the Instagram picture of the influencer @amira_riaa, followers were critical of her hijab as they seem to believe that it is not an Islamic one:

> Just remove the hijab; it is much better. What you are wearing has nothing to do with hijab anyway ; read the Quran to learn about your religion.

Like the Instagram comment above, on YouTube, a follower criticized @amira_riaa for wearing a turban that did not cover the neck and the ears:

> When you wear a hijab, cover your neck and ears, a hijab is used to cover your body, and we wear it as Allah (God) tells us to do.

The veiled influencer @Noor_m_officiel, however, was less criticized for her hijab than @amira_riaa. Unlike Amira, Noor covers her neck and ears and does not wear a turban. Her dress styles comprise more modest styles. For example, Noor usually wears loose clothes that does not show her body shape.

On YouTube, a total of 81 comments were about the influencer @Noor_m_officiel's hijab. 20 comments were critical of her hijab. 14 comments criticized her hijab for aesthetic reasons. The aesthetic reasons include followers not liking certain types of her clothes or their colours. The rest of the six comments addressed the Islamic nature of Noor`s hijab. The followers described her hijab as non-Islamic because some parts of her body, such as her arms, are not covered, which goes against the Islamic dress code. An example of this can be found in the comments under Noor's YouTube video:

> I am really astonished, so this is what you call a hijab while half of your arms can be seen?

Similarly, another follower said:

> As a veiled woman what you are wearing does not cover your arms, Noor, please be careful with that.

In this chapter's introduction, I summarized the main principles of the Islamic dress code, including covering the full arms (except the hands). In the previous quotes, the followers addressed Noor's hijab as it did not cover her arms. As Islamic veiling is used for modesty, most of the followers consider modern hijab, which encompasses both the ways the influencers cover their hair and how they dress, an incorrect application of the Islamic dress code.

The followers also criticized the influencer Noor for other reasons than her clothes or hijab, such as her makeup. For example, on her YouTube video, 12 comments criticized Noor for her heavy make-up. Red lipstick for example, is viewed as a

violation of Islamic modesty since it makes the influencer more appealing to the general public. An example of this can be found in the following comment:

> "Sorry, but wearing makeup does not go along with hijab"

Similarly, Maria, a 25-year-old unveiled woman from Bejaia, criticized the make-up that the influencers wear and argued that Islamic hijab among Algerian influencers is unusual:

> The problem with the Algerian influencers is that it is very rare to find one with a real Islamic hijab, maybe Noor, but even her, I do not think she is always respecting the Islamic dress […] Well, like her makeup, for instance, makeup is prohibited because it makes you appear more desirable.

The aesthetic reasons for which the influencers` modern hijab was criticized include followers not liking the colour of the headscarf the influencers wear, the fabric, or just the overall style. For example, a follower commenting on the influencer @amira_riaa's Youtube video said:

> "I don`t like the fabric of the headscarf, it looks cheap".

The neutral opinions about the influencers` modern hijab represent the followers who praise and criticize the influencers` modern hijab at the same time. For example, on Noor's YouTube video, a follower commented :

> "The colour is very nice, but the style of the headscarf is not".

In broader debates, Muslim female influencers who combine Islamic modesty with fashion are also referred to as 'hijabistas' (Kavakci and Kraeplin, 2017; Williams and Kamaludeen, 2017). It is argued that such influencers shape modern Islamic identities through restyling Western dress practices to correspond to the Islamic modesty code, including the production of new styles of head coverings (Kamel, 2014). Those modern Muslim identities are generated by framing Islamic veiling as modern and fashionable (Waninger, 2015). Some scholars (such as Jones, 2010; Tarlo, 2010; Piela, 2012; Beta, 2014; Kamel, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Almila, 2018;

Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018) believe that the rise of this type of Muslim influencer is a response to popular stereotypes that associate veiling with oppression and backwardness. They link fashion with Islamic modesty as a self-identity construction process to shape how Muslim women are represented, meaning that they present themselves not only as modest or religious but also as attractive and modern to promote positive images about Islam. By presenting Islamic modesty and fashion together, they are striving to normalize them (Moor, 2013; Almila, 2019).

In opposition to these claims, in my research, the majority of followers do not view the association of modern fashion and Islamic modesty as a way of shaping modern or positive images about Muslims. They rather view it as a distortion of the hijab meaning in Islam. From my analysis of comments and interviews, the majority of followers believe that modern veiling reflects a poor religious belonging, distorting, and misrepresenting the meaning of in Islam. These violations occur either through make-up, modern headscarves such as turbans or fashionable clothes. For example, Mayliss, one of the followers I interviewed, described modern hijab as confusing because it communicates ambiguous messages about the religion of the influencer; she even believes that modern veiling practices are meaningless:

> A modern hijab is confusing because you can't understand whether they (influencers) are religious or not religious, which is confusing, for me modern hijab has no meaning.

In her study of Muslim women in America, Mir (2014) notes that Muslim women who do not wear a hijab that aligns with the expectations of the Muslim communities are often scrutinized. Her ethnographic study demonstrated that Muslim women are expected to represent hijab through sustaining the Islamic criteria of modesty to avoid the risk of communicating incorrect principles about their faith, as well as dishonouring Muslims through abandoning Islam. Tarlo and Moor (2013, p.19) also explained how, in some Muslim communities, the shift from the conventional Islamic dressing style for women is occasionally viewed as a "distortion or distraction from more weighty theological concerns". In other words, women who wear modest fashion (combination of fashion and Islamic modesty) are criticized because they are viewed as following a degenerate and superficial purpose in trying to appear fashionable and alluring to others instead of promoting inner purity (Jones, 2010). Mir (2014)

explained that those who negatively judge Muslim women's clothes practices often believe that an incorrect application of the Islamic modest dress code disseminates confusing images about Islam.

Modesty and fashion are often situated as binary concepts (Moors and Tarlo, 2013). As a result, online commentary about Algerian influencers' modern, fashionable veiling practices are sometimes critical. This is not limited to the examples shown in the above quotes, where most of the comments are phrased to instruct the influencers on how ideal Islamic femininity and womanhood should be. This is achieved by suggesting what an Islamic dress should be, what type of headscarf defines Islamic hijab, what parts of the body should be covered, and even what behaviours are tolerated for Muslim women. Because fashion is seen as a rejection of religion in religious societies, the focus on the influencers' dressing choices are often moral judgments (Bucar, 2016), or because those influencers are presumed to inadequately use and misrepresent the holy Islamic texts of modest dress code (Jones, 2010).

In this respect, criticising Algerian influencers' modern veiling practices occurs because they are viewed as attempts to redefine the original idealized Islamic forms of modest dress code that many Muslims value. Additionally, Lewis (2013) believes that online debates about modesty echo offline popular religious debates; however, social media accentuates the phenomena, leading to rigid corrective comments calling for women to embrace the standards of their religion.

The followers' criticisms of modern hijab in the Algerian context could also be seen as a rejection of Western ideologies relating to fashion and dressing styles. Lazreg (2009) in her research about veiling, explained that Algerian women's rejection of Western sartorial styles was understood as a victory and a way to conserve Algerian customs, traditions, and identity, which can then be passed on to future generations. This is partially because women's attire is presumed to constitute a part of their self-representation to other individuals; and those representations communicate the standards and values of the community to which they belong (Bucar, 2018). It also suggests that Muslim Algerian womanhood is often framed as being appropriately veiled. Lazreg (1994) explained how violations of what is perceived as appropriate Islamic dress and veiling in Algeria used to be seen as a representation of Muslim women's

lack of religiosity. In Algerian society, some scholars (Lazreg, 1994; Fanon, 1994) have noted that in previous years, being unveiled was also interpreted as a bad practice of religion and an assimilation to the French colonizer's culture of that period. Because of such common interpretations in Algerian society, there was an entrenched "model of acceptable womanhood" (Lazreg, 1994, p.177). As seen in the quotes above, this desire to conserve the Algerian role model of Islamic femininity or womanhood remains strong. The rejection of Western dress practices also highlights the complexity of veiling fashion that many modern Muslim influencers have worn in the last few years.

As seen, the majority of my research participants believe that Algerian female influencers are responsible for representing Algerian women in particular ways, including wearing a correct Islamic hijab. The followers' desire to protect the Islamic hijab may emerge from their social identification and belonging to Algeria, which is predominantly a Muslim context, where hijab and modesty are valuable attributes.

6.4.2 Identity Loss through Clothes

In the previous sections, I showed the status of Islamic and modern hijab and their relationship to the influencers` roles. Throughout my research, I observed that two participants were also critical of influencers modernizing other Algerian traditional clothes. In the context of my research, modernizing Algerian traditional clothes is often described as a process of identity loss.

This can be illustrated by Nabila, a 28-year-old English teacher from Bejaia City. During our interview, she described the process of modernizing traditional Algerian clothes as "identity loss". In Algeria, the number of existing traditional clothes is extensive, and each region has specific traditional attire. The Berber region, for example, has traditional clothes and jewelry for women (It typically consists of a long, silky garment that is either colorful or white, with long or short sleeves. The dress is decorated with geometric patterns that are inspired by the Berber alphabet and are created using a collection of vibrantly coloured ribbons known as zigzag in the Amazigh region of Algeria). According to Nabila, Berber traditional attires are disappearing and being replaced by Arabic ethnic clothing or more modern styles, and social media platforms are partially contributing to the process of modernizing traditional clothes:

> Our traditional outfits are gradually disappearing, and they are replaced by modern outfits that are exposed on social media. Here in our region, Berber women, mainly brides, used to wear "thaksiwth" (the Berber name of the Berber traditional dress at parties). But now women copy everything from influencers on social media: imagine a Berber woman wearing Arabic traditional clothes. I mean, wearing outfits from other cities such as "Blouza" (a traditional Algerian dress from the city of Oran) and "the Constantine djebba" (a traditional Algerian dress from the city of Constantine) because most of the influencers are Arab, and that's a shame.

Nabila went on to say that modernizing Berber clothes meant "eradicating her culture". She means losing what she perceives as representative of her cultural heritage (the Berber culture), such as clothes. Nabila also believes that Western clothes are gradually replacing some of the Algerian traditional costumes:

> [...] Worse than that, we are influenced by the West; in our weddings, I see many women wearing Western party dresses and jewellery. Everything is disappearing, from clothes to jewellery to traditional food. Bejaia is really influenced by Algiers; we keep copying their traditions. It's like we are eradicating our culture and replacing it with another one. We are slowly losing our identity.

In the previous section, I explained how the hijab is viewed as a religious and cultural identifier by followers. Similarly, Nabila views Berber traditional clothes in similar ways, i.e., they represent her Berber identity and her belonging to the Berber culture. The Berber clothes that Nabila mentioned as "thaksiwth" , are not Islamic but traditional and ethnic. This suggests that both the hijab and the Algerian traditional clothes are sometimes viewed as religious and cultural identifiers.

This perspective about dress, including religious or traditional dress, being used as a means of conveying social belonging or religion suggests that dress can function as a system of communication (see, for example, Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1962; Lee, 2015; Almila, 2019). Scholars such as Stone (1962), Goffman (1976), and Craik (2003) explain that

appearances, including dressing practices, can convey people's identities when meanings are attributed to them. These meanings are context- and time-dependent and are continuously transforming (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). Dress, for example, can communicate age, gender, ethnicity, and social role (Lee, 2015).

According to Nabila, substituting traditional Berber clothes for other types of clothes results in identity loss because they communicate her Berber identity. Nevertheless, scholars such as Eicher (1995) and Lynch et al. (1995) believe that dress and identity are very complex processes because they are not static and transform over time through, for example, immigration and contact with people from other ethnicities and cultures. This has been proven by the extensive literature about veiling practices and modest fashion that demonstrates the diversity and complexity of such practices in different Muslim societies, accentuating that veiling is not simply a personal dressing style, a gender norm, or simply a political hallmark, but rather a combination of several elements (El Guindi, 1999; Tarlo, 2010; Bucar, 2016).

6.4.3 'It's not always about Religion: Modern Hijab fits me'

As previously mentioned, on both Instagram and YouTube, 209 (out of 695 comments) praised the modern hijab. The modern hijab of the influencers was favoured for a variety of reasons by their followers. The aesthetic appeal of the modern hijab was the main factor that attracted followers; in other words, the followers claimed that it enhances women's beauty and attractiveness and fits in with contemporary culture and fashion trends. Modern veiling practices among Algerian influencers, as I previously explained in this chapter, are mostly found in the influencer @amira_riaa. An example of comments admiring her modern hijab can be found on her YouTube video, where some followers praised her headscarf:

> "I love how you wear your headscarf".

Another follower expressed:

> "I wear my headscarf in the same way, I really like this method".

Similarly, on her Instagram post, a follower expressed their admiration for her modern hijab by saying:

"I love your hijab's style here"

Among the participants I interviewed, Mounia, a 28-year-old business student from Jijel, was the only woman who supported modern hijab. Mounia identifies herself as a "fashionista" because she is a devoted follower of fashion. Mounia is veiled, but she described her hijab as modern because she wears make-up, long nails, and colourful, modest, fashionable clothes. According to Mounia, the hijab is becoming more modern because new designs are promoted online. As opposed to women who prefer to preserve the authenticity of their clothes or hijab, Mounia thinks that women's clothes should change to fit contemporary modern societies:

> I think hijab should be modernized. I am aware that religion tells us how to dress, but the Internet transformed many aspects of modern culture. On social media right now, you can see new trends and looks everywhere. I personally find myself intrigued by what I see, so I give them a try. […] I am not defined by what I wear, and wearing a modern hijab does not mean I am not a Muslim.

Regardless of what Islam says, Mounia thinks that traditional Islamic dress practices need to be replaced with modern ones. Indeed, in different Muslim societies, either in the Middle East, Malaysia, or Turkey, religious clothes have undergone transformations over time (Lewis, 2017). This often happens because individuals experience religion as a set of dynamic convictions and practices rather than static devotions (McGuire, 2008). Mounia further expressed the difficulty of maintaining the traditional Algerian hijab, including the haik and the jilbab. She believes that in modern Algerian society, the haik and jilbab are not practical clothes for everyday life:

> It is difficult to keep the same clothes. I always see pictures of my grandmother wearing a haik, but I cannot go outside now wearing one. It is not even practical. I think the same for jilbab; I can't go to my university wearing it as it is not comfortable. As I said, society changed, so we need to adapt to modernity.

While it may be true that ethnic and religious identities are crucial for how people practice their faith, when people come into contact with others, they may want to preserve or reconstruct these identities (Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008). While acknowledging that Islam has a rigid dress rule for women, Mounia, for instance, appears to encourage the modernization of her traditional Algerian dress. Her objective is to act in accordance with current social norms, such as practicality. When Mounia goes to university, for instance, wearing a haik or a jilbab that are both quite loose and lengthy makes it difficult for her to move around. Mounia also cited the Internet in the passage as a factor in her preference for modern veiling trends.
This happens because the development of the modest-fashion market in recent years has been boosted and promoted by the Internet and social media, mainly by influencers (Lewis, 2013; Moors, 2013; Lewis, 2017). This demonstrates that social media – as a communication medium and a "techno-religious" channel (Boyd, 2010; Mohamad, 2017) – may affect how people view veiling practices. Techno-religious spaces are the communication technologies such as the internet and social media that offer a space for religious expressions and practices (Mohamad, 2017).

Scholars such as Ammerman (2007) argue that, in the modern world, it is almost impossible for people and institutions to preserve their unique religious practices while people can exchange their systems of beliefs through different means, such as traveling. In the case of Mounia, social media motivated her to try some modern hijab styles. At the end of the quote, Mounia highlighted that her clothes and hijab style do not define her as a Muslim. This indicates the complexity of how people interpret the meaning of clothes. It shows that not all individuals are motivated to manifest their internal religious beliefs through external practices (Meyer and Houtman, 2012; Tarlo and Moors, 2013). It also indicates that the type of hijab women wear can be influenced by other non-religious factors, such as practicality for Mounia. As other researchers (Lewis, 2013; Tarlo and Moors, 2013) suggest, women can wear religious clothes for non-religious reasons, such as social pressure or even as a personal style.

6.5 Followers Attitudes towards Unveiled Influencers

6.5.1 'It is Not All about a Headscarf!': Unveiling versus Modern Hijab

In my research, the attitudes of followers towards the unveiling habits of the influencers were diverse. The majority of interview participants (16 out of 22) had a favourable attitude toward the unveiled influencers. The rest were neutral about them in that they did not care about the influencers not wearing a headscarf, but they commented on some influencers who wear non-modest clothes. The participant Sabrina, a 30-year-old middle school teacher from Algiers, praised the content of the Algerian unveiled influencers she follows and argued that unveiling is a personal freedom and a common bodily practice among Algerian influencers. She also thinks that the unveiled influencers she follows wear acceptable clothes:

> I don't see anything wrong with the unveiled influencers, honestly; they are free to not wear a hijab. When I see their content, I honestly find the type of content they share with us much better and more interesting than what some veiled influencers share. Maybe they do not cover their hair, but the influencers I follow wear respectful clothes and there is nothing wrong with them.

However, the four other participants who were neutral about the unveiled influencers argue that wearing a headscarf is not necessary for the influencers, but wearing modest clothes is essential because the influencers come from a conservative Muslim context. To illustrate, Lydia, a 36-year-old caterer from Algiers, highlighted the importance of modest clothes over a headscarf when talking about the unveiled influencers:

> Covering the hair is not crucial , but dressing modestly is because we are conservative and Muslim. It's perfectly ok if she dresses in trendy or colourful clothes ; she simply needs to stay modest.

As these quotes show, influencers' not wearing a headscarf that covers their hair is sometimes accepted among their followers. Veiling is argued to operate as a tool that helps women to be depicted as "good Muslims" and consequently avoid any negative judgments by relatives

or others (Lazreg, 2009; Tarlo and Moors, 2013; Karaman and Christian, 2022), whereas unveiling is often associated with conformity to secular dogma (Fadil, 2011). In the Algerian context, unveiling often had negative associations among Algerian society in the past because it was interpreted as a rejection of the Algerian religious and cultural systems (Lazreg, 2009; Fanon, 1994). However, as my findings show, unveiling is not always negatively described, as seen in the previous quotes. Nonetheless, Lydia also emphasized the need to dress modestly, indicating that modesty is still crucial.

When describing unveiled influencers or other unveiled Algerian women, three of the participants I interviewed referred to them as "*civilisée"*, a French word that translates as "civilized" in English. The word civilized means "having a high state of culture and development, both social and technological" (Powerthesaurus Dictionary, 2011). When I questioned my participants about the meaning of this phrase, they explained that it refers to women with Westernized appearances, whether through uncovered hair or the wearing of non-religious clothes.

This might be the case because Western women are thought to come from more civilized and liberated countries. Alternately, it can be the outcome of French colonization in Algeria. During that period, there were many political French operations that attempted to Westernize and modernize Algerian women through unveiling campaigns – some commentators argue that the French believed women needed emancipation from Algerian traditions and culture (Fanon, 1994; Lazreg, 1994; Vince, 2015). In her research on Algerian women, Lazreg (2009) concluded that the term "Westernized" is used by women to describe Algerian unveiled women. In this context, the terms Westernized and civilized are used interchangeably to describe the appearances of Algerian women who are not veiled and wear fashionable clothes.

Lazreg (2009) argued that terms such as "Westernized" for unveiled women are reductionists. When my participants used the term "civilised", it was used to describe Western appearances and not as a negative concept to imply that Algerian women with Western appearances are rejecting their religion or cultural belonging. Nevertheless, the concept is a reductionist view of Muslim women because it may produce new stereotypes and suggest that veiled women are "uncivilized". These typologies deny how Algeria is a complex society where women

cannot be reduced to one form of appearance, and thus describing Algerian women based on whether they are veiled or not is an oversimplification (Lazreg, 1994).

6.5.2 'You Just don't Look Algerian'

In the previous section, I explained how unveiling among the Algerian influencers was accepted by the majority of women I interviewed. In the comments I have analysed, however, a few followers criticized some of the unveiled influencers` dressing styles. For example, the influencer @ryma_beautyaddict had 163 comments on her Instagram pictures about her dressing style. 102 of them praised her dressing style, 48 were critical, and 13 were neutral. Among the critical comments, Seven (out of 48) followers commented on her picture where the influencer was wearing a short skirt, saying that her clothes are unacceptable because she is a Muslim married woman:

> As if we are not in a Muslim country, do you think that it is halal [permissible in Islam] to wear that? Worse, you are a married woman, how can your husbands accept something like that.

Similarly, on the influencer @thedollbeauty's Instagram picture, 137 comments were about her dressing style. 68 were praising her style, 60 were critical, and 9 were neutral. Among the critical comments on one picture, 23 (out of 60) described her clothes as being inappropriate for a Muslim woman. For example, a follower said that her clothes do not represent her cultural and religious heritage:

> What you wear doesn't represent the Algerian Arabic identity, you can be beautiful with modest clothes.

In the previous comment under @ryma_beautyaddict's Instagram post, the follower addressed the influencers' dressing style , arguing that husband should not allow their wives to wear non-modest clothes. Lazreg (2009) argued that in patriarchal societies, women's bodies are often viewed as the honour of the males of the family. Due to the traditional nature of the family system and the traditional patriarchal nature of Algerian society, women in Algeria are often viewed as the honour of their families (Lazreg, 1994; Fanon, 1994). Dressing is also

historically gendered. How women dress is more often judged than men's clothes and has also been used to control women's sexuality, mainly in religious societies (Arthur, 2000). For example, women's clothes are more often judged as immodest than men's clothes (Tseëlon, 1997). When women`s clothes are perceived as immodest, they become described as immoral or non-religious because they are associated with their sexuality (Entwistle, 2015). As in the previous quote, the followers suggested that the influencer` husband should not allow her to show herself in non-religious clothes because in Islam men are instructed to protect their wives and the women in their families from other males' gazes (Siraj, 2011).

As an Algerian, I follow many Facebook pages dedicated to Algerian celebrities and public figures. Among the influencers who are frequently discussed is @Shirineboutella. Shirine was popular on YouTube and Instagram as an influencer before recently becoming a professional actress. Her career started in Algerian cinema and then in French media. She played the role of a young Algerian woman during the Algerian civil war of 1990 in her first drama film, *Papicha*, which was later selected for a nomination at the 2019 Cannes festival. This was followed by another series called *Christmas Flow* in 2021. After her debut as an actress, the criticisms became stronger among her followers – some described her as "not being Algerian anymore" because she defied the conventional role of women in Algeria and the cultural practices of its society in general. Shirine declared to the media that she had endured cyber harassment because she does not conform to the traditional role of women in Algeria. According to Algerian Facebook pages, Shirine shares pictures on Instagram wearing clothes that are viewed as immodest, with tattoos and strong make-up; these are described as peculiar in terms of Algerian society and traditions and the Islamic dress code. Algerian writer Kamel Daoud (2021) dedicated an article to her that he titled "Shirine Boutella (and so many others): guilty of non-representativeness", in which he wrote that "she is guilty of what? To misrepresent the Algerian woman", according to some Algerian Internet users who he described as "digital identity prosecutors" (Daoud,2021). Nevertheless, Shirine also has many followers who support her. My analysis of Shirine's post on YouTube showed similar comments. On YouTube, a few of her followers commented on her make-up video tutorial that was about the special occasion of Aid. Aid is the name of an Islamic religious party, and Sherine shared a specific video with her followers to propose some makeup styles that fit the religious event.

In one comment, a follower questioned the influencer's decision to wear special makeup for Aid given that she is not Muslim and said:

> "Oh, but you are neither Muslim nor Algerian anyways, so why to bother".

Among the women I interviewed, only one of them spoke about @Shirineboutella. Kaouthar, a 25-year-old pharmacy operator from Algiers, referred to how @Shirineboutella's lifestyle goes against both Islam and Algerian customs:

> […] Sherine`s lifestyle, it is very different from how an Algerian Muslim woman lives. She shares things that do not belong to our religion, traditions, or customs; we do not do things like those as religion does not allow them […] A simple example is her wedding; if a stranger sees her pictures, he will think it is a European party, not an Algerian one; it just has nothing to do with our traditional Algerian weddings […] Yes, for example, men sitting and dancing with women in her wedding, or her not wearing any kind of Algerian traditional dress as a bride.

The above comments imply that @Shirineboutella is not Muslim or Algerian, as her appearance and lifestyle seem Western to her followers. I explained in the previous section that dress can function as a system of communication for some individuals and thus can be used to convey social or religious belonging. From Kaouthar's perspective, wearing non-Algerian clothes means not appearing Algerian or Muslim.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how Islamic modesty is not only applied to the clothes and external appearances of individuals but is also required in behavior, speech, actions, and lifestyle (Boulanouar, 2006). @Shirineboutella appears to frequently share posts that her followers perceive as defying Algerian social norms. Kaouthar provided in the quote the example of gender mixing during wedding parties or wearing non-traditional dresses at weddings. In Islam, gender mixing (in Arabic, Ikhtilat) should be avoided, and women should have their own private spaces (Van Geel, 2012). Conservative Muslim scholars advocate that gender mixing may lead to temptation, including sexual acts outside marriage, and thus encourage gender segregation to protect women from male harassment (Wagemakers, 2016).

These findings contribute to existing debates on how hijab operates as a hallmark of Muslim women's religious and cultural backgrounds. The findings also highlight the importance of modesty in relation to the influencers' role. Influencers have large audiences; they are believed to be representative of their religious and cultural heritage. The vast majority of my participants believe that influencers are required to represent Muslim Algerian women and the hijab in ways that correspond to Islam. In this regard, modern hijab is often described as a violation of the Islamic dress code. A small number of followers also admired the modern hijab, as it stands for modernity and is aesthetically attractive. My research indicates that modesty is a multifaceted concept with varied interpretations that people negotiate differently, and that is not just determined by external appearances but also by behavior. Modesty is expected not only from veiled influencers but also from unveiled influencers, regardless of the form of hijab they wear.

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has offered a detailed analysis of followers' attitudes towards Algerian influencers' dress and hijab practices. It began by examining followers' understandings of influencers' roles in relation to dress and hijab before examining their reactions towards the influencers' Islamic hijab. I argued that the influencers' visibility on social media and their large audiences are pivotal in how their followers evaluate their dress and veiling practices. As the role of the influencers is assumed to be significant, their online representations are expected to adhere to various criteria, including Islam and traditions in Algerian society, to avoid negative representations of hijab or Muslim women. By emphasizing the importance of Islamic hijab among the influencers' followers, this discussion contributes to an understanding of how hijab functions as a religious identifier and as part of Muslim identity.

My chapter then turned to followers' views of influencers' modern hijab practices. The majority of followers criticized the modern hijab because it is perceived as a violation of the Islamic dress code. The followers criticizing modern veiling practices believe that Islamic hijab defines them, and, as a result, influencers should preserve its authenticity. The modern hijab was praised mostly for its aesthetic attributes, as it helps them to appear more attractive,

allows them to stay in line with contemporary fashion trends, and is more practical for everyday life.

Followers' views of unveiled influencers are also complex and diverse. The majority of my participants view unveiling as a normal bodily practice that any Muslim woman can choose for herself. However, few participants were encouraging the unveiled influencers to wear modest clothes. I argued that the followers' views on the influencer's Islamic hijab, modern hijab, and unveiling are heavily influenced by the Islamic Algerian context. The nature of Algerian society, which is Muslim and conservative, influences how they interpret the influencers' appearances. Most importantly, the common factor in their views about the influencer's dress and veiling practices is the influencers' role, which is assumed to extend beyond promoting products to their ability to produce positive or negative representations of Muslim women and hijab.

I also argue that modesty is hard to define. Although Islamic modesty is important in the Algerian context, it does not necessarily have the same meaning for everyone. For example, despite the fact that women are supposed to cover their hair in Islam, followers showed tolerance towards not covering the hair but were critical of modern hijab, such as the turban. Some followers place more significance on the influencers' clothes than their choice of headscarf for modesty. I suggested in this chapter that the lack of a clear definition of an Islamic dress code or hijab in Islamic religious scriptures is the cause of the latter. Islam provides general guidelines on the characterizations of an Islamic dress code, including covering the hair and the neck or wearing loose and non-flashy outfits, but does not indicate whether, for example, a Muslim woman should wear a dress instead of a skirt. Therefore, the interpretations of modesty remain open and diverse (Siraj, 2011; Lewis, 2013), and the various dresses that Muslim women wear are inspired by local traditions and customs as well as by Islam (Tarlo, 2010). This shows the interplay of both Islamic and Algerian norms with regard to influencers' dress and veiling and followers attitudes towards these things.

It is worth noting that as an Algerian woman who is active on social media, I have observed that many Algerian influencers disclaim their desire to represent Algerian or Muslim women. For example, the influencer @Shirineboutella has explained multiple times that her posts and

her presence online as an Algerian woman do not represent others. Therefore, the followers' desire to have influencers appropriately represent them may result from their belief that influencers' roles go beyond simply promoting products to include acting as ambassadors for Algeria and Islam, but this belief is not always shared by influencers themselves.

This discussion around how followers view influencers' dress and hijab evokes the question of how women experience veiling in its different forms in modern Algeria. These findings pave the way for the next chapter, in which I explore the status of hijab in three different cities and what factors affect their experiences.

Chapter 7: From Attitudes to Practices: the Role of Patriarchy and Locality in Algerian Women's Veiling Practices

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 6, the hijab is often understood as a hallmark for Muslim women's religion and identity. The findings discussed in that chapter also highlighted the importance of modesty and Islamic hijab in relation to how many followers perceived the influencers' roles in representing their religious and cultural heritage. Followers' expectations of influencers are often reproduced with regard to themselves and their own dress, veiling and behaviour. This chapter therefore moves from the debate discussed in Chapter 6 - about attitudes to influencers' practices of hijab - to the ways women experience the hijab in three different Algerian cities: Algiers, Jijel and Bejaia. This chapter focuses on the fourth research question: What is the status of veiling in different Algerian cities? It empirically examines some Algerian women's experiences with the hijab, its importance to them, the motivation behind hijab practices for my participants, and whether and how location has a role in their experiences. This is important for situating attitudes to followers within the broader context of followers' everyday lives. It explains how followers' views and reactions to influencers, including their dress/hijab practices, are heavily influenced by socio-cultural contexts. Algeria is a Muslim society, and its social system is heavily influenced by traditions (Lazreg, 2021). In Chapter 3, I explained how the family system is sacred in Algeria, and it is often protected and maintained by patriarchal strategies where men control the family (MacMaster,2020). This chapter extends this debate by examining how patriarchy manifests more broadly, beyond the family, in Algeria. Patriarchy manifests in restricting women's visibility on social media platforms, education, mobility, and employment. Furthermore, patriarchy is believed to be sustained in Algerian society through traditions and religion. In other words, Islam is often used as a pretext for male dominance. Regarding the practice of the hijab, I argue in this chapter that the hijab for some of my participants is worn under patriarchal circumstances involving pressure by male family members (husbands, brothers, fathers). At the same time, many of my participants also wear a hijab as an act of worship and devotion to God. In the second section of this chapter, I show how the role of patriarchy varies in distinct localities, where differing

perceptions of the status of the hijab can be found. I demonstrate this with a focus on three Algerian cities: Algiers, Bejaia, and Jijel. I argue that the status of the hijab across Algeria changes from one city to another, and that the hijab in Algeria is in the process of transformation from a conservative to a modern form.

Throughout the history of Algeria, dress and veiling practices went through different transformations. In Chapter two, I outlined how dress and hijab were influenced by the political situation of Algeria. According to McDougall (2017), locality has an impact on how women dress in Algeria as well; some cities are recognized for their Western and non-religious apparel, while others are known for their largely modest and religious attire. During the French colonization in Algeria, the French attempted to liberate Algerian women by leading campaigns that aim to convince the local habitants to abandon veiling practices and wear European dress styles (see Chapter 3). It has been argued that the Berber regions were the most influenced by the French culture, and most Berber women started adopting European dress practices (Thoral, 2015). For example, Berber women used to be seen in public wearing skirts and other forms of European dressing tyles (Thoral, 2015). In Bejaia, French culture is believed to be dominant. For example, the French language is used during conversations, images, in official documents, in commercials, and everywhere else in the town (stores, restaurants, hotels, road signs, notice boards, etc.) (Idri and Bouguebs, 2021). Overall, dress practices were influenced by the political situation of Algeria and its history that witnessed different invaders (Belkaïd, 2019). Most cities in Algeria have distinctive local dress customs and clothing patterns that are influenced by the city's history, including former colonizers and the country's political climate (Belkaïd, 2019). Therefore, these variables frame the context of this chapter which examines how location affects women's hijab practices in three different Algerian cities. I selected Jijel, a small Arabic city, Bejaia, a Berber city, and Algiers, the country's capital, to represent a range of perspectives on hijab practice in Algeria. In the following table, I provide a brief description for each city:

City	Description
Jijel	Jijel is located on the Mediterranean coast in the northeast of Algeria about 314 Km east of Algiers, and 100 Km east of Bejaia (MICLAT, 2022). Around the 10th century, the Phoenicians first settled in Jijel. Then came the Romans in 105 B.C., followed by the Arabs in the 16th century, when Islam emerged as the city's main religion (Britannica,2014). The population of Jijel is estimated to be around 789667 habitants. The dialect spoken is Jijel is the jijilian, which is a form of Algerian Arabic (Azieb and Mahadin, 2015).
Algiers	Algiers is the capital and largest city of Algeria. It is located in the Mediterranean Sea on the western side of the Bay of Algiers. Algiers was occupied by the Phoenicians in 3rd century BC, then the Romans in in 200 BC (Britannica, 2021). In 1519 Algiers was seized by the Ottoman Empire, to be invaded later in 1830 by the French colonizer (McDougall, 2017). The population in Algiers is estimated to be around 3282979 habitants (MICLAT, 2022). The language spoken in Algiers is called Algiers dialect, which is a form of simplified dialectical Arabic (Harrat et al, 2014).
Bejaia	Bejaia is a city belonging to the Kabyle cities in Algeria. The Kabyle or Berber regions in Algeria are known as the Greater Kabylia and the Little Kabylia . Greater Kabylia includes the city of Tizi Ouzou and two other villages: Bouira and Boumerdes. The little Kabylia covers the city of Bejaia alone. The inhabitants of the two regions are the Kabyles, representing an ethnic group who speak a language referred to as Berber (Britannica, 2014). Bejaia is a Mediterranean sea port situated in north-eastern Algeria, with 984050 habitants (MICLAT, 2022). Bejaia was occupied by the Spanish (1510–1555), the ottomans (in 1555), and then the French colonizer in 1830 (Ben Amira and Ben Amira, 2019).

Table 7: Description of Jijel, Algiers and Bejaia.

In this chapter, I use the phrase 'Arabic cities' to refer to Algerian cities where Arabic is the native language. Algiers and Jijel are two Arabic cities. I use the phrase 'Berber region' to refer to Algerian cities where Berber (or Tamazight) is the native language of its habitants.

7.2 The Multiple Faces of Patriarchy in Algeria

The previous chapters indicate that the socio-cultural and political contexts in which Algerian women live are of great importance to the way they view influencers. The nature of Algerian society - which is predominantly Muslim, conservative, and patriarchal - establishes various expectations for women, including the hijab and a specific dress type. Patriarchy in its different forms remains a barrier to women's achievements, success, and freedom. This section explores some of the patriarchal structures in Algeria and the ways they affect my participants' lives.

In Algeria, the origin of patriarchy is believed to emanate from the precolonial society before the French invasion in 1830 (Knauss and Knauss, 1987). Patriarchy was established through different practices, including patrimony, patrilocality, Islam, and the tradition of male honour in both the Berber and Arab tribes in Algeria (Knauss and Knauss, 1987). Berber people represent an ethnic group who speak their own native language (Berber) and have their own culture and traditions (Roberts, 2014). There was an established social belief that honour was crucial in the family system in both the Arabic and Berber tribes. Honour in the Berber communities is associated with a man's self-image in a social group; as such, a man is obliged to protect his and his family's honour in the community (Bourdieu, 1970). These early beliefs created patriarchal systems that saw men designated as the protectors of women and resulted in gender segregation (Knauss and Knauss, 1987).

Patriarchy manifests in degrees through the relationship between men and women, including, for example, the dominance of fathers over daughters, brothers over sisters, or husbands over wives. The family system is sacred in the Algerian social system, and it is often protected and maintained by patriarchal strategies, wherein the male figures control the family (MacMaster, 2020). In Chapter three I also explained how women are often expected to preserve a family system that is based on traditions and Islamic principles.

When I interviewed my participants, four of them used the word 'ذكوري' (an Arabic term that translates to 'patriarchal' in English) to describe Algerian culture. The majority of my participants argued that men have more dominance than women in society, and some men use their power to weaken the position of women. For example, patriarchy in my participants` narratives manifests itself in establishing restrictions on women's visibility on social media platforms, which is often judged as immoral. By which I mean that their presence online is seen to indicate non-modesty. In Islam, modesty encompasses both behavior and attire, as I discussed in Chapter 6. The Arabic word for modesty is haya, which also refers to being shy and avoiding unwanted contact with those who are not mahrams (individuals with whom marriage is permitted). Essentially, women should not show themselves to non-Mahrams without a hijab and when wearing makeup. In light of this notion, women's online presence is interpreted as immoral because it exposes them to the gaze of non-mahrams in public settings like social media, an act that violates the Islamic religious concept of modesty.

For example, Samra - a 30-year-old French teacher from Jijel city - said that men from her social environment shamed her and her brother for sharing her picture on Facebook:

> I can recall my brother telling me when he got home that some of the men in our neighbourhood had shamed him because of me. All that because I opened a Facebook page using my picture, and they shamed my brother for allowing his sister to go online, as if Facebook is something abnormal for women. Each time I returned from school; I heard them talking about me. They made me believe that I was immoral and dishonourable to my family.

In Samra's experience, some men in her vicinity criticized her visibility on Facebook, and this resulted in shaming her and her brother. Her brother was perceived by his peers to be allowing Samra to share her picture, implying that as a man he should restrict her from doing so. The latter thus implies that men are often believed to have authority over their female relatives.

Similarly, Mayliss - a 27-year student from Algiers - argued that Algerian women were traditionally restricted from being visible online, because their visibility online is deemed to be unacceptable in society:

> Amel: can you please elaborate on this?
> Mayliss: yes, influencers are harshly criticized because in the past women were almost invisible on social media; men tell them that it was culturally not acceptable to show themselves to others. Now women are challenging this belief, and that's why they are receiving this amount of criticism.

Mayliss claims that patriarchal cultures give rise to the idea that women are not supposed to be seen by other people. Influencers who deviate from the prevailing societal belief face criticism as a result.

In debates around the politics of visibility, it has been demonstrated that women's visibility on social media is continuously judged, assessed, and examined (Banet-Weiser, 2015). This perspective, as shown in previously discussed comments from my participants, also applies to the Algerian context. This demonstrates that women's visibility online may expose them to public judgments and sometimes to the incitement of hateful comments (Duffy et al., 2022). It has also been argued that the judgments about women's visibility online are moralistic and ethical in nature (Marwick, 2013; Griffith, 2020). Women`s visibility online often reflects their morals; this was the experience of Samra, who was shamed and judged for sharing her picture on Facebook, an act that is judged as immoral in her surroundings.

The majority of my participants agreed that patriarchy is both established and upheld through traditions and religion. According to them, the cultural system in Algeria is founded on traditions and religion, and this has resulted in men having more power than women. For example, Malika - a 27-year-old housewife from Algiers - believes that for the majority of people in Algeria, religion and traditions have become ingrained aspects of daily life. Religious and cultural norms and lifestyles that are violated in society are thus criticized:

> […] Because of the nature of this society, most people worship traditions and religion, and any perceived transgression of either will be used against women.

Similarly, Sabrina- a 30-year-old middle school teacher from Algiers - believes that culture often sustains gender inequality in society:

> […] Because certain cultural beliefs and traditions demonize some behaviours in society. I can give you the example of smoking: Islam does not allow smoking for both men and women, but men still do it as a normal activity; if a woman smokes in public, she will face criticism and be seen as immoral.

The way men express their faith in society was also viewed as an important factor in upholding patriarchy. The majority of my participants argued that men often misappropriate Islam and gain control over women to portray the image of religious men to others. For example, Houda (a 27-year-old medical student from Algiers) explained that traditions and faith are both crucial for men's self-image in society:

> [...] Because the majority of men in this country give importance to what others think about them, men generally like to have this perfect image in society, so they try to show themselves as perfect religious Muslim men.

Similarly, Mayliss - a 27-year student from Algiers - believes that religion is crucial in Algerian society, and as a result, men and women often seek to gain religious capital by outdoing others in the strict application of Islamic law:

> What happens is that both women and men try to show a personality that fits our society, even if it is not authentic to gain a high social position . If you show that you are not following the traditional system, you are either negatively judged, or seen in an inferior way. So, men and sometimes even

> women try to look religious and conservative because society gives importance to Islam.

In this context, Houda added that religion is often used as a pretext to sustain the patriarchal nature of society. She believes that misapplying the religious Islamic texts sustain patriarchy:

> Men weaponize religion against women because of its significance in our culture. I think it is the result of applying religion in the wrong way that's all. They bring religion in any kind of debate. Each time they don't like you to do something , they use the famous sentence "you are a bad person for not respecting religion" to shame us.

Patriarchal interpretations of Islamic religious texts are therefore among the reasons patriarchy is sustained in society. For example, Selma - a 27-year commercial assistant from Bejaia city - explained that Islamic religious texts are often misused by men to meet their needs:

> […] I believe we use tradition and culture more often than we use religion. It is incorrect to think that Islam forbids women from engaging in any activity. Traditions prevent women from leading the lives they desire. Take working as an example. Islam does not restrict women from having a profession, but in our society, men continue to say that work for women is not allowed in Islam because it benefits them to have a housewife.

Similarly, Naima - a 35-year-old woman from Algiers, and a television camera operator on an Algerian News channel - argued that Islam establishes equal restrictions for men and women. However, due to patriarchal and cultural norms in Algeria, those restrictions are only applied to women:

> There are a lot of things women cannot do because of our culture and not Islam. Anyone can clearly see that Islam forbids things for both men and women, but men do whatever they want just because they are men. Men

> always justify their control over women by religion. But anything Islam forbids is for both genders; it is just because in our traditions men do whatever they want without being criticized in society.

Naima believes that women do not lose their freedom because of religion, but rather because men use Islam as an alibi to gain more control in society. In similar ways, Mayliss explained that some men use religion to justify restricting women's rights and freedom. Patriarchy in her opinion manifests in restricting women from work, education, mobility, visibility on television, or travelling:

> […] Some men don't really know Islam. They make up stories to justify their bad behavior toward us. This society is just patriarchal, look at how some men in the Algerian families still say that a woman cannot go outside alone, a woman must not show herself on television, a woman cannot travel alone, and cannot work, or even sometimes study. Men who tell women to stop studying for example when they reach a certain age, know that Islam tells us to study because the Prophet (peace be upon him) said "seeking knowledge is a duty on every Muslim", but they don't care about applying what Islam says.

In the quote, Mayliss used a hadeeth (the prophet Muhammed's sayings) to prove that, in Islam, both men and women are required to seek knowledge. Traditional, cultural expectations of how women should act constantly put women's freedom and rights at risk. Huda - a 27-year-old medical student from Algiers - acknowledged the difficulty of living under patriarchal circumstances because they contribute to women's oppression and gender inequality, affecting their freedom and rights:

> It is just hard because men will put challenges for you everywhere as if being Muslim, Arab, or Algerian is a sin. I believe that the Arabic-Muslim society has a complex towards women; they feel insecure regarding women's success, and that's why they negatively judge us for everything. Of course, I'm

> not saying all men, just the majority of them. Men view a woman's success inside the family and society as a danger, which is why they will use everything at their disposal to repress her.

These quotes suggest that my participants view patriarchy as a driving force behind gender inequality which inhibits women's freedom, including their visibility on social media, their education, employment, mobility, and many other aspects of their lives. These quotes confirm existing literature arguing that the power dynamics between men and women in Algeria often emanate from patriarchy and are then maintained through culture and Islamism (Mebtouche Nedjai, 2013). This demonstrates that women's positions in some Muslim societies, such as Algeria, are often directed by local culture and history rather than religion alone (Smail Salhi, 2008).

The family system is intended to work according to Islamic teachings in the majority of Muslim countries. However, Muslim civilizations and Islamic texts are interpreted differently by different individuals (Barlas, 2019). This in turn has resulted in much corruption and the emergence of multiple Islams being practiced differently in different geographies (Hussain, 2020). The existence of multiple interpretations of Islamic religious texts demonstrates how they undergo mutation within various cultures (Gerner, 2015). As a result, it is necessary to emphasize that the Quran, Sunna (the traditional and legal practices of Muslims), and Hadith (the prophet Mohammad's sayings), are only principles (Saadawi, 1982; Smail Salhi, 2013; Gerner, 2015). Under patriarchal interpretations, Islamic texts are arguably distorted (Saadawi, 1982; Smail Salhi, 2013). Islamic values have gradually become entwined with local systems of belief and traditions to the extent that people sometimes do not differentiate between religion and local traditions (Haeri, 2002). As Morris (1993) argues, when patriarchal views are established in society, individuals often embody them, and thus they become normalized.

Like my participants, scholars such as Barlas (2019) argue that religious Islamic texts are often misinterpreted by men to control women. She argued that Islamic religious texts are polysemous, and thus multiple interpretations of the same religious text exist. Historically, the interpretation of Islamic religious texts was assigned to men, as women were said to be less competent and emotional in religious matters (Tibi, 2005; Barlas, 2019). Thus, it could be argued that Islamic religious texts are not the source of women's oppression, but their

interpretations often support the enforcement of patriarchy (Mernissi, 1991; Barlas, 2019). My findings also demonstrate how religion (Islam) is used by men to achieve a certain religious capital. According to Bourdieu (1987), religious capital represents an individual's understanding and application of religion, which shapes the person's hierarchical status in the religious domain. For Bourdieu (1987), religious capital is a source that has the potential to assist people in competing for status. In the narrative of my participants, representing the self as religious helps men gain respect and value and avoid negative judgments from other members of society. To achieve that high status, as my participants explained, men also control women by imposing strict religious principles on them, positioning women as the carriers of religious ethics (Lazreg, 2021).

Patriarchy can thus result from men interpreting Islam according to their interests (Hussain, 2020). According to Wadud (1999), the interpretations of Islamic texts were conducted through the lenses, positions, and needs of men. Women's exclusion from such duty contrasts with what used to happen during the earliest periods of Islam because the Prophet's wives were vigorously involved in producing Islamic religious understanding (Ahmed, 1992). Similar to what my participants argued, scholars such as Saadawi (1982) and Gerner (2015) explain that Islamic religious texts do not prevent women from working and give women several other rights that were later lost under patriarchal circumstances. In most Muslim societies, it is believed that women are expected to behave according to men's expectations; in other words, gender roles are often established by men and not women (Hussain, 2020). This, in turn, leads to women's subordination. The concept of women's subordination means lowering women's positions in society while restricting their access to different assets or making decisions (Sultana, 2010).

After the end of the Algerian civil war in 2002, the state started practicing a type of Islam that Lazreg (2021, p. 28) called 'wasatiya Islam', which is a moderate form of Islam that is not influenced by politics. In addition, Algeria adopted a family code based on Islamic values while also adhering to a French penal law (Lazreg, 1994; 2021). A family code is a group of laws managing how a family should function (Bekhedda and Sarnou, 2020). Salhi (2003), after

analyzing the articles of the family code, argued that although political leaders claim that the Algerian family code is purely Islamic, its articles originate from traditions and the patriarchal Algerian system because some of the articles violate many rights that Islam originally granted to women. The new Algerian family law, which was designed by male political leaders, was examined in a more recent study (Bekhedda and Sarnou, 2020), and the authors found that many of its provisions still reinforce gender inequality by giving men more rights than women.

All these factors I explain and provide context for my participants' narratives about patriarchy in Algeria. This context could also help to explain why some Algerian women I tried to recruit during my data collection decided not to participate since their husbands would not give them permission. It also provides the context for how my participants view influencers' dress and veiling, and how they experience and enact veiling themselves. I discuss how patriarchy influences women's hijab and dress practices in the part that follows.

7.2.1 The Role of Traditions and Patriarchy in Women's Practices of Hijab

In her research about veiling practices in Algeria, Lazreg (2009) described the experiences narrated by some women who were forced to wear a hijab. Lazreg (2009) concluded that women are often pressured by male family members (husbands, brothers, fathers) to veil. Similarly, wearing a hijab under patriarchal forces was how two of my participants described their experiences. For example, Kamilia - a 26-year-old English teacher based in Jijel city – shared her veiling story, and explained how her male siblings and father pressured her to wear a hijab because of existing cultural presumptions suggesting that unveiled women bring shame to male members of the family:

> […] When I was 18, I was obliged to wear a hijab. One day, my brothers and father told me that I must cover now, and if I don't, they will not allow me to enter the university. This means I must choose between the hijab and my dream to finish my studies. What can I say, I was not convinced to wear it. I felt forced to wear it. I will not lie to you or pretend to be a religious person just because I am veiled; if they did not oblige me, I would not wear it even

> now. […] They said that if I don't wear a hijab at my age in public, I will bring shame to my father.

Kamilia described her experience with the hijab as forced. According to Kamilia's story, her brothers and father made her choose between wearing a hijab and going to university or not wearing a hijab and not going to university. She explained that not wearing a hijab at 18 would, according to the male figures in her family, bring shame to her father. Kamilia added that her hijab does not reflect her religiosity. Being forced to wear a hijab led to a lack of adherence to Islamic dress code. She believes that hijab is not an obligation for Muslim women:

> I am not applying all the rules of an Islamic hijab, I try to be moderate because as I said it was not my own choice, I do not believe that women are obliged to wear one […] yes, I wear colourful dresses, and also trousers, the only correct thing I wear is my headscarf because it covers my hair and neck.

Kamilia's perspective covered how hijab may affect women's beauty. According to Kamilia, covering the hair detracts from a woman`s beauty. She explained that her desire to look prettier as a veiled woman pushed her to wear a modern hijab:

> Any woman can tell you that not wearing a hijab is better; I love myself without it, honestly. The hijab hides some of our beauty. Our beauty is absolute without the headscarf because hair makes us prettier. I know some women love themselves in the hijab, but many don't. Sometimes women just wear it because it is an Islamic practice or because they are obliged to at a certain age. I do not think wearing it makes me ugly, but I love myself without it. I wear a modern hijab to feel prettier; I am not wearing an Islamic hijab, as I said.

Similarly, Sidra - a 29-year-old tourism officer from Jijel city - was forced to wear a hijab by her uncle at a very young age. Sidra's experience with a hijab went through two phases.

Initially, she was obliged to wear a hijab by a male member of her family (her uncle). In this period, she used to wear a non-Islamic type of hijab (a turban) with non-religious forms of clothes. Then, at the age of 19, she decided to wear an Islamic hijab for religious reasons:

> When I first wore a hijab, I was just 13 years old, and it was not my choice. My uncle asked me to wear it. I remember he first asked his daughters to wear a hijab, and then he told me that I must do the same because my body is curvy, and it attracts men`s attention outside. Honestly, I did not wear it with conviction, and I used to wear a turban with normal clothes like t-shirts and jeans intentionally. I did not wear an Islamic hijab. I also had problems with my father and brothers because they kept asking me to wear the correct religious clothes. but I was not happy with it because I was initially wearing a hijab against my will. I just did not like them deciding what I could wear. After years, at the age of 19, I decided to wear the correct hijab.

In this extract, Sidra and her female cousins were forced to wear a hijab. Because Sidra's body was perceived as attractive, her uncle instructed her to wear a hijab to avoid drawing attention from men in public. Sidra expressed her displeasure at being required to wear the hijab or any other article of religious garb. She purposefully wore non-religious clothes, such as t-shirts, jeans, and a turban, as a result of being pressured to wear a hijab. Sidra's second phase in her experience with hijab was distinct from the first one since she decided to do it for religious reasons and in accordance with Islamic laws:

> I did it for religion and to comply with God's will, I did it after reading and watching videos about hijab in Islam. When I discovered the real meaning of my hijab, I did what Islam tells me to do.

Learning about hijab in Islam motivated Sidra to wear an Islamic one, as shown in the previous extract. During the interview, Sidra described her hijab habits in specific ways, arguing that Islamic clothes are not only represented by a jilbab (a long outer Islamic garment that covers the head and the hands). As such, what constitutes an Islamic hijab for her includes any form

of modest clothes such as long dresses and abayas (a loose Islamic black dress similar to a robe, containing generally a zip in the middle, with large and long sleeves) :

> I am not talking about the Jilbab, but I am talking about normal and modest clothes, because I do not believe that a Jilbab is an obligation in Islam, as no religious texts are saying that a Jilbab is what women should wear. I wear long dresses, sometimes abayas and this is correct and Islamic for me.

In the previous quotes, both participants wore the hijab under patriarchal circumstances including pressure from male family members such as brothers, fathers, and uncles. In the case of Sidra, her uncle instructed her to wear a hijab because of the common belief that around the age of puberty, girls who start looking like 'women' should cover their bodies to avoid sexually attracting men in public (Lazreg, 2009). Muslim scholars say that menstruation marks the beginning of puberty for girls, along with other indicators like the development of breasts, which signify adulthood (Zulaiha and Mutaqin, 2021).

Although both my participants were forced to veil, how it affected them varied. Initially, being forced into veiling affected the type of dress and headscarf they wore, as being forced led them to choose a modern hijab over an Islamic one. For Kamilia, wearing a modern hijab, including colourful dresses and trousers, helped her feel more beautiful. Sidra used to wear a turban, t-shirts, and jeans to express her unhappiness at being forced into veiling. Lazreg (2009) argued that women who are forced to wear a hijab often resent it later because they believe that their femininity is restrained or even lost during the process. In the case of Kamilia and Sidra, both expressed their resentment towards forced veiling by wearing some non-Islamic forms of clothes and headscarves.

However, Sidra's experience with hijab changed over the years as she went from a modern form of hijab to an Islamic one. For religious motivation, she started wearing religious clothes such as abayas. The experiences of Kamilia and Sidra show not only the complexity of veiling practices but also that women's motivations for veiling are diverse and complex (Bhowon and

Bundhoo, 2016). As seen in Sidra's experience, the motivations behind veiling may also shift over time.

Patriarchy is a power dynamic that operates in diverse ways. Among the participants I interviewed, three of them argued that dominance shifts from the father or brothers to the husband after the woman gets married. Applied to veiling practices in the Algerian context, women are also under pressure from their husbands to wear a hijab after marriage or to alter the style of their hijab to one that is more Islamic. For example, Hayat, a 29-year-old teacher who describes herself as a strongly religious person, believes that the type of hijab influencers wear is thus sometimes chosen by the husband:

> Hayat: I sincerely believe that there is no way to stay unveiled in Jijel. Just in case you don't know even when the woman's family allows her to wear a modern hijab when she is single, after marriage, a man from Jijel can't allow his wife to continue to wear it, he will oblige her to wear an Islamic one.
>
> Amel: Why do you think that a husband may ask his wife to wear an Islamic hijab instead of a modern one?
>
> Hayat: To avoid being shamed by other men and also to show he is the head of the family. You know men are judged in our society based on how their women behave; if a woman goes outside not covering her body, she will bring shame to her husband.

In the quote, Hayat said, 'Family allows' and then 'a husband allows'—this echoes the experiences of the previous participants, Sidra and Kamilia, implying that social factors such as family influence women's hijab practices. As she explained, women's behavior is associated with men's competence to manage a family, and as a result, men tend to control women's dressing practices. The men's control within the family structure is implied when the woman is wearing an Islamic headscarf.

The quotes presented above reflect how women's bodies are negotiated under male authority. Some men use their authority to control women in different ways, including by veiling them by force and pressuring them to obey their family male members in the name of religion. Morris (1993) explained that patriarchy may manifest in various forms, such as family, legal codes, religion, labour, and cultural norms. In the previous quotes, the patriarchy manifested itself in family relations, religion, and cultural norms. Under patriarchal circumstances, some men control the practice of hijab by denying women's right to make decisions about wearing a hijab.

Forcing women to wear a hijab to hide their bodies' assumed attractiveness to men is a very common form of patriarchy in different societies; the family system is often used by men to control women's behaviour and sexuality (Nkealah, 2013). In Chapter 3, I explained that the hijab is assumed to protect women from sexual harassment, as it hides their bodies from men. Muslim scholars often argue that women need to cover their aurat, or awrah, an Arabic term meaning the private parts of men and women (Parker, 2006). However, in Islam, awrah for men and women represents different body parts. For women, the awrah in front of non-mahram men involves all the body except the face and the hands (Karyono et al., 2017). Considering the latter debates, women's bodies became controlled by men by imposing dress codes or controlling the degree to which these women could beautify themselves through make-up (Lazreg, 2009). Furthermore, women's bodies are often associated with moral discourses, implying that their bodies indicate the morality of their families. To preserve the family's moral status, women are required to avoid men's attention, mainly of a sexual kind (Bhowon and Bundhoo, 2016). This belief, in turn, positions women as the cultural ambassadors of their communities (Yuval-Davis, 1994).

As I explained in Chapter 3, the Islamic texts instructing Muslim women to be modest are polymerous and were interpreted and translated only by men; women were argued to be incompetent for such professions (Barlas, 2019). Under patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic texts' concept of modesty, women's mobility and visibility are restricted to a different degree in Muslim societies through recourse to modesty (Mernissi, 1987; Syed, 2008). As a result, in some Muslim societies, women are often expected to visually disappear from public spaces (Lazreg, 2009; Addi, 2013). Lazreg (2009) argues that women should not be held

responsible for men's sexual desires, and the hijab does not always guarantee protection from sexual harassment because it does not necessarily diminish men's sexual desires.

My findings in this section align with the debates about how hijab may become a form of gender oppression when women wear it to obtain the consent of male family members to be able to leave their houses (Jackson and Monk-Turner, 2015). My findings show that women are sometimes coerced to wear a hijab (Al Wazni, 2015). This was the experience of my participants, who explained that men often strive to be accepted and thus avoid being shamed by other men by pressuring women to wear a hijab. Under patriarchal circumstances, veiling becomes a sign of gender inequality that marginalizes women and gives men unwarranted and unearned power (Mernissi, 1991; Lazreg, 2009). Although some of my participants' experiences with hijab were forced, the decision to wear a hijab for others was a personal choice, as discussed in the following section.

7.2.2 The Exercise of Choice in Wearing Hijab: Religious Motives

As discussed in Chapter 3, women also wear a hijab as an act of worship and devotion to God and the Islamic dress code. Some Muslim women regard the hijab as a choice embedded in their religious journey, and for them, the hijab is an act of devotion to God's orders in Islam.

Among the participants I interviewed, eight of them said that hijab was a matter of choice. For example, Sarah, a 26-year-old architect from Jijel City, described herself as an active user of social media, a fan of some influencers, and a religious woman who seeks to practice religion correctly. Sarah believes that veiled women are required to respect the Islamic dress code and should not distort its meaning by wearing non-religious clothes. She also acknowledged that modern veiling practices distort the real meaning of hijab. Sarah described her experience wearing a hijab and said that doing so was a personal decision that symbolized her embrace of Islam and deference to God:

> Wearing the hijab was my own decision, I decided to wear it and I am convinced by my choice. I did it because I want to be a good Muslim and I want to obey Allah (God).

Similarly, Samia - a 25-year-old woman from Jijel - decided to wear a hijab at the age of 16. Samia explained that her decision to wear a hijab was against her parents' wishes as they seemed to think she was still too young to veil:

> I wore a hijab against the will of my parents because I am a Muslim woman, and I am convinced that I should do so. They didn't agree with me because they thought I was too young—just 16—to make such a choice.

The belief that hijab is obligatory and important in Islam was also held by some of the unveiled women I interviewed. For example, Nabila - an unveiled 28-year-old English teacher from Bejaia city - was critical of influencers wearing modern hijabs, as such practices distort its religious meaning. Nabila argued that hijab is a religious obligation in Islam, and she aspires to cover in the future to comply with religion:

> I am aware that I should cover to be a good Muslim woman; I think about it every day, and I know it is a mistake to not wear one, but I just hope that one day I will. At the moment, I am not able to wear an Islamic hijab, and I do not want to disrespect my religion by wearing an inappropriate hijab either, and this is why I am still unveiled.

Nabila emphasized in her comment that the hijab remains important in Islam regardless of her not wearing one. She also acknowledged her inability to wear a hijab that aligns with the Islamic dress code. Therefore, she is remaining unveiled to show respect for her religion.

These findings show that hijab can also be a matter of choice (Crossley, 2005; Lewis, 2013; Mansson McGinty, 2014). Lazreg (2009) presented similar experiences of Algerian women who described their hijab practices as a matter of choice in Algeria. Because Islam values modesty, some women choose to wear a hijab. As Moghadam (1994) argued, some Muslim women "find value, purpose, and identity in religious practice" (p. 21). Some Muslim women also view wearing the hijab as a form of commitment to Islam (Bhowon and Bundhoo, 2016). As Bullock (2010) notes, the hijab has multiple meanings for different women, and sometimes

it is used as a way to demonstrate religiosity and worship, as shown in the previous quotes. In the following section, I discuss the role of locality and the status of veiling in Algeria.

7.3 Locality and the Status of Veiling in Jijel, Bejaia and Algiers

This section addresses the relationship between locality and the status of veiling in three Algerian cities: Jijel, Bejaia, and Algiers. The first part of this chapter began by considering patriarchy and then my participants' motivations behind their veiling practices. In this section, I argue that the status of veiling across Algeria changes from one city to another, and that modern hijab in Algeria is becoming more common.

According to the majority of my participants, location affects women's' veiling practices. For example, Fatiha - a 28-year-old housewife from Bejaia city - who describes her hijab as a religious because she was wearing a jilbab believes that locality has an influence on the practice of hijab including its status:

> Many things change when you move from one city to another, even hijab […] There are cities where all women are veiled, or half of them are veiled. Hijab sometimes is obligatory in some cities, and not necessarily in others. I think it is the case in Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou, a lot of women are unveiled, but in Setif I don't even think that you can find an unveiled woman, or I guess 90% of them are veiled […] But the last time I visited Setif, I found that many of them wear a modern hijab too, but there are still some who wear an authentic hijab, so even in the same city, there is still diversity.

In her comment, Fatiha explained that the hijab is worn more in some Algerian cities than others. Fatiha provided the example of Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou, which are the Kabyle cities in Algeria, and Setif, which is predominantly an Arabic city. In Algeria, there are two main Kabyle or Berber regions: the Greater Kabylia and the Little Kabylia. The inhabitants of the two regions are the Kabyles, representing an ethnic group who speak a language referred to as Berber (Britannica, 2014). Greater Kabylia includes the city of Tizi Ouzou and two other villages:

Bouira and Boumerdes. The little Kabylia covers the city of Bejaia alone. Bejaia, one of the cities from which I recruited my participants, is a Mediterranean Sea port situated in north-eastern Algeria. Department of Health and Population (2018) shows that the population in Bejaia city is estimated to be around 978050 . Setif is a city in the east of Algeria and has a population of around 410,000 (The Interior Ministry of Local Authorities and Regional Plannings, 2015), whose language is predominantly Arabic. According to Fatiha, the hijab in Setif is more common than in Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou. At the end of the quote, she highlighted the diversity of hijab practices in Setif, including both Islamic and modern forms of hijab.#

Similarly, Hayat - a 29-year-old teacher, introduced earlier in the chapter - noticed that location affects women's hijab practices and the type of hijab they wear:

> Do not forget the city where the woman lives. If you live in Algiers or Oran, I can say that you can wear a modern hijab easier, but in my city, Jijel or Annaba, it is much harder, and only a few women wear it. […] Because Jijel and Annaba are much more conservative and religion is very important than in other cities, it is just like that in Jijel, hijab is necessary for women.

Hayat believes that it is easier for women in Oran and Algiers to wear modern forms of hijab. In Annaba and Jijel it seems that the Islamic hijab is obligatory and more common for women. Hayat explained that in religious conservative cities (such as Jijel and Annaba), the practice of hijab is more customary. Oran or Wahran is a coastal city in northwest Algeria and the second largest Algerian city after the capital Algiers (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2019). Jijel is situated in north-eastern Algeria and the population is estimated to be 131,500 in 2008 (CCI, 2014). The language spoken in the region is the Jijeli or the Jijel Arabic, which is a form of Arabic predominantly spoken in the north-eastern cities of Algeria (Caubet, 2000). Jijel inhabitants are predominantly Arab with some Berber minorities (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014). Annaba is situated in the north-eastern corner of Algeria, near the border of Tunisia (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2016). The dominant language in Annaba is also Arabic.

Similarly, Naima, whom I previously introduced, works as a television camera operator and thus has to move between cities with her team. She observed that the practice of hijab varies from one city to another:

> I visited many Algerian cities because of my work. There are some cities, mainly the provincial cities, and I do not think I have seen any unveiled women there. When I go from Algiers to there, I am the only unveiled woman, and when I walk down the street, I feel like an alien. Well, not all of them wear an Islamic hijab, but those I saw all cover their hair in a certain way […] I think it is because in these cities, men pressure women to veil in any way to avoid the shame of society and other people talking bad about them, and many women do it for culture.

Naima believes that hijab in Algerian provincial cities situated far from the capital of Algiers is very common and often becomes obligatory in public. By saying "I feel like an alien", she seems to feel different, as walking unveiled in provincial cities is unusual for most women. According to Naima, the hijab seems to be important in the Algerian provincial cities for patriarchal reasons.

Another participant, Nabila - a 28-year-old English teacher from Bejaia city - explained that location defines the status of hijab in Algeria:

> I think everyone knows that in some Algerian cities, like most of the provincial cities, women cannot go outside without a hijab, and I think that on social media, mainly the influencers never consider showing that reality […] Because of the culture of the city, the people around women put pressure on them to wear a hijab to avoid being labelled as bad women.

Similarly, Nabila mentioned that in Algerian provincial cities, women are required to wear a hijab to leave the house. As she explained, the local cultural system of the city pressures

women to wear a hijab to avoid being shamed. For Nabila, social media as well as influencers do not present such diversity about hijabs in Algeria.

Among the participants I interviewed from Bejaia city, Five (out of 7) of them suggested that hijab in the Berber regions such as Bejaia city is less obligatory for women. For example, Salima (a 37-year-old French teacher; a housewife at the time the interview) argued that women in the Berber regions (specifically Bejaia and Tizi Ouzou) of Algeria are less criticized for not wearing a hijab, unlike in other (Arabic) cities where hijab is used as a standard to evaluate women's morality:

> Here, it depends on the region; I think it is the geography. Geography plays an important role, like in Bejaia or Tizi Ouzou, the Berber cities. I mean, most women are not judged for hijab, but if you move to the Arabic cities, like the east and western regions of Algeria, hijab is used to judge women about their virtuousness.

When asked to provide more information, Salima argued that religion is practised differently in different parts of Algeria, and some Algerian cities are more conservative than others. This results in diverse ideologies defining how hijab and women are viewed in the city:

> Because in our country geography defines how people of each region think, most of the cities I just listed are more religiously conservative than the Berber region, so how they view hijab and its importance change from one city to another.

The participants cited some reasons for hijab having less cultural meaning in the Berber regions than in other Arabic cities. For example, Nabila mentioned some political events:

> […] Speaking about hijab, hijab is more important and is required in Arabic-Algerian cities and has always been less important for Berbers […] I think it is because of the political problems that happened in the past. I mean,

> during the Berber spring, there was this clash of cultures between us and the Arabs, and to protect the Berber culture, Berbers rejected anything related to the Arabic cultures, including hijab and Arabic language.

As Nabila noted, hijab seems to be non-obligatory in the Berber regions and often acquires strong cultural meaning in the Arabic regions. Nabila believes that some political events affected the status of hijab in the Berber communities. The Berber spring (1980) is the political period when Berber activists claimed recognition of the Berber culture and language in Algeria (Aïtel, 2013). Since Algerian independence in 1962, the National Liberation Front (FLN), as the dominant political movement in the government, has established a constitution instituting Arabic and Islam as the official and only language and religion of Algeria, denying the existence of cultural pluralism (Mahé, 2001). As a result of this event, Berber groups and activists revolted against the Algerian government (Willis, 2015). Since hijab is an Islamic practice, Nabila argues that Berber populations rejected the hijab as a symbol of resistance against the government establishing Islam and Arabic as the only language and religion in Algeria. The rejection of hijab thus lead to diminishing its importance among the Berber cities.

Another non-Berber participant, Mayliss (from Algiers), shares a similar view about hijab in the Berber region. Nevertheless, Mayliss thinks that the practice of hijab has less social meaning in the Berber regions for historical reasons:

> […] In the Berber region, women wear modest clothes but do not cover their hair. Berber women for a long time do not veil. Over the past few years, I've started to notice some veiled women in their areas. Women have recently begun to become more religious.

Mayliss thinks that hijab has only been more popular in the last few years, and that Berber women (from the Algerian Kabyle regions) are frequently unveiled in these regions. To further explain, Nabila added that in the history of the Berber people, female historical figures were always unveiled:

> Amazigh (Berber) women historically like Al Kahina and many others do not wear a hijab; veiling did not even exist for them in the past. They just wear modest Berber clothes. The traditional clothes are very modest but have nothing to do with religious Islamic clothes.

Mayliss used the example of Al Kahina, a Berber queen and military leader who fought against the Arab/Muslim conquest of the Maghreb in the 7th and 8th centuries (Hendrickx, 2013). Mayliss believes that hijab as a religious practice did not exist in Berber culture. However, modest traditional clothes were essential for them. As previously mentioned by my participants, the type of hijab also changes from one city to another. In the previous quotes, the participants mentioned that modern hijab in the provincial cities and Jijel may be difficult to wear. However, two participants from Jijel argue that modern hijab has become a common practice in the city over the past few years. Sidra - a 27-year-old tourism officer from Jijel city - observed that modern hijab styles including the turban are becoming prevalent in her city:

> In the past, most women used to wear a traditional Islamic hijab in Jijel. But now many women wear a turban with non-religious clothes.

Similarly, Sarah (a 26-year-old architect from Jijel city) believes that modern hijabs such as turbans are worn by many women in Jijel:

> Even here in Jijel, modern hijab is widespread, many women now wear modern clothes with a turban on their heads.

These opinions on the modern hijab demonstrate the complexity of how people interpret hijab. For Sidra and Sarah, modern hijab comprises a turban, non-religious clothes, and modern fashion trends. For them, these forms of hijab are common in Jijel. In this case, the participants who believe that wearing a modern hijab in Jijel is difficult may have different definitions of what constitutes a modern hijab, and this is why they assumed the difficulty of wearing one in Jijel.

These above examples reflect the importance of recognizing the diversity of Muslim veiling practices (Amer, 2014). This chapter has empirically confirmed that veiling is influenced by the context in which it is practised (Almila, 2017). The chapter demonstrates that, "like all clothing, Muslim women's clothing is diverse, both historically and geographically, and is connected with much broader cultural systems" (Bucar, 2018, p.14). It is essential to consider various factors when investigating the practice of hijab because women differ in terms of social class, ethnicity, age, and educational levels; some support liberal ideologies, while others are more fundamentalist; some are against religion and discard traditions, while others accept these as a part of their identity (Moghadam, 2003).

In Algeria specifically, the status of the hijab is influenced by traditions, patriarchy, and the way religion is practiced by the local habitants of each city. Other factors in understanding the practice of hijab are age, ethnicity, and how the individual interprets and practices religion. This diversity is demonstrated by the claim that the hijab has less cultural meaning in the Algerian Berber regions. Historically, Great Kabylia is known for being influenced by French education and culture during the French colonization of Algeria (Roberts, 2014). As a result, women in those regions are believed to be more emancipated than women in other Algerian Arabic cities (Vince, 2015), and most of them do not wear the hijab (Hessini, 1995). My findings thus show that this claim is still common. Regarding the diversity of dress in Algeria, and how locality influences women's dress practices, McDougall (2017) describes the diversity of Algeria, highlighting how women in certain Algerian cities wear Western and non-religious dress styles, whereas in other cities they tend to wear only religious and modest clothes.

The complex and varied narratives about the modernization of hijab in Algeria could be explained by the research of Almila (2017) about veiling in modern Muslim societies. Almila (2017) argued that most women in Northern African countries like Algeria shifted from wearing a conservative traditional hijab to a modern one to accommodate modern public spaces, mainly because women from these countries started to integrate into modern workspaces such as factories. One participant in Chapter 6 stated that one of the practical benefits of wearing a modern hijab is that it makes it easier to move around in public.

This chapter thus stresses and adds to the existing debates about the “impossibility of generalizing about the veil” (Rabine, 2013, p.103), showing that hijab is a complex practice with different social meanings.

7.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the multiple faces of patriarchy in my participants experiences. I argued that patriarchy continues to be a barrier to women's success, accomplishments, and independence in all its forms. According to Knauss and Knauss (1987), patriarchy had its roots in the precolonial society before the French invasion in 1830. In both the Berber and Arab tribes of Algeria, patriarchy was formed through a variety of customs, including patrimony, patrilocality, Islam, and the custom of male honour.

In the chapter, I showed how patriarchy for my participants manifests in establishing restrictions on women’s visibility on social media platforms, as the latter is often judged as an immoral act. I argued that this finding suggests that women’s visibility in digital media is still debated, judged, and assessed (Banet-Weiser, 2015). Patriarchy was related to traditions and religion: due to the importance of religion in Algerian culture, both men and women frequently seek to appear religious by exhibiting a strict adherence to Islamic laws. As a result, men use religion as a pretext to uphold the society's patriarchal structure and obtain more control over women. One main reason for the latter is the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic religious texts.

In this chapter, I also showed how patriarchy influences women`s hijab practices. Two of the participants were forced to wear a hijab by their male relatives. Pressure from male relatives to wear a hijab resulted in the participants resenting the practice of hijab and thus wearing a modern one. The dynamic of patriarchy in women`s hijab practices sometimes shift from the father or brothers to the husband after the woman gets married. Women are sometimes pressured to wear a hijab by their husbands after marriage, or to wear an Islamic one instead of a modern one. Therefore, I argued that the practice of hijab may become a form of gender oppression mainly when it is done to obtain the approval of the members of a specific social

group (Mansson McGinty, 2014). Nevertheless, the results also showed that some women wear a hijab as an act of devotion to Islam.

My research also showed that the status of hijab is influenced by location. Some Algerian cities are more religious than others, and this resulted in hijab being more required in such cities. In the participants narratives, hijab is more commonly practiced in Algerian provincial cities situated far from the capital of Algiers. Women in these cities cover their hair to avoid violating the town cultural norms. This chapter also showed that hijab in Jijel city is often more required than in Algiers or Bejaia. In the Berber cities such as Bejaia, hijab is argued to have less social significance, and thus women in the Berber cities are expected to be less criticized for not wearing a hijab. The main factors in hijab being less important in Bejaia are political and historical. This chapter also showed that modern hijab practices are often difficult to wear in Jijel, although few of the women from Jijel argued that modern hijab is becoming more common in the city.

This Chapter thus shows that patriarchal views lead to the interpretation of religious texts in ways that disadvantage and oppress women. Patriarchal practices and Islamic texts are also interpreted in particular ways in Algeria, according to its varied history. The three phenomena – a) the Algerian social environment; b) Islam and Islamic customs; and c) patriarchal norms – interact. And they interact in different ways in different parts of Algeria, because how the people of each city practice religion has an impact on the status of the hijab. It is thus important to acknowledge the diversity of Muslim women's veiling customs (Amer, 2014), as the context in which hijab is practiced influences its status (Almila, 2017).

Finally, in Chapter 2, I explained that postfeminism acknowledges and considers previous feminist approaches but also rejects them; thus, it entangles anti-feminist and feminist subjects. These contrasting views can be seen in the followers` oppositional attitudes towards female influencers. In a postfeminist discourse, they supported the influencers' financial success and the ways they defied Algerian traditions to become visible on social media, but simultaneously criticised the way the influencers presented themselves, primarily by wearing modern hijab, or fashion hijab, which is seen as a violation of Islamic dress code (see Chapter 6). While most participants were critical of the patriarchal nature of Algerian society as seen in this chapter

(a debate that feminism had fought against), they were also critical of the influencers who, in some cases, were thought to defy those religious and patriarchal constraints.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I provide a summary of my qualitative research findings and describe how they contribute to existing literature. My thesis has investigated young Algerian women's attitudes towards a group of veiled and unveiled Algerian female influencers. As explained earlier in the thesis, influencers are argued to present themselves in certain ways, including as being knowledgeable experts on certain topics. Existing research has mostly focused on influencers' posts to investigate their self-representations. However, I have examined how their followers feel about their social media posts and self-representations. My thesis has also examined followers' attitudes towards influencers' dress and veiling habits. It also explores how some young women experience veiling in contemporary Algerian contexts, which feeds into their views on influencers.

My engagement with existing academic literature covered in Chapters 2 and 3 motivated me to formulate the following research questions:

Overarching question: What are Algerian women's attitudes towards female Algerian social media influencers?
RQ1: What themes emerge in people's comments on Algerian female social media influencers' Instagram and YouTube posts?
RQ2: What are followers' responses to influencers' dressing and veiling practices?
RQ3: What is the status of veiling in different Algerian cities?

The qualitative research methods used in my study were described in Chapter 4, and Chapters 5 to 7 addressed my research questions. Chapter 5 examined how followers view the influencers' self-representations, and Chapter 6 addressed how they view their veiling and dress habits. Finally, Chapter 7 explored the experience of veiling among my participants. In this final chapter, I highlight the major contributions and accomplishments of my research.

8.1 The Attitudes of Followers towards Algerian Female Influencers' Self-representation Strategies on Instagram and YouTube

This study has presented several key findings about the attitudes of followers towards the influencers` self-representations. First, I identified five key themes raised by influencers' followers: (1) instructiveness, (2) inspiration and motivation, (3) wealth, (4) credibility, and (5) representativeness. As shown in Chapter 5, influencers appear instructive because they present themselves as knowledgeable and expert in many domains. In the context of my research, the term instructive refers to the influencers' content being seen as educational and helping others in a variety of fields, including business, beauty, self-development, and education. Being instructive depends on the influencers` content. The majority of their followers view them as instructive when they share content about topics such as relationships, self-development, or education. However, a small number of followers characterized the influencers as non-instructive when their content included private life stories or cleaning. This type of content can come across as mundane and patronizing for some followers. Therefore, this research proposes that influencers present themselves in diverse ways, including as exceptional, knowledgeable, talented, and expert (Hearn and Schoenhoff, 2016; Abidin, 2018). As shown in Chapters 3 and 5, Algerian influencers engage in diverse techniques and similarly present themselves as knowledgeable, talented, and experts.

My research also showed that some Algerian influencers were seen as inspirational and motivational. I showed that some influencers serve as role models, and their professional success is used as motivation and encouragement by followers. Female influencers are viewed as inspirational role models for successful women due to their position in Algerian society. Women in Algeria have maintained a traditional role inside the family system, with the majority confined to the roles of mothers and housewives. Algerian female influencers challenge the traditional role of women in society by portraying themselves as successful and financially independent. The latter resulted in followers viewing them as inspirational and motivating.
Influencers engage in digital intimacy as a self-branding technique and thus disclose private information about their wealth. Furthermore, in recent years, influencers have been required to disclose their paid and sponsored partnerships. These two factors resulted in questions

about the influencers. This study demonstrated that the concept of inspiration and motivation has been questioned as a result of followers' awareness that influencers are sponsored and paid by commercial brands.

Previous literature has argued that influencers in modern societies often portray themselves as members of a higher socioeconomic class by leading a lavish and refined lifestyle, as some Algerian influencers do. My research findings advance the debates in the field with a focus on how followers interpret influencers' luxurious lifestyles and how it affects them. The findings showed nuanced opinions about the influencers sharing excessive content related to extravagant lifestyles and spending. Most of the followers argued that influencers' lavish lifestyles are unrealistic in Algerian society, where belonging to the upper class is considered unusual or unattainable. The findings also indicate that exposure to influencers' extravagant lifestyles negatively affects some followers' emotions.

My research also indicates that frequently sharing extravagant and luxurious lifestyles affects influencers credibility. The mediated intimacy or closeness that influencers develop with their followers may be lost as a result of excessive sharing of luxury lifestyles. In Chapter 5, I showed that influencers with high numbers of followers are believed to be credible because providing fake reviews about products may damage their reputations among followers and brands. Furthermore, influencers who test the products before providing feedback on them seem to raise their credibility among followers. Additionally, my data demonstrated that influencers' interactions and communications with followers made them seem more credible.

The followers' awareness that influencer marketing is competitive and profit-driven, however, makes them sometimes distrust their reviews, casting doubt on their credibility. Through these findings, I was able to add to the existing body of knowledge by showing some factors that influence influencers` credibility. In the context of my research, building followers' trust requires, at the very least, that influencers communicate with followers and demonstrate a high level of subject matter expertise.

Another major trend in my data was the view that influencers' self-representations are expected to be representative of other Algerian women. My research showed that the majority of followers claim that influencers have a duty to accurately portray Algerian women. It is

expected that the generated self-representations reflect the influencers` religious and cultural heritage. Followers expect influencers to present themselves in ways that aligned with Algerian cultural and religious norms. Therefore, self-representation needs to be understood as expressions of the self but also as expressions of the group to which the individual belongs (Van Es, 2019). At the same time, a small number of participants rejected the idea that the influencers' self-representations extend to representing other Algerian women. This can be seen in followers' assertion that influencers are individuals with distinct personalities who cannot speak for or represent other women.

8.2 Followers' Attitudes towards Female Algerian Influencers' Dress and Veiling Practices

Many researchers (Lazreg, 1994; Tarlo, 2010; Galadari, 2012; Bucar, 2018; Van Nes, 2019) argue that Muslim women sometimes contend that their use of the Islamic hijab identifies them as Muslims; it makes their adherence to Islam visible because it symbolizes their devotion to the Islamic principles of dress code. Similarly, my findings show that wearing an Islamic hijab is seen by followers as a way to express their identities and social backgrounds.
The findings also showed that influencers' visibility on social media and their large audiences influenced how their followers evaluated their dress and veiling practices. Influencers with large audiences are assumed to have the ability to shape public opinion about any given subject. This led to expectations amongst my participants with regard to how influencers present themselves online, which is expected to adhere to various criteria, including Islam and Algerian traditions, to avoid negative associations with hijab or Muslim women. Therefore, in the context of my research, influencers are seen to motivate others to act, inspire or guide the actions of others, generate interest in a subject, and are also seen as ambassadors of their religious and cultural heritage.

This research also demonstrated that the majority of participants and followers interpret modern hijab as a misapplication of the Islamic dress code. Modern hijab includes both the ways influencers cover their hair and how they dress. Influencers who wear the modern hijab are often believed to spread inaccurate and poor representations of Islam and Muslim

women. As noted by Mir (2014), Muslim women who do not wear a hijab that aligns with the expectations of the Muslim communities are often criticized because they are expected to uphold Islamic modesty and prevent the possibility of transmitting false beliefs about their faith and dishonouring Muslims. Like existing academic literature, I found that women's disregard for the Islamic traditions of dress and veiling is viewed as a "distortion or distraction from more weighty theological concerns" (Tarlo and Moor, 2013, p. 19).

The rise of Muslim influencers who promote modern lifestyles and modern Islamic clothing is perceived as a response to popular stereotypes that associate hijab with oppression and backwardness. To influence how Muslim women are portrayed, influencers link Islamic modesty and fashion to present themselves as not just religious but also attractive. In contrast to these assertions, my study shows that the majority of followers do not see contemporary styles and Islamic modesty together as a means of challenging the widely held misconception about Muslim women. In their eyes, it represents a distortion of their faith and a loss of Islamic identity and principles.

My study also showed that followers sometimes admire the modern hijab for its aesthetic qualities; in other words, they believe that it enhances women's beauty and attractiveness and that it is in line with contemporary culture and fashion trends. The modernization of the hijab indicates the desire to accommodate modern lifestyles; as Almila (2016, p. 93) explained, some Muslims follow fashion out of "a desire to look up-to-date".

My research also highlights the complexity of dress and veiling practices. Dress, whether religious or traditional, may function as a system of communication, conveying the individual's social and religious heritage (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992; Stone, 1962; Lee, 2015; Almila, 2019). Dress can convey the norms and values of the group to which the individual belongs (Bucar, 2018). Nevertheless, the meaning behind dress is context- and time-dependent and is continuously transforming (Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 1992). The Islamic dress code in particular instructs women to cover their hair. Despite the fact that women are expected to cover their hair in Islam, participants remained tolerant towards unveiled influencers while criticizing those who wear modern hijabs like the turban. This in turn shows the complexity of modesty and its meaning to different individuals. It has been argued, for example by Lazreg (2009) and Fanon (1994) that unveiling is often interpreted as a rejection of the Algerian religious

and cultural heritage (Lazreg, 2009; Fanon, 1994). In contrast, my research showed that not covering the hair with a headscarf was not always interpreted in this way. In addition, modesty was also applied to the behavior and lifestyle of the influencers as well as to their dress. Influencers who display certain lifestyles that seem at odds with Algerian social norms are characterized as rejecting Algeria's social and cultural heritage. This included, for example, gender mixing at social events.

The diversity of views about hijab reflects the complexity of modesty. While modesty is valued among followers, it has different meanings for different individuals. Because few Quranic passages address how Muslim women should dress, Muslim scholars have interpreted them in a variety of ways (Tarlo, 2010). While some believe that such Quranic verses provide general guidelines for women to dress modestly (Bucar, 2018), others have interpreted them differently by specifying particular clothes (Tarlo, 2010). This explains the variety of opinions about modesty in my research.

8.3 Locality and the Status of Veiling in Jijel, Bejaia and Algiers

My research shows that patriarchy continues to be a barrier to women's success, accomplishments, and independence in Algeria. Patriarchy for my participants manifests in establishing restrictions on women's visibility on social media platforms, as the latter is often judged as an immoral act. Patriarchy also manifests in other areas, such as restricting women's access to work, education, and mobility.

Many of my participants believed that men often misuse religion to uphold the patriarchal nature of Algerian culture, which is engendered by customs and religion. Most of the participants believed that losing their freedom came as a result of men using Islam as an excuse to seize more power in society. They also believed that one of the reasons patriarchy is still practiced in society is because of patriarchal interpretations of Islamic religious texts. Islam places equal limits on men and women; however, for cultural and patriarchal reasons, only women are subject to these restrictions. For instance, the limitations include prohibiting women from working outside the home, limiting their access to education, or even becoming visible online.

Therefore, I argue that gender dynamics in Algeria often originate with patriarchy and are then maintained by Algerian cultural norms and Islam (Mebtouche Nedjai, 2013), demonstrating that culture and customs are as important as religion (Smail Salhi, 2008).

Religious capital is related to the individual's understanding and application of religion, which determines the person's hierarchical status in the religious domain (Bourdieu, 1987). In Algeria, presenting oneself as religious enables men to win others' respect and esteem while avoiding social rejection. Men thus acquire high status and gain control in society by imposing rigid religious ideals on women.

Wearing a hijab under patriarchal insistence was experienced by a few of the participants. Pressure from male family members such as brothers, fathers, and uncles to wear a hijab forced some women to adopt a more modern style of hijab that includes colourful dresses, trousers, jeans, and turbans. As Lazreg (2009) argued, women who were forced to wear a hijab often resent it later because they believe that their beauty is restrained or even lost during the process. Nevertheless, one of my participants, among those who were forced to wear hijab, later chose to wear religious clothes that aligned with the Islamic dress code. This highlights the diversity and complexity of women's motivations for wearing hijabs (Bhowon and Bundhoo, 2016), suggesting that the motivation behind veiling practices may shift over time.

My research has also shown that the dynamics of patriarchy sometimes change because the dominance shifts from the father or the brothers to the husband after marriage. Applying this to hijab in the context of marriage, it is believed that husbands may pressure unveiled women to wear a hijab, while veiled women with modern hijab may experience pressure to wear an Islamic one. My research, therefore, shows that women's bodies are negotiated under male authority as some men use their authority to control women's dress and hijabs under the name of religion.

Controlling women's dress also implies controlling their behaviour and sexuality (Nkealah, 2013). Enforcing dress codes or restricting the degree to which Muslim women can enhance their appearance with make-up is another facet of men's control (Lazreg, 2009), mainly

because women's bodies are associated with moral discourses and reflect the morality of their families. Women must avoid men's attention, especially sexual attention, to maintain the moral standing of their families. (Bhowon and Bundhoo, 2016). Together, these arguments and the criticisms of the influencers' attire and hijab usage that I previously highlighted indicate that women are occasionally made responsible for their cultural and religious heritage (Yuval-Davis, 1994). Therefore, my research shows that under patriarchal circumstances, modesty and hijab may become symbols of gender inequality that are used to varying degrees to restrict women's visibility in public (Mernissi, 1987; Mernissi, 1991; Syed, 2008; Lazreg, 2009).

The findings also show that most of my veiled participants wear a hijab out of choice as an act of worship. Hijab can thus be a decision embedded in women's devotion to God's orders in Islam. Furthermore, hijab for most of my participants, including the unveiled women, is a highly valued religious duty. As Moghadam (1994, p. 24) argued, some Muslim women "find value, purpose, and identity in religious practice".

My research also showed that the status of veiling is influenced by location. Because some Algerian cities are more religious than others, certain ideas about how women should dress have emerged. It showed that hijab is more practiced in some Algerian cities than others. According to the findings, hijab is more commonly practiced in Algerian provincial cities situated far from the capital of Algiers. Women in these cities are under pressure to cover their hair in public because doing so would put them in violation of small-town cultural norms. This chapter also showed that hijab in Jijel city is often more required than in Algiers or Bejaia. Hijab is also argued to have less social meaning in the Berber cities of Algeria, such as Bejaia. Women in the Berber cities are expected to be less criticized for not wearing one, unlike in other Algerian cities.

One main reason for the hijab being less important in Berber cities is believed to be political. As explained in Chapter 7, the Berber Spring of 1980 was a political era during which Berber activists reclaimed the government's authority to officially recognize Berber culture and language (Atel, 2013). Following this incident, Berber activists and citizens rebelled against the Algerian government, which initially established a constitution instituting Arabic and Islam as

the official and only language and religion of Algeria (Mahé, 2001; Willis, 2015). Therefore, some of my participants argued that the Berbers rejected the hijab, an Islamic habit, at the same time they rejected the government's institution of Islam and Arabic as Algeria's sole language and religion. As a result, the hijab lost some of its significance in Berber cities. The second potential reason for the hijab being less socially significant in the Berber regions is historical. It was believed by some of the participants that hijab was uncommon throughout the history of the Berber ethnic groups. For example, as I described in Chapter 7, some historical female figures, such as queens and military captains, were argued to be unveiled but wore modest traditional Berber clothes. Unveiling is therefore thought to still exist in contemporary Berber groups due to historical events. The findings also showed diverse opinions about the practice of hijab in Jijel. While a few of the participants from Jijel claimed that modern hijab is becoming widespread in the city, some others suggested that modern hijab practices are difficult to wear in Jijel.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the historical changes in Algerian women's dress and hijab, including the haik and then other types of hijab. My research also sheds light on the transformation of dress and hijab in Algeria, as veiling practices in Algeria today seem to include more modern hijabs such as turbans and modern fashion. Therefore, in Algeria, the status of the hijab is influenced by traditions, patriarchy, and the way religion is practiced by the local inhabitants of each city. These findings add to the existing literature about the importance of recognizing the diversity of Muslim women's veiling customs (Amer, 2014; Bucar, 2018). They showed that the context in which hijab is practiced influences its status (Almila, 2017).

8.4 Connecting Islam, Algerian Culture, and Patriarchy

Three interacting phenomena are central to my study: a) the Algerian social environment; b) Islam and Islamic customs; and c) patriarchal norms. Followers' attitudes towards influencers self-representations, dress, and hijab are influenced by the Algerian social context. Features of Algerian society informed followers' interpretation of influencers' visibility, hijab, and dress, and their attitudes to their own dress and veiling. So did Islam.

The influencers` hijab and dress as seen in the previous chapters, were often judged through the lenses of Islam. Women are required to adhere to a dress code prescribed by Islam. Critics often pointed out the stylistic infractions of the influencers` dress codes. Influencers are thus judged when they do not follow the Islamic dress code and modesty, as their visibility, entailing having large numbers of followers and shaping the public's opinions about any subject, is often believed to have the ability to create either positive or negative representations about Algeria, Islam, and Muslim women. Dress and hijab were thus often interpreted from a religious and cultural point of view. The established religious and cultural norms in Algerian society influenced how followers interpreted dress. It is shown that dress was often viewed as a communicative system. The latter communicate the religious and cultural affiliations of the influencers.

The importance of each of these phenomena varies across the different aspects of my study. Islam was more important in the attitudes of followers towards the influencers` self-representations, dress, and hijab practices. However, traditions that were often described as patriarchal played a role in my participants positions in Algerian society and their hijab practices. Algerian traditions were embedded in patriarchy and then used by men to control women`s lives in different ways. For example, work, education, hijab, traveling, and women`s visibility online according to most of my participants, men allegedly use Islam as a pretext to consolidate their power in society. Men frequently misinterpret Islamic religious texts in order to limit the rights of women. As Wadud (1999) suggested, the Islamic texts were for so long interpreted by men according to their personal needs. Therefore, the findings show that Islam and patriarchy influence each other, as religion often tampers with traditions and establishes social norms that affect how women are perceived in society.

Algeria's current state, as I previously explained in this thesis, practices a moderate form of Islam. However, its history witnessed other forms of religious fundamentalism, mainly during the civil war (1990–2002). The civil war in Algeria is known as "العشرية السوداء" which translates to "the Black Decade" in English. According to scholars (like Lazreg, 1994), women were the first target of the Fundamentalist political movement of that period. During the civil war, It was argued that the political movements were adopting the "Takfir ideology", which means excluding an individual from Islam and thus categorizing them as non-believers or Kafir

(Zeraoulia, 2020). In a study conducted by Zeraoulia (2020, p. 39), a member of the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) reported the events of the civil war and said:

> Look to the picture, my mother used to wear Hayak and when you go to great Kabyle you will find women wearing the Kabyle dress and it was the same for all part of Algeria. When the FIS came, their supporters started appealing for a new society, new culture and new traditions … Suddenly, all the society became Kafir and everything was prohibited, including the how we were dressing.

In the previous quote, the participant mentioned that the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which was the main political movement during the civil war (see Chapter 3), implemented a new ideology that influenced different aspects of society, including women`s dress. Individuals who violated social norms, including women who did not dress as the FIS instructed them to, are thus called Kaffir. The previous ideology was viewed as an effective means of obtaining purity and the ideal social model (Zeraoulia, 2020). The civil war left a legacy that disproportionately impacts women (Lazreg, 1994). During the French colonization of Algeria (see Chapter 3), women`s dress and hijabs were also negotiated between the French colonizer, who wanted to unveil Algerian women, and Algerian men, who resisted them by veiling women. The patriarchal system that was established prior to civil war in precolonial society before the French invasion in 1830 through different practices, including patrimony, patrilocality, Islam, and the tradition of male honour in both the Berber and Arab tribes in Algeria, resulted in men becoming the protectors of women (Knauss and Knauss, 1987). As discussed in Chapter 7, men`s honour in the Algerian family system is maintained through male dominance. Following the independence of Algeria in 1962, the Family Code that the Algerian state established served to reinforce patriarchy in similar ways. Therefore, the political, religious, patriarchal, and historical situation of Algeria is reflected in the followers attitudes towards the influencers` dress, hijab practices, and the participants life experiences. Overall, women`s rights, including dress and hijab habits, became negotiated under patriarchal, traditional, and Islamic religious systems.

In this study, Islam, patriarchy, and Algerian traditions are thus intersectional dynamics. In the context of anti-discrimination and social movement politics, intersectionality was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black feminist and critical race theorist, in the late 1980s to refer to the unique experiences of black women in the United States (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018; Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality was introduced to demonstrate how race and gender cannot be analyzed as mutually exclusive or distinct from one another to understand the dynamics of social relations and power systems (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018).

Intersectionality has nowadays gained prominence in other fields of research such as history, sociology, and philosophy, becoming a distinct area of study known as “intersectional studies” (Cho et al., 2013). Consideration of gender, racism, and other power structures has been greatly aided by intersectionality's attention to exploring the dynamics of difference and similarity (Cho et al., 2013). In intersectional studies, examining how place functions in intersectional connections is one of the key components (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018). Place demonstrates that in intersectional dynamics, there aren't primary and secondary categories; rather, the importance relies on the situation at hand and the particular social ties that exist (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018). As demonstrated in this thesis, the followers attitudes towards the influencers` and the participants` experiences with hijab are influenced first by Islam and Algerian traditions, and the patriarchal nature of the society also plays a role in determining women`s rights and how they dress or veil. According to Massey (2005, p. 10), “identities and entities, the relations "between" them, and the spatiality, which is part of them, are all co-constitutive”. In intersectional studies, it is thus necessary to acknowledge the intersection of different variables such as gender, sex, race, place, and culture class (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina, 2018; Vaiou, 2018). The intersection between Islam, patriarchy, and Algerian traditions thus produced social processes that shaped gender relations and provided a specific context for the study of influencers in Algeria as well as the practice of hijab. My research about influencers and hijab thus demonstrates a strong relationship between Islam, Algerian traditions, and patriarchy. The three factors influenced the attitudes of followers towards the influencers in diverse ways. They influenced not only how dress and modesty were interpreted but also the position of Algerian women in society.

8.5 Complexities in Followers` Attitudes towards the Influencers

My research demonstrated that representations of the modern hijab and female influencers` visibility on social media platforms are perceived as simultaneously motivational and inspirational, but also contentious. Algerian influencers produce both traditional (Islamic/Algerian) and modern (non-Islamic and non-Algerian) lifestyles through their content. For example, some of the influencers wear hijab fashion, others wear traditional Islamic hijabs, some wear makeup, and others wear revealing clothes. In addition, they also post different activities, some of which portray them as free, successful, and independent women. Followers sometimes find their content aspirational, motivational, and empowering. This in turn shows that they may be open to the postfeminist discourses (see Chapter 2 for more details) that often strive to portray women in modern societies as strong, successful, and fashionable, which may inspire Muslim women to overcome the patriarchal and oppressive nature of their societies. For example, in Chapter 5, I showed that followers articulate the influencers` financial success and visibility on social media as an empowering step that defies Algerian cultural and traditional norms, which place a strong emphasis on male dominance over women. Nevertheless, there were also critical voices in the followers` narratives. In my research, some followers rejected or negotiated the influencers' content in several ways. For example, the influencers' modern hijab received the most criticism, seen as an immoral distortion of the Islamic dress code and less socially acceptable than not covering the hair with a hijab.

One contradictory aspect of my findings is that participants valued influencers` success and visibility on social media, while simultaneously being critical of their portrayal of lifestyles that are seen as unachievable or not compatible with Islam or Algerian social norms. While the influencers' visibility was celebrated as a step against men`s dominance, it was also criticized as something that defies the notion of modesty in Islam, implying that women`s presence in public spaces such as social media platforms is not entirely acceptable under Islamic norms.

While some participants were critical of the patriarchal nature of Algerian society (a debate that feminism had fought against), they were also critical of the influencers who were thought to defy those religious and patriarchal constraints. Therefore, my research presents a contradictory picture of the Algerian female influencer, who in part portrays a new version of

womanhood, which is a discourse of postfeminism, and followers who admire influencers and appear to desire freedom from patriarchy and men using Islamic texts as an alibi to control women, yet, at the same time, reinforce hegemonic conventions around dress codes. My research demonstrates that postfeminism is a useful concept for studying Muslim influencers in Algeria because of its flexibility: postfeminism entangles anti-feminist and feminist concerns while acknowledging earlier feminist thought.

The contradicting opinions about influencers can be further understood through Hall`s (1989) notion of audiences encoding and decoding media content. According to Hall, a message is produced by a process called encoding, and decoding is the process through which audiences understand such messages (Hall, 1980) (see Chapter 2). The theory posits that media messages are decoded by audiences in three possible ways: agreement (preferred reading), opposition (oppositional reading), and negotiation (negotiated reading). The latter occurs when the audience partly accepts the intended meaning of the media message but also rejects certain elements of the same message. In negotiated readings, the audiences are neither fully accepting nor fully rejecting the media messages. My research found that the followers interpret influencers' content in similar ways, neither fully accepting nor fully rejecting the media messages. This results in multiple (conflicting) positions about the influencers, or what could be seen as negotiated readings.

The complexity of the followers` attitudes towards the influencers reflects the complexity of Algerian society. The findings of my research demonstrate that Algeria is a society where traditional and modern lifestyles coexist. In Chapter 3, I introduced the history of Algeria, including a French colonization that lasted 130 years and the creation of multiple constitutions compromising both Islam as the religion of the country and a French penal code. Furthermore, Algeria witnessed political movements that led to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism and secularism. Multiple important events thus created multiple lifestyles that vary between traditionalism and modernism. The consequences of this varied history affects women in different ways, including with regard to expectations about their dress and veil habits as well as their position in society. Algeria thus is complex and studying it requires taking into consideration the coexistence of multiple lifestyles, ways of applying religion, or even dress.

The emergence of female influencers in Algeria, a conservative and Muslim country with traditional and modern lifestyles, thus has multiple implications in Algerian society. Some followers believe that influencers represent a role model for women and portray a new version of womanhood that may help Algerian women achieve financial independence, educational success, and career success. Through their social media platforms, influencers help other women improve their positions in society. Simultaneously, some influencers, especially those who wear a modern hijab and those who present lifestyles that defy the Islamic teachings, are believed to teach the new generations of young women the wrong applications of Islam. To summarise, the influencers are seen to have power in shaping opinions and thus creating changes in Algerian society, which some see as negative and others as positive.

8.6 Directions for Future Research

In any study, it is necessary to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, in my qualitative research, I was unable to examine a large sample size. Although this study includes Algerian women from three different cities, educational levels, and occupations, the interviews were conducted with just 22 women. The sample size is insufficient to draw generalizations from the findings. However, my aim was never to argue that interview participants can be representative of all Algerian women. What has been accomplished instead is a small window into the attitudes of followers towards influencers and the experiences of some women in relation to hijab. Consequently, any future research might involve a larger sample size. In addition, Algeria has 57 cities in total. I consider the sample of my research, which included three Algerian cities, to be quite small. This research thus does not reflect the full geographical diversity of Algeria. Consequently, any future research might involve a more diverse sample size drawn from other Algerian cities.

Further, Bejaia, one of the cities from which I recruited my participants, is only one city among the Berber Algerian cities. Most of the Berber women interviewed claimed that women have more choice in Berber cities to decide whether to wear a hijab. They claimed as well that women do not experience harsh judgments for their appearances as they do in other, non-Berber cities. To investigate this claim, I suggest additional investigation into the other Berber

regions of Algeria to reveal more information about women's experiences with dress and hijab in that part of Algeria.

Moreover, the investigation of Muslim influencers in Algeria was the main goal of this study. As observed throughout the thesis, the way Islam is practiced in Muslim communities varies, as do cultures, dress, and veiling customs. A deeper knowledge of Muslim influencers will be possible if comparative research is conducted across diverse Muslim countries.
In my research, I encountered a common claim that influencers who wear modern hijab have a negative impact on adolescent girls who follow them. Some participants or comments on influencers' posts argued that this category of influencers is shaping 'incorrect' Islamic habits and practices and normalizing them in young generations. Whether this is indeed the case could be the focus of future research into whether influencers have a role in shaping adolescent girls' religious and veiling practices.

In existing academic literature, Muslim influencers are argued to use social media to shape more positive views about hijab and Islam. Existing studies tend to use online ethnography, observations, and content analysis of the influencers' posts. I suggest using alternative research methods, such as conducting interviews with influencers, to examine the assertion that they are attempting to produce new and modern Muslim identities, because it is only by speaking to them that we can know what their intentions are.

My thesis focused on interviewing only female participants. For future research, I suggest including a male sample to examine and compare attitudes between the genders in relation to influencers and to understand men's perspectives about veiling in Algeria. Furthermore, when I first began my research, there were only female beauty and lifestyle influencers in Algeria. In recent years, male influencers have become an intriguing phenomenon in Algeria. To provide more comparative studies concerning male and female Algerian influencers, I suggest future research consider how followers respond to this group of influencers.
Finally, when I started my data collection, Algerian female influencers were active only on Instagram and YouTube; few were on Facebook. However, many have since become active on TikTok. Therefore, I suggest investigating influencers on TikTok to examine whether the attitudes of followers vary across different platforms.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

The rise of female influencers in Algeria, as I outlined in Chapter 1, represented a double-edged sword, as women's visibility online comes with a cost. The visibility of the influencers exposes them to public judgments and sometimes to hateful comments (Duffy et al., 2022). The judgments that they receive are often moralistic in nature (Marwick, 2013; Griffith, 2020). However, it is important to note that, throughout my research, participants acknowledged that social media platforms helped them in many ways, including having access to education and becoming financially independent through using the platform to earn money. Defying social norms and stepping outside of the traditional roles of women, influencers are admired for their courage and success and considered role models and a source of inspiration as much as they are subject to critical scrutiny

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewee Framework

Background Information	
1	Can you please introduce yourself ? (tell me your name , age and gender).
2	Can you tell me something about your present occupation/education.
3	Can you tell me the name of your city.
Social Media Use and Influencers	
4	How frequently do you use social media? if daily how many hours per day would you say you are on social media?
5	What social media platforms do you regularly use?
6	Do you follow Algerian female social media influencers?
7	If yes to (Q6), can you tell me who are your favourite Algerian female influencers?
8	What do you feel is your main drive to follow them?
9	Are there any other female influencers who you particularly like (in addition to those already mentioned)? What are your reasons for liking them?
10	Algerian female influencers share different type of content (e.g., beauty and fashion tips, veiling and makeup tutorials, suggesting products/services), which aspects of what they share do you like? Why?
Main Questions	
Central Topic: Attitudes towards veiling and social media influencers. You may notice that there are both veiled and unveiled Algerian influencers, so:	
11	What do you think about Algerian female influencers who are veiled in an Islamic way?
12	What do you think about Algerian female influencers who are veiled in a modern way?
13	What do you think about Algerian female unveiled influencers?
14	Do you think that whether and how influencers are veiled is important? How important? And why?
15	Do you ever look at how followers react to Algerian female influencers online?
16	If yes (to Q.15), what have you noticed?
17	What type of female influencers (traditionally veiled, veiled in a modern way, unveiled) receive most comments, in your view?
18	What kinds of comments do they receive – supportive, critical, or something else?
19	Why do you think these influencers receive the comments that they do?
Central Topic: Influencers` role and the role of social media with regard to Algerian women	

22	Do you think that one type of influencer (traditionally veiled, veiled in a modern way, unveiled) represents Algerian women? Or Do you think that all these types of influencer represent Algerian women? Tell me why you think this.
21	Do you think social media use has resulted in any changes for women in Algeria?
22	If yes to (Q.21), please tell me more.
	Closing
23	It has been a pleasure learning more about your experiences. I'm grateful that you took the time to speak with me. Do you have any more information that you believe is helpful for me? I should be aware of? If I have any other questions, would it be okay to contact you again?

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

The University Of Sheffield.

Department Of Sociological Studies.

Investigating Young Women`s Attitudes towards Social Media Influencers in Algeria.

Participants Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in this research project. Before you decide to do so, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This study aims to investigate young Algerian women`s attitudes towards social media influencers in Algeria, who are representative of both conservative and modern femininity and are criticized or admired as a result. In addition to exploring the status of veiling in influencer self-representations and audiences' responses to those self-representations. Finally, it will also investigate to what extent geographical diversity plays a role in women`s attitudes towards Algerian female social media influencers; this means that this study aims to understand whether women who come from different cities have diverse attitudes towards the influencers.

Why have I been chosen?

You are selected as a participant for this research because you are a young woman (18-38 years old) from Algeria, following Algerian influencers on social media platforms.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation in the research depends on your agreement only. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should provide either an oral or a written consent for your participation. You can still withdraw at any time without providing any justifications.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will participate in an interview after providing your consent.

What do I have to do?

The researcher will have a discussion with you. The researcher will ask you some questions in the form of an interview to which you are kindly asked to answer.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated disadvantages or any physical or psychological harm for you. In case of potential questions, which make you uncomfortable, I would like to inform you that you can abstain from answering them or withdraw from the research without providing any justification for your decision.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There is no immediate benefits for those people participating in this study, however, it is hoped that this research will be beneficial for the existing literature about Algerian women. Furthermore, the investigated topic of this research may of interest for Algerian women.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified or identifiable in any reports or publications without your explicit consent. Any data collected about you for the interview will be only accessible by the researcher.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

You will be recorded during the interview if you consent to this. The recording will be securely stored and will be accessed only by the researcher in order to be transcribed. After finishing the transcription, it will be destroyed.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is a part of a PhD that is fully funded by the Algerian government**.**

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University of Sheffield is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This research has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the sociological studies department. The University of Sheffield's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Contact Details:

Researcher: Bakour Amel. **Email**: abakour1@sheffield.ac.uk
Telephone: 0776918041
The University Address: Department of Sociological studies, Elmfield Building, Northumberland Road, Western Bank, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK, S10 2TU.

In case you have any question, you are kindly invited to contact my supervisors:

Name: Professor Helen Kennedy **Name**: Dr Ysabel Gerrard
Email : h.kennedy@sheffield.ac.uk **Email** : y.gerrard@sheffield.ac.uk

Telephone: + 44 (0) 114 222 6488 **Telephone**: + 44 (0) 114 222 6435

Thank you for reading this and considering taking part in this research project. Please fill out and sign the consent form in the attachment if you would like to participate.

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Investigating Young Women`s Attitudes towards Social Media Influencers in Algeria

Please tick the appropriate boxes	**Yes**	**No**
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project information sheet and the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	☐	☐
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include my participation in an interview and that the researcher will use an audio recorder for the purpose of the proposed study.	☐	☐
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	☐	☐
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	☐	☐
So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	☐	☐

Name of participant [printed] Signature Date

Name of Researcher [printed] Signature Date

Project contact details for further information:

Principal investigator: Bakour Amel abakour1@sheffield.ac.uk
Supervisors: Professor Helen Kennedy h.kennedy@sheffield.ac.uk
Dr Ysabel Gerrard y.gerrard@sheffield.ac.uk
The University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield S10 2TN U

Appendix 4: Overview of the Research Participants

No.	**Pseudonym**	**Date of Interview**	**Occupation**	**City**	**Age**	**Gender**
1	Maria	8 March 2021	Student (in Sociology of organisational development)	Bejaia	25	Female
2	Souhaila	12 March 2021	Accountant	Algiers	25	Female
3	Salima	14 March 2021	French teacher	Bejaia	37	Female
4	Serena	15 March 2021	Housewife	Bejaia	32	Female
5	Nabila	17 March 2021	English teacher	Bejaia	28	Female
6	Noura	19 March 2021	Administrative officer	Bejaia	26	Female
7	Selma	11 April 2021	Commercial assistant	Bejaia	27	Female
8	Fatiha	16 April 2021	Housewife	Bejaia	28	Female
9	Samra	13 March 2021	French teacher	Jijel	30	Female
10	Kamilia	18 March 2021	English teacher	Jijel	26	Female
11	Sarah	23 March 2021	Architect	Jijel	26	Female
12	Sidra	29 March 2021	Tourism officer	Jijel	27	Female
13	Hayat	15 March 2021	Teacher of economics and business	Jijel	29	Female
14	Mounia	20 March 2021	Business student	Jijel	28	Female
15	Samia	30 March 2021	Architect	Jijel	25	Female
16	Lydia	25 March 2021	Food caterer	Algiers	36	Female
17	Malika	26 March 2021	Housewife	Algiers	27	Female
18	Houda	24 March 2021	Medical student	Algiers	27	Female

19	Sabrina	7 April 2021	Middle school teacher and post-graduate student	Algiers	30	Female
20	Naima	8 April 2021	TV camera operator	Algiers	35	Female
21	Kaouthar	9 April 2021	Pharmacy operator manager	Algiers	25	Female
22	Mayliss	17 April 2021	Student (Marketing) and coach in personal development	Algiers	27	Female

Appendix 5 : Qualitative Content Analysis Code Book

1. **Islamic hijab:** a unit of coding belongs to this category if the followers expressed an opinion about the influencers` Islamic hijab. Islamic hijab is a religious practice for Muslim women that is based on the foundation of modesty. Islamic hijab entails a set of instructions that women are required to respect (see Chapter 3 for the characteristics of Islamic hijab).

- **Favoured:** a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers compliment the influencers' Islamic hijab. The reasons include:

    - **Religion :** when the follower praises the influencers` Islamic hijab for religious reason. For example**:** Mashallah, when you wear a hijab that respects Islam as this one , you are so much better.
    - **Aesthetics:** when the follower praises the influencers` Islamic hijab for aesthetic value. For example: I love the colour of the abaya (a long outer garment that some Muslim women wear).

- **Not favoured**: a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers criticize the influencers Islamic hijab. The reasons include:
    - **Aesthetic:** I don`t like the colour of the headscarf, it doesn`t match your skin colour
- **Neutral:** a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers praised and criticized the influencers' Islamic hijab at the same time. For example: the headscarf is nice because it covers your neck, but I don`t like the colour.

2. **Modern Hijab:** a unit of coding falls under this category if a follower offered an opinion about the influencers modern hijab. Modern hijab is a style e of veiling that mixes between modesty and fashion. It may include for example wearing a turban instead of a full headscarf that covers the hair, the neck and the ears, wearing fashionable clothing such as jeans and t-shirts, not covering the full forearm., showing parts of the hair like a fringe, wearing makeup in public.

- **Not favoured**: A unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers criticize express the influencers' modern hijab. The reasons include:
    - **Religious reasons**: Why don`t just remove the hijab? This is a heresy not a hijab, this is not what Islam says about hijab.
    - **Traditions :** Do you even respect your culture by wearing such a hijab?
    - **Influencer's` role** : Your hijab is wrong is many ways, do you even think about the young girls that are following you and thinking that this is how they should veil?
    - **Representation**: you are not representing us by wearing such type of hijab.
    - **Aesthetic**: I do not like the colour of the turban.

- **Favoured:** A unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers express their praise for the influencers' modern hijab. The reasons include:
    - **For aesthetic reason:** I love how you wear your headscarf (turban); this style looks very pretty.

- **Neutral**: A unit of coding belongs to this sub-category when the followers praise and criticize the influencers` modern hijab at the same time. For example: The colour is very nice, but the style of the headscarf is not.

3. **Dressing style:** a unit of coding belongs to this category if the followers express an opinion about the influencers` ways of dressing This includes the style of the garment, its colour, and how it was associated with other styles. For example, suits, skirts, Abayas (a long, loose dress with long sleeves for veiled women) are all dressing styles.

- **Favoured:** a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers praise the attire of the influencers. This includes expressing positive statements about the colour, the style or others. For example: what`s an amazing dress.

- **Not favoured:** a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category if the followers criticized the influencers' dressing style. For example: The jacket id full of buttons, why did you make it ugly by wearing a belt?

- **Neutral:** a unit of coding belonged to this sub-category when the followers praised and criticized the influencers' dressing style at the same time. For example: too classic, , you know how to do much better, your jacket would have been perfect with a simple jean without the belt, but it is still fine on you .

4. **Makeup:** a unit of coding belongs to this category if the followers express an opinion about the influencers' makeup.
    - **Favoured:** This sub-category applies if the followers show admiration for the influencers' makeup. This includes the colours, the amount of makeup they use, and the final look. For example: I haven't enjoyed a makeup as much in a while! I haven't liked a makeup like this in a long time! Natural, chill, easy make up!! Top ! Thank you!.
    - **Not favoured:** This sub-category applies if the followers criticised the influencers' makeup. For example: This time, I didn't really like this look .
    - **Neutral:** a unit of coding belongs to this sub-category when the followers validated and criticized the influencers' makeup at the same time. For example: It looks nice, but too much foundation .

5. **Inspiration and motivation:** a unit of coding belongs to this category if the followers described the influencers as a source of inspiration, motivation or role model. For example: God sent you my way, and I want to thank you for this lovely video. I have a lot of admiration for you. You are a really good example for our daughters to follow.

6. **Influencers` lavish lifestyles:** a unit of coding belongs to this category if the followers express an opinion about the influencers` extravagant lifestyle.
    - **Favoured:** This sub-category applies if the followers show admiration for the influencers' luxurious lifestyle.
    - **Not favoured:** This sub-category applies if the followers criticised the influencers' lavish lifestyle. For example: she is showing a fake life, because only rich people like her can afford such things.

Appendix 6: The Generated Codes on Instagram and Youtube

Category On Instagram and Youtube	**Favoured** (number of comments)	**Not Favoured** (number of comments)	**Neutral** (number of comments)
Islamic hijab	180	27	16
Modern hijab	209	436	50
Dressing style	496	285	33
Makeup	217	140	6
Influencers` lavish lifestyles	181	275	0
Motivation and inspiration	482	/	/

Appendix 7: Irrelevant Material for the Qualitative Content Analysis on Instagram

Name of the Category	**Definition of the Category**
Beauty advice	A unit of coding falls under this category if the followers ask the influencer about beauty tips such as skin care.
Beauty standards	A unit of coding falls under this category if a follower offered an opinion about the influencers' physical traits, this includes body or facial shape , colour of the hair, colour of the eyes, etc.
Price of products	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about the price of any product or service.
Shopping places	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about where to buy certain products.
Specific products	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about products such as how to use them.
Advertisements	This category applies if the followers write a comment where they advertise for their social media pages or their business. These comments are used to ask others to follow them.
Expressing gratitude	This category applies if the followers write a comment where they express gratitude by saying for example thank you.
Asking personal questions	This category applies if the followers write a comment in a form of question for the influencers. For example, asking the influencer about her age or whether she is pregnant.

Appendix 8: Irrelevant Material for the Qualitative Content Analysis on Youtube

Name of the Category	Definition of the Category
Beauty standard	A unit of coding falls under this category if a follower offered an opinion about the influencers' physical traits, this includes body or facial shape , colour of the hair, colour of the eyes, etc. For example: “the colour of your eyes is very pretty”.
Beauty advice	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about beauty tips such as skin care. For example: what foundation I can use on an oily skin?
Prices of products	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about the price of any product or service. For example: what is the price of the primer you are using, please?
Shopping places	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about where to buy certain products. For example: where can I buy a similar headscarf?
How to buy	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer to explain the process of buying products or services. For example: how can I order like this headscarf from your brand?
Specific products	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer about products such as how to use them. For example: can you explain how to use the eyeliner?
Video Suggestion	This category applies if the followers ask the influencer to create a new type of video. For example: can you make a video to show us how you organize your room?
The YouTube video	This category applies if the followers expressed an opinion about the quality of the influencer` video on Youtube. For example: the lighting is not good.
Advertisement	This category applies if the followers write a comment where they advertise for their social media pages or their business. These comments ask others to follow them or check their business. For example: I am an aesthetician, I create videos about skincare and makeup, please follow me.
Being appreciative	This category applies if the followers write a comment where they express gratitude. For example: thank you!!!
Asking personal questions	This category applies if the followers write a comment in a form of question for the influencers. For example, asking the influencer about her age or whether she is pregnant.
Language	This category applies if the followers write a comment where they ask the influencer to speak in a specific language. For example : can you speak in Arabic, please? I don`t understand the French language.
Comments in other languages	A unit of coding falls under this category if the language of the comment was other than French, English and Arabic. For example, some comments were written in Turkish.
Ambiguous comments	A unit of coding falls under this category if the meaning of the comment was not clear to be analysed. For example , pk ?

Tags	A unit of coding falls under this category if the followers mentioned another user in the comment. To tag a channel or a creator, the followers need to type @ followed by their username. For example: @username.
Emojis	A unit of coding falls under this category if the comment was only in an emoji form. For example: 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🌷🌷🌷🌷🌷🌷🌷🌸🌸🌸🌸🌸.
Expression gratitude in Islamic way	A unit of coding falls under this category if the followers expressed gratitude towards the influencers using an Arabic Islamic expression. For example: Mashallah.
Followers replying to each other	A unit of coding falls under this category if the followers were engaging with each other in the comment section. For example, a follower replied to another one by saying: you can find this type of hijab only in her shop.