

Selfie Production: A Qualitative Study of
Platform Affordances and Cultural Norms in Shaping
Saudi Women's Selfie Practices Posted on
Instagram and Snapchat.

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Abstract

With the rise of digital technologies, selfies are a contemporary and popular form of digitally produced self-expression for women in Saudi Arabia. Drawing from a phenomenological approach, informed by Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, this study explores how Saudi women express their identity through selfie images on Instagram and Snapchat platforms, examining how these practices are shaped by cultural norms and platform affordances. Methodologically, the study consisted of four staged phases with 25 Saudi women involving focus groups, in-depth interviews, online observation, and photo-elicitation interviews. Through the research I developed a framework for understanding selfie production, consisting of seven stages, and I identified six key motives for taking and posting selfies on these platforms. This study draws on critical technological perspectives and theories of spaces to show how Saudi cultural norms, in combination with platform architecture and affordances, shape and inform selfie production in a number of ways. For example, Saudi women are discerning about which platforms they use, depending on which audiences they want to reach, and they build what I conceptualise as "virtual walls" to keep audiences separate.

The study makes several important empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions by shedding light on the selfie production and sharing process, highlighting how users and culture are shaping online practices, providing a new way of thinking about selfies in terms of dramaturgical analysis, and pioneering a mixed method design providing multidimensional understanding of selfie presentation in online spaces.

Keywords: Selfie, Saudi, women, Instagram, Snapchat, Self-presentation.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Selfies are a popular digital practice, engaged in by many groups all over the world, including Saudi women. Saudi women's selfie practices gained global attention in 2011, when Manal Al-Sharief, a 32-year-old divorced Saudi woman, posted video selfies showing her driving a car, which, at the time, was against the law. Her images and actions led to her being jailed for nine days, her video being removed from YouTube, and her driving campaign being deleted from Facebook (Stewart, 2011). Nowadays, Saudi women are celebrating their right to drive by posting selfies from the driver's seat and selfies with their newly issued Saudi driving licenses. In June 2018, for the first time in Saudi history, the government decided to lift the ban on women driving.

A selfie is an informal photograph of oneself usually taken using a mobile phone and posted on social networking sites SNS (Tomanić Trivundža, 2015). Selfie-taking is a practice and gesture that signals different messages to different individuals and audiences (Senft & Baym, 2015). For instance, while a number of researchers perceive selfies as evidence of narcissism (Fox & Rooney, 2015), other studies observe selfies as a self-documentation tool (Ardevol & Gomez-Cruz, 2012). In addition, the selfie practice is identified as a social practice, as a cultural artefact, as an advertising tool (Senft & Baym, 2015), and as an empowerment tool (Nemer & Freeman, 2015).

In Saudi, there are many restrictions related to women's public self-expression (Le Renard, 2008). Indeed, Saudi women are encouraged to use a face cover or *niqab* in public (Alghadir, Farag, & Hamayun, 2012). The *niqab* is a cultural norm and a social obligation in Saudi. However, posting selfies has recently become a trend for Saudi women, which in a sense challenges this tradition, albeit in a digital space.

Taking into account both the cultural norms of Saudi society and the trends on popular SNS, this project attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of Saudi

women's selfie production in online spaces. The study intends to focus on multiple aspects of the selfies taken by Saudi women including: the different types of presentations, the cultural factors that may influence selfie takers, the decision-making processes when taking and publishing selfies, the reasons for posting selfies, and the concept of beautifying one's image in these visual presentations.

Saudi women have a variety of different reasons for posting their photos on SNS. Although some studies (Al-Senaigy, Ahmad, & Shafi, 2012; Al-Saggaf, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015) have been conducted in this area, they have not identified the cultural factors that might influence and/or shape women's decisions to post self-expressive images. Furthermore, previous studies were conducted on older platforms such as Facebook (Al-Saggaf, 2011), which have become less popular over time and have been eclipsed by platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. Most importantly, earlier literature did not reveal the meaning behind the different modes of selfies posted by women in Middle Eastern cultures. Given the above limitations, the current study examines the modes of self-presentation that emerge through selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat, taking into account cultural and technological factors.

The following reasons show the importance of examining the selfie phenomenon in particular. Firstly, selfies are mostly taken for the purpose of sharing one's image with others (Weiser, 2015), which makes it an appropriate area for exploring the ways in which Saudi women communicate their public identity to others. Secondly, as indicated by discourse theory, the way a society thinks and talks about an issue is reflected in the way individuals act in relation to that issue (Karlberg, 2005). Consequently, examining selfies allows us to understand how Saudi women construct their identity in online spaces in relation to the cultural constraints on women's public presentation. Given that women might be able to express themselves differently in selfies than they do in 'real life', selfies present

opportunities for different means of expression in a society that imposes limits on self-expression. Finally, selfies are self-portraits mediated by the user. Thus, these images express Saudi women's identity from their own perspective. Indeed, this study seeks to understand the ways in which selfie give a voice to women, who have traditionally been marginalized in mainstream media spaces (Jason, 2012; Tuchman, 1978).

1.1. Background of the Study

In order to understand the present study, it is essential to cast light briefly on Saudi and its culture. Saudi society is well known for its conservative nature and its strict traditions, which in many cases stem from tribal civilization. However, Saudi has experienced tremendous transformations in the last half-decade (Alsharkh, 2012, p. 5).

In the first place, the discovery of oil in 1941 transformed the lifestyles of many Saudis. The economic growth introduced modernisation and changed the structure of the social system in the country. Saudi people responded to this new found prosperity in different ways. There were those who welcomed modernisation and innovations like television while others resisted modernisation and technology, believing that the changes would be a negative influence on the traditions of the Saudi family (Alsharkh, 2012, p. 6).

A second transformation was engendered by the 1998 introduction of the internet to Saudi (Sait, Al-Tawil, Sanaullah, & Faheemuddin, 2007, p. 1). Saudi was transformed from being "a traditional and tribe-dependent" country to a more active country that communicates with other countries (Peterson, 1991, p. 13-15). SNS allowed Saudi citizens to express their opinions and to debate current topics because freedom of speech is banned in Saudi.

Gender segregation is part of the Saudi system and way of life (Le Renard, 2013, p. 112). For the most part, males and females are separated in the workplace, in public schools, in universities, and in government institutions (Clarke, 2007, p. 30). Few institutions, such as hospitals, private companies, and international schools, allow the mingling of both sexes.

Despite the cultural constraints, opposite sexes still communicate with each other in non-segregated venues according to social boundaries. For instance, in some families, both genders mingle together in social gatherings like Friday meetings in which veiled women greet and talk with male family members without touching them or getting into intimate conversations (MacGillivray, 2011). However, public occasions like wedding parties, which includes women only, are considered private since women will often wear revealing clothes; thus, it is inappropriate to film or videotape such celebrations (Qutub, 2013, p. 11). Nowadays, posting selfies and Snapchat stories from private occasions is trending among girls and women in Saudi.

Despite Saudi's conservative background, the country is now going through major economic and social transformations to meet the 2030 vision agenda. The 2030 vision was introduced by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman and it proposes opening the country to diversified sources of income and investments. The aim is that, by the year 2030, Saudi will have achieved these goals and the reliance on oil will be reduced (Alkhalisi, 2018). More importantly, Prince Mohammed legalised women drivers from June 2018, and proposed developing movie theatres and having music concerts in Saudi for economic and tourism purposes (McKernan, 2018). These new changes, in addition to the removal of the religious police authorities, are reforming social and cultural norms, especially those related to veiling practices and the mobility of women in public spaces, which will inform visual online presentation.

1.1.1. Veiling Practices

Veiling practices refer to the hijab which is the religious practice of women wearing modest clothing when appearing in a public place or seeing men who are not identified as *mahram* meaning men that a woman would never be permitted to marry because of a close blood relationship. Generally, the veiling and the veil are translated into Arabic as hijab. The

word veil is taken from the Latin word *vela*, which in Latin means a curtain or a garment (Stillman, 2003, p: 139–141). The garment can be defined as a piece of fine material worn by women to conceal the face and hair. The practice of veiling takes different forms depending on traditions, cultures, and family rules. The hijab refers to the general concept of veiling and consists of varying elements. In Saudi, the niqab refers to the black piece of cloth that covers a woman's face, while the word abaya refers to the popular Saudi loose black coat which is usually worn with the *tarha* (the black head scarf). The niqab is very common in Saudi when women are in public places. Indeed, after reaching puberty, any girl or woman can wear the niqab if they chose to or if their parents tell them to do so. Given the centrality of veiling to Saudi women's social experience, this study will explore how veiling practices inform selfie sharing practices and audience segregation.

1.1.2. Social Networking Sites in Saudi

Several studies confirmed that SNS enhanced the social skills of users and increased their self-esteem (Jones, Millermaier, Marthinez & Schuler, 2008; Young, 2009). Similarly, Al-Saggaf's (2011) study conducted on a Saudi population confirmed those findings. SNS have empowered many individuals in Saudi society, in particular marginalised groups (Eltahawy, 2008). According to social norms in Saudi, women and young adults are the two most marginalised groups in society. The social hierarchy always places men and older members of the community at the top of the hierarchy. When face-to-face discussions occur, younger individuals are always asked to remain silent and to respect the elderly. Since the emergence of SNS, it has become more acceptable for younger individuals to express themselves and to stand up for their ideas when speaking to older people (Alsharkh, 2012). In the past, it was very rare for younger individuals to disagree with their elders or to make decisions on their own. Hence, the importance of the current study lies in attempting to find out more about the ways social media give women a voice.

It is clear that Saudi women gained a great deal of empowerment and freedom of expression because of SNS (Fatany, 2012). Recently, there have been many cases where Saudi women formed groups on SNS and called for their rights including, the right to drive (Watson, 2011), the right to get married without the permission of a male guardian, the right to travel without the permission of male guardian, the right to participate in politics, and the right to vote. Saudi women have been granted permission to participate in politics and to sue an abusive husband, which is a major shift in the male-dominated country; other demands are still under negotiation. Alothman's (2013) study is in agreement with three previous studies (Al-Saggaf 2003; Alsharkh 2012; Weirich 2013) and it confirms the view that SNS could be an empowering tool for Saudi women. Considering the findings of these studies and the new reforms in Saudi like lifting the driving ban for women and the opening of cinemas, it is expected that Saudi women will be more likely to construct their online identity using contemporary visual communication means like selfies.

Research suggests changes in social power structures caused by SNS activities. Many Saudi are expressing their dissatisfaction with the country's policies and institutions (Alothman, 2013). The number of young activists on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook is increasing on a daily basis (Fatany, 2012). While the government controls protest that may occur in the public sphere, it is hard to control those expressing opinions in a virtual environment.

1.2. Problem Statement

This study addressed the problem of presenting Saudi women in online spaces from their own perspective. Saudi women are either misrepresented by male media producers (Qutub, 2013) or they are looked at in comparison to western women's lifestyle (Mishra, 2007). The present study explains how women choose to represent themselves via their selfie practices. In addition, the study undertakes the lack of resources forming a framework of the

process of selfie production. While selfie studies pointed to discrete stages of selfie taking (Al-Kandari & Abdelaziz, 2018) selfie editing (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim & Masters, 2015), and selfie posting (Weiser, 2015), a selfie model in which the producer processes the image has not been identified. Thus, this present study overcomes this limitation of selfie literature by presenting a selfie production model that emerged from the multi-phase method focusing on participants' narratives and experiences.

1.3. Project Aims

The overall objective of this thesis is to explore Saudi women's self-presentations with a specific focus on the following aims:

- a) Identify how Saudi women express their identity through selfie images.
- b) Explore how selfie producers are shaped by the cultural and social norms in Saudi.
- c) Seek to find out more about the experience of selfie taking, editing and sharing on Snapchat and Instagram in Saudi.
- d) Explore how the platform affordances and technical features shape image construction in online spaces.

This thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the selfie as a means of communicating the identity of Saudi women. It is anticipated that this approach will lead to unique insights and that it will open up new avenues of research into the presentation of women in new media in the Middle East.

1.4. Research Questions

In order to provide context to the questions to be investigated in this project, I reviewed the available literature on the topic of the selfie phenomenon (Milcot, 2015) and online identity construction (Al-Saggaf, 2015; Pugh, 2010).

The current study will examine the following research questions:

RQ1: What motivates Saudi women to take and share selfies online?

RQ2: What modes of self-presentation emerge from selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat?

RQ3: How do platform affordances inform selfie production?

RQ4: Do women post veiled or unveiled selfies? Do this change with multiple accounts? Multiple platforms?

RQ5: How do cultural factors play a role in informing selfie production?

RQ6: How do Saudi women make decisions about representing themselves through selfies?

1.5. Research Approach and Methods

The approach and methods of my study were guided by the main objective of this research which investigates the processes and experiences of selfie taking and sharing as described by research participants. Accordingly, for this project, I used a qualitative methodology applying a phenomenological approach because the topic is relatively new and has not been addressed from the perspective of Middle Eastern women.

My objective in using phenomenological research was to describe the participants' lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). A phenomenological approach is a qualitative approach that aims to understand and describe how human beings experience a particular phenomenon (Davis, Powell & Lachlan, 2013, p. 329). Further, the phenomenological approach investigates the meanings of lived experiences within the context in which the experience takes place (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 27).

In terms of methodological design, I used qualitative methods, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, online observation, and photo-elicitation interviews, to explore participants' feelings and thoughts about selfie posting experiences. In the newly evolving field of selfie research, qualitative research provides insights into how people (users) behave in virtual communications. The rationale for adopting a multimethod design was to enhance

the validity of the data and to provide an in-depth understanding of selfie behaviours performed by Saudi participants.

1.6. Theoretical Perspective/ Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study is informed by Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory, Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, the concept of platform affordances (Costa, 2018), and platform vernacular (Gibbs, Meese, Arnold, Nansen, & Carter 2014).

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model indicates that the world is a stage in which people's performances vary depending on the situation and audience. In his view, self-presentation is centred on playing to the audience to meet their expectation. His term 'front stage' describes self-presentation that uses impression management strategies like applying makeup or costumes. Whereas, back stage performance occurs in one's environment.

Proxemics in Hall (1966) describes the use of space in offline situations identifying four spaces: intimate, personal, social, and public. When interacting with each other, people occupy these spaces based on the relationships with each other. My conceptual framework argues that the interpersonal proximity with selfie viewers is related to the location of posting the selfie, the level of self-disclosure, and the applied technical features. Indeed, it is expected that the interpersonal proximity of selfie producers with the audience shapes the performance of the producer. While selfie producers may share a desirable frontstage selfie with a public audience, backstage selfie performances are expected to be shared with a close network of friends. In addition, considering that Instagram (Fatani & Suyadnya, 2015) and Snapchat (Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016) have varying image presentation and image editing features, I am exploring whether these affordances may inform selfie production in the platforms.

1.7. Significance of the Study

My study is important in understanding a contemporary mode of self-presentation in online spaces for researchers focusing on methodology, social media, and the theories of Goffman (1959) and Hall (1966). Theoretically, my study extends Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and Hall's (1966) proxemics theory to online visual communications. In terms of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, my study provides new ways of thinking about selfies in relation to frontstage performance staged with a public audience and backstage performance shared with a small group of friends. Drawing on his theory, I developed the terms *frontstage selfie* and *backstage selfie* signalling how platform affordances enabled selfie producers to present varying contexts to varying audiences.

Frontstage selfies describe selfies in which the producers tend to present a more enhanced version of the self using strategies like applying a beautifying face filter or positioning the selfie next to a beautiful landscape. On the other hand, a backstage selfie refers to selfies that are shared with close friends and family members in which the producers present impromptu images as in the selfies applying funny face filters.

As for Hall's (1966) theory, my study determines how proxemics are applied in online spaces to selfie sharing behaviours. The developed term *virtual walls* outlined selfie producers' audience segregation as a form of maintaining cultural norms such as veiling practices. *Virtual walls* showed Saudi women's transgressions of formal communication and the production of a new private space on Snapchat that excludes males and judgmental ladies.

In terms of theoretical and empirical significance, I have been able to develop key concepts and practices like the use of selfies as a form of *visual dairies* signalling snapshots of producers' daily activities and documenting their presence in interesting locations. Snapchat affordances are used to apply *digital makeup* to add a feminine touch to the producers' faces. In addition, producers seek the achievement of the "upgraded version of the

self' through offline and online preparations to display a more desirable image to viewers. Both concepts of the *upgraded version of the self* and *digital makeup* are motivated by achieving gendered-beauty ideals that are socially constructed as witnessed in the use of effects that make the skin look fairer and poses that make the body look thinner. Indeed, the developed term *female gaze* highlighted that Saudi selfie producers construct their images to be looked at by other women to either seek positive feedback or marriage proposals. This also shows how Saudi selfie producers are reproducing offline environments in which females' social gatherings excluded men in Snapchat online spaces. Finally, participants used the process of selfie editing and taking as a replacement for a physical mirror, thereby leading to the concept of a *digital mirror*. Although actual mirrors can only reflect images as they are, a *digital mirror* allows selfie producers to control their looks and enhance their appearance.

As regards methodological significance, the four phases research design was a key contribution of this study. Previous selfie studies used a single method or two methods like an interview and questionnaire (Sung et al., 2016); interviews and written narrative exercise (Milcot, 2015); online surveys (Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim & Andreassen, 2016); survey and Instagram analysis (Kim, Lee, Sung & Choi 2016); interview and focus groups (Tiidenberg, 2015); experiment and online survey (Re, Wang, He & Rule, 2016). However, I have been able to produce a framework explaining the process of selfie production using my original methodological design, which consisted of focus groups, in-depth interviews, online observation, and photo-elicitation interviews. This multi-method design, which explored producers' descriptions, selfie posting habits, and feedback on their images provided a selfie model that explained the process of producing selfie images.

In a Saudi context, this study is important in highlighting women's image-based presentation in a transitional period from being an extremely conservative society to a

culturally less restrictive society. Further, this study outlined how selfie producers developed a clear normativity to fit audience expectations through deciding not to post certain selfies, segregating audiences, posting different kinds of selfies on Instagram and Snapchat, and using digital and non-digital enhancing effects. Most importantly, my project is useful for social media researchers in Middle Eastern countries by highlighting how and what cultural norms inform women's online selfie presentation as this is the first selfie study to provide an in-depth understanding of the selfie phenomena in the region.

1.8.Conclusion

Having outlined the thesis as a whole in this chapter, Chapter Two will discuss the theoretical framework of this project concentrating on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis and Hall's (1966) theory of personal spaces. In addition, it will present the relevant selfie literature and the history of Saudi women's presentation in relation to Islamic principles and social media trends.

Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the research design of this study, which consisted of four phases: focus groups, in-depth interview, online observation, and photo-elicitation interview. The chapter explains the rationale behind using a multi-method design and discusses the sample and the procedure for each phase. It also outlines the sampling types, including network and snowball sampling. Finally, the chapter highlighted the process of text and image analysis.

The thesis includes three finding chapters: Chapter Four, Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Chapter Four synthesised three key ideas: selfie motives, cultural practices related to selfie activities, and the selfie model. The data identified six main motives related to selfie activities: communicating the self, attention-seeking, experimentation with filters, entertainment, empowering, and educating. Cultural factors informing selfie production included: veiling practices, privacy concerns, boundaries with non-related males, and respect

for parents and elderly viewers. Here, I have also explored cases in which selfie producers avoided posting online selfies taken while smoking a hookah or wearing revealing clothes. Finally, I showcase how data resulting from motivation and cultural themes formed two stages in the proposed selfie production model and I introduced the model briefly.

Chapter Five explains the key role of platform affordances in producing varying selfie presentations that I termed “frontstage selfies” and “backstage selfies”. While Goffman’s (1959) theory was extended to online selfie communications, Hall’s (1966) proxemics was critically used and developed as the selfie interactions with varying audiences were found to be determined by virtual intimacy rather than physical space. Here I reconstructed his theory as selfie producers were found to engage with three proxemics: private, personal, and social spaces while creating “virtual walls” to exclude undesired viewers. The chapter goes on to link that data resulting from platform affordances and the management of online proxemics to the emerging selfie model.

Chapter Six focuses on two main ideas: seeking to achieve an “upgraded version of the self” and the concept of gaze. The findings revealed that producers applied a series of technological capabilities and non-technological preparations to produce a desired self in online spaces. Drawing on male gaze theory (Mulvey, 1975) and on female gaze theory (Cohen, 2010), I rationalised selfie production in relation to the expectation to be viewed and acknowledged by viewers. I argued that selfie producers seek to achieve gendered beauty ideals even if their targeted audience are females. The fascination with materials was witnessed in a particular type of selfie known as the mirror selfie.

Finally, Chapter Seven presents the selfie model as a whole and the empirical and conceptual contributions of the study. In particular, I demonstrated the interrelation between the theories of Goffman (1959) and Hall (1966) in relation to selfie behaviours. Also, I pointed out key concepts such as, digital makeup, visual diary, virtual walls, digital mirror,

and the upgraded version of the self which were developed by this study. Lastly, I clarified the limitations of my study and provided suggestions for future researchers in the area of selfies and SNS. Next, Chapter Two will discuss the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In the introductory chapter, I presented an overview of my study exploring its objectives, methodological design, and significance. This chapter focuses on the theoretical perspectives, the conceptual framework, and the literature review that inform this study.

Theoretically, this chapter conceptualises selfie behaviours in terms of Goffman's self-presentation theory and Hall's (1966) proxemics theory. This study will be an extension of interpersonal communication theories by demonstrating how using new media communications like selfies is related to concepts like self-disclosure and proxemics in online spaces. Also, it will extend Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis to selfie taking and posting behaviours. The conceptual framework developed argues that selfie producers choose to present frontstage or backstage performances based on their interpersonal proximity with the viewers and the platform used. Indeed, deciding whether the selfie content and context is appropriate for posting is informed by the interpersonal proximity with the imagined audiences. While selfie producers share backstage selfies with intimate and personal viewers, the frontstage selfies are shared with public audiences who have a superficial relationship with the selfie producer. This may apply to selfie producers worldwide, yet it is particularly important in a culture like the Saudi culture in which frontstage and backstage performances are embedded in the social system that trains women to preform differently in public spaces where men are present and in private spaces with only women present. Therefore, it is expected that varying selfie performances will be shared with varying online networks.

Moving beyond the theory, the literature review expands on areas like the history of representing the self, selfie motives and patterns, historical presentation of Saudi women, and the affordances Instagram and Snapchat and selfie production. This literature review is important in explaining how cultural practices around female photo sharing in Saudi is shaped by cultural norms in addition to how the platform design informs selfie practices

among Saudi women. It is also significant in highlighting how factors like age and gender result in particular selfie practices. Overall, the literature review focuses on three main ideas: the general history of self-presentations, the particular history of Saudi women's presentation, and contemporary aspects of selfie patterns and platform affordances.

2.1. Theoretical Perspectives

The selfie phenomenon has been understood as a global practice, a political object, and a visual signifier of the self (Senft & Baym, 2015; Uzlaner, 2017). However, the process of producing and sharing selfies relies on many aspects such as, social codes and expectations, relational closeness with the viewers, technological affordances, available face filters, aesthetic editing features, the desire for likeability, the content disclosed, confidence, and personality. With that in mind, it is essential to think about elements from the following areas: photographic elements, social psychology theory, and interpersonal communication. While Goffman's (1959) theory originating from social psychology will be used to focus on varying presentations in online spaces, Hall's (1966) proxemics will be used to examine how selfie sharing activities take place across varying social network circles. Literature on media affordances investigated the correlation between platform design and selfie activities and productions. Next, these theories and their relation to selfie interactions are discussed.

2.1.1. Theatrical Performance

Goffman suggested that people's social self-presentation emerges from a theatrical perspective. In other words, his dramaturgical approach states that human beings are "performing", using costumes and scripts to portray an image (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's theatrical performance theory asserted that a major motive for self-presentation is centred on playing to the audience. Individuals often adjust their self-presentation strategies according to the environment and the audience. This may include trying to make a good impression to

manipulate the audience. More often than not, individuals will adjust their behaviour to the “preferences and expectations of the audience” (Alsaggaf, 2015, p. 23).

In terms of selfie sharing in relation to Goffman’s theatrical performance, there are two groups of selfie producers. First, it is possible that those who share selfies are performing to create a desirable picture of reality. This is in line with the studies that associated narcissism and selfie posting (Fox & Rooney, 2015, p. 164; Weiser, 2015, p. 479). A narcissistic user has an egocentric admiration of herself/himself. Accordingly, it is likely that those users will share desirable and perfected selfies. A second group is likely to share random and playful selfies without editing them, if they are to be shared within close relationships, which is likely to occur on the Snapchat platform. As confirmed in recent studies, Snapchat is a more private form of communication (Vaterlaus et al, 2016, p. 598) and selfies are the most frequent content shared on Snapchat (Piwek & Joinson, 2016, p. 365). These assumptions are in line with Goffman’s idea that one’s performance changes according to the audience. Thus, choosing to perform to others versus posting to a small group of friends is subject to one’s personal preference, the potential viewers, and the affordances of the platforms. Accordingly, this study attempts to explore how front and back stage performances are shaped by cultural norms in the selfies produced.

Furthermore, self-presentation consists of front stage performance and backstage performance. While people are cautious of the self they present for the front stage, a less filtered self is constructed for the backstage (Goffman, 1959). Although Goffman suggested that the front stage and backstage performances take place in face-to-face interactions, it is possible to extend these notions to online communications. For instance, selfie producers who want to share an image with a public audience are likely to present an elegant edited frontstage selfie to maintain a positive impression. On the other hand, selfie producers may share a more relaxed funny or silly looking selfie with close girlfriends as this context would

constitute a backstage setting. This arises from the variations in social interactions in gatherings for women only, versus gatherings for men and women, in offline spaces in Saudi.

Not only could a sense of audience inform selfie performances, but also the social media platform and its affordances and architecture could shape the image to be shared. For instance, a user's identity construction and performance could be formal and cautious when using a platform like Facebook or Instagram (frontstage), while they might perform in an informal and spontaneous way on another platform like Snapchat (backstage). Indeed, it has been indicated that Facebook is used for extensive networks rather than for close relationships (Vitak, 2012, p. 8). By contrast, Snapchat is used to maintain small networks and close relationships (Piwek & Joinson, 2016, p. 365).

Hence, identity performance is not a fixed notion; it changes according to the platform and the audience. As an illustration, one might display hardworking ambitious selfies on Facebook (frontstage) to a large audience including co-workers, while, at the same time, displaying playful spontaneous selfies (backstage) to intimate close connections on Snapchat. In the context of online performances, it is expected that selfie producers tend to edit selfies to portray a more desirable self-presentation (Chua & Chang, 2016, p. 195). Given that young adults are at a developmental stage that needs reassurance and admiration from others to build their sense of identity (Erikson, 1959), then sharing frontstage selfies might be influenced by the perceptions of a network of viewers. As an illustration, friends' comments and likes on a current selfie might affect the type and style of future selfies posted by the selfie taker. Indeed, a person who receives negative comments indicating that the selfie sharer has gained weight might lead to using editing filters on future selfies or taking a selfie at a distance from the face to make it appear thinner. Sharing selfies might not only be influenced by the perceptions of friends or close relationships, but also social values could impact on the type of shared selfie and the audience who can view it. People tend to maintain

their cultural identity (Hall, 1996) through connecting with the values, religious beliefs, aesthetics, and ethnicity of a particular social group or culture.

2.1.2. The Audience and Selfies

Although Goffman's ideas of the social self and the real self originally discussed self-presentation in a face-to-face context, scholars have extended his theory to computer mediated communication (Boden & Molotch, 1994; Heath & Luff, 1992; Meyrowitz, 1997; Thumim, 2015; Smith & Sanderson, 2015). According to Milcot (2015), Goffman's theory has created a foundation for exploring the virtual self in a selfie as well as the real physical self (p. 39). Goffman suggests that people's social self-presentation emerges from a theatrical perspective. Nowadays, social media users are more aware of their image on SNS and invest more time to add their realities to the shared image. In particular, Saudi social media users were found to construct their online identity on Facebook in terms of the imagined audience and audience aggregations to meet cultural norms (Alsaggaf, 2015, p. 47). Accordingly, it is expected that Saudi selfie producers will manage and divide online audiences when sharing selfies to suit the expectations and cultural codes of both audiences.

In a related study, Smith and Sanderson (2015) examined athletes' self-presentation in Instagram photos using Goffman's theory. Their findings indicated that athletes displayed photos according to the following themes: doing charitable work, sharing family moments like birthdays, training, endorsing a sponsor, and socialising at high profile events. This study confirms Goffman's dramaturgical approach which states that human beings are "performing", using costumes and scripts to portray an image (Goffman, 1959). Like actors, athletes are performing to create a desirable picture of reality. For instance, none of the 1,352 photographs analysed showed an athlete being depressed, being drunk, insulting others, or being violent with family members. With this in mind, my study attempts to explore how

selfie producers display different aspects of themselves to different users and what factors inform their decisions.

Goffman (1959) also confirmed that one's performance changes according to the audience. Taking this into account, my study investigates (1) whether females post several kinds of selfies to connect with multiple audiences and (2) if participants become more cautious when posting selfies after adding certain audiences.

In *The Public and Private Self*, Baumeister (2008) discusses the differences between public and private communication behaviour. Public behaviour is more significant because it can create a greater impact than private behaviour. People behave differently in public because they are motivated to make a good impression. As such, it could be implied that selfie takers are more motivated to use self-presentation strategies when sharing selfies in a public account on Instagram or in a Snapchat story because of the larger audience in these virtual environments. Therefore, my study attempts to understand if the public aspect of the account (restricted access or not) affects the type of selfies posted. Such selectivity of the platform used and the location of the platform, in addition to the editing of the selfie (Chua & Change, 2016; McLean et al., 2015), which includes adding text, captions, emojis, or adjusting the brightness of the selfie, are significant in extending Goffman's "given off" concept to online spaces. According to Goffman, individuals use both verbal and non-verbal communication, which he calls *sign vehicles*, as they interact publicly. To him, given expression refers to verbal communications used in face-to-face interactions which can be controlled by the performer. On the other hand, given off signals are non-verbal expressions that cannot be controlled in an offline setting. In selfie communications, the producer makes a series of technological enhancements and additions like applying a flower crown filter, applying digital makeup, or adding the city name or occasion name to the selfie that can signal non-verbal cues to viewers.

2.1.3. Proxemic Theory

Hall introduced proxemic theory in 1966. Although this nonverbal communication theory tends to explain how individuals perceive and use physical space, the principles of proxemics may be present in online communications and selfie behaviours (Dhir, Torsheim, Pallesen & Andreassen, 2017). Hall argued that humans are territorial and that they utilise fences, walls, furniture, and gardens to mark their spaces.

In Hall's view, there are four types of spatial zones associated with the types of interpersonal relationships. They are known as the intimate zone, the personal zone, the social zone, and the public zone. The intimate zone ranges from 0–18 inches and includes lovers, family members, and very close friends. The next zone, the personal zone is reserved for relatives and close friends and ranges from 18 inches to 4 feet. Then, there is the social zone (4–12 feet), which is used for professional encounters like student-teacher meetings or casual encounters. Finally, there is the public zone which is used to maintain distance between individuals such as performers and their audience. In my study, I will be conceptualising selfie producers' selfie sharing and producing activities with varying audiences in relation to Hall's theory.

Hall (1966) categorised proxemics based on the inches between persons; this is not possible in virtual spaces. Instead, online proxemics may be determined by the habitual proximity which is the level of closeness felt, based on existing experience of the physical space of getting closer to individuals whom we already know (Pogjed, 2015). When applied in relation to this study, I argue that Saudi women use “virtual walls” to mark their spaces when using a social networking platform like Snapchat. In the offline setting, on social occasions, there are separate spaces for women and men. Furthermore, on these occasions young adults would generally gather and sit next to each other away from mothers and older females. Thus, I argue that Saudi selfie producers may build “virtual walls” to keep different

audiences apart based on gender and age factors. Also, the amount of communication with others and the sharing of personal versus non-personal content may indicate online proximity. Additionally, people can use virtual walls to decide who can belong to their varying level of circles (e.g., do they “follow” them on Instagram or view their “Snaps” on Snapchat?).

Expectancy violation theory, which was developed by Burgoon (1976), is linked to proxemics. Breaking the rules of proxemics, as in standing within 0–18 inches when talking to a stranger, leads to violating the expectations of the other person. As a result, this violation of space may lead to negative consequences. Similarly, a user who receives a “friend” request on Snapchat from a stranger may perceive this as a proxemics violation. This relies on the idea that selfie posting behaviour is popular on Snapchat and the platform is used for exchanging content with personal users (Vaterlaus et al, 2016). The development of Hall’s (1966) theory and the concept of “virtual walls” will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Hall’s (1966) study indicated that people in Middle Eastern cultures cannot have private space in public areas because they do not demand as much physical privacy when compared to Americans. The first critique is that generalising this assumption to all Middle Eastern cultures may not be accurate since there are many cultural variations between those countries (Qutub, 2013). It is not my intention here to point out those cultural differences in terms of standards of proxemic spaces. However, emphasising differences in proxemic spaces leads to the second critique of Hall’s lack of understanding of gender segregation as another layer of proxemics in Saudi culture.

Gender segregation takes place in most locations in Saudi including education, the workplace, restaurants, gyms, and social gatherings. Saudi culture is more sensitive to intrusion because the society is gender segregated. For instance, if a woman is seated in a public space and there is an empty chair next to her, it is not acceptable for a man to occupy that seat. As another example, houses including areas like pool or garden will be blocked off

so that males living in the next house may not be able to view these areas. The niqab (face cover) that is widely used by Saudi women, is a way of creating distance between men and women.

Given the gender segregation that takes place in offline environments, it is therefore unsurprising that gender boundaries are transferred to online spaces. As an illustration, it is expected that a Saudi woman who takes a group selfie with her girlfriends is likely to post it as a private message instead of a public post because men who are unrelated to her friends would be able to view the selfie. All in all, proxemics theory provides a general framework that requires further investigation when applying its principles to the online environment and/or to cultures that are formed differently as in gender-segregated societies. Therefore, it is essential to consider gender segregation in relation to proxemics as both concepts are closely interlinked in Saudi culture.

2.1.4. Self-Disclosure and Selfies

Self-disclosure is the conscious act of revealing one's thoughts and feelings to others (Derlaga & Berg, 2013). Joinson, Reips, Buchanan and Schofield (2010) discuss when and why individuals choose to self-disclose online. Their study provides evidence that privacy preferences influence people's online self-disclosure behaviour. The mediator between privacy concerns and self-disclosure is trust. The authors suggest that people's willingness to share depends on those with whom they are sharing information (Joinson, Reips, Buchanan & Shofield, 2010. p. 4). As a result, it could be argued that the privacy setting of an Instagram or Snapchat account could inform the self-disclosed selfies shared with others. Indeed, a recent study (Piwek & Joinson, 2016) conducted in the UK, confirmed that selfies are the most common content shared on Snapchat, which tends to feature small networks of close friends, compared to Facebook, which includes larger networks and less intimate relationships. Given that these trends exist in the West, we might anticipate they are

amplified in Middle Eastern cultures as 55% of Snapchat users in Saudi are women who trust the privacy of the application (Al-Harbi, 2018).

Moreover, individuals are more likely to engage in online self-disclosure behaviour when they trust the other party with their information (Joinson et al., 2010). Accordingly, it might be possible that females would send playful selfies as a direct message to a Snapchatter, who is a close friend, rather than posting the selfie to all Snapchatters in My Story on Snapchat. In addition, some people have two accounts on Instagram and/or Snapchat. Therefore, it is expected that selfies in the account involving close friends will be more intimate and spontaneous, while more formal selfies could be shared in the public account.

2.1.5. Socio-technical Features and Photographic Elements

Investigating the selfie experience requires discussing the technical or digital features that selfie producers commonly apply to their selfie prior to posting the selfie on SNS. As this study is focused on selfies posted on Instagram and Snapchat, the following section will address the digital terms and technical concepts associated with selfie posting on these platforms.

Selfie-editing usually refers to the digital enhancement of a selfie using a smartphone application or computer software (Chae, 2017). Selfie-editing includes using filters, removing blemishes, adjusting brightness, adding face contouring, slimming the face, enlarging the eyes, or cropping unwanted items. Apart from selfie enhancing features, there are other technical features that may be applied to selfies for reasons like entertainment or documentation. For instance, Snapchat enables selfie takers to add text to the selfie, to add filters indicating the location or season, to add the temperature, to include the time, to add emojis, to adjust the viewing time, to create a personal Bitmoji (customized avatar), and to save the selfie to a camera phone. Moreover, technical reproducibility enables the posting of

a selfie in multiple forms and platforms. For instance, some selfie users choose Snapchat because it enables them to add enhancement editing. After saving the selfie to the camera roll, that same selfie may be reposted in the person's Instagram account, used in a Twitter profile account, or sent to a loved one using WhatsApp.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study proposes that the relative proximity is related to the posting of the selfie to frontstage vs. backstage audiences, self-disclosure, and the technical features applied as illustrated in Figure 2.1, developed by the researcher.

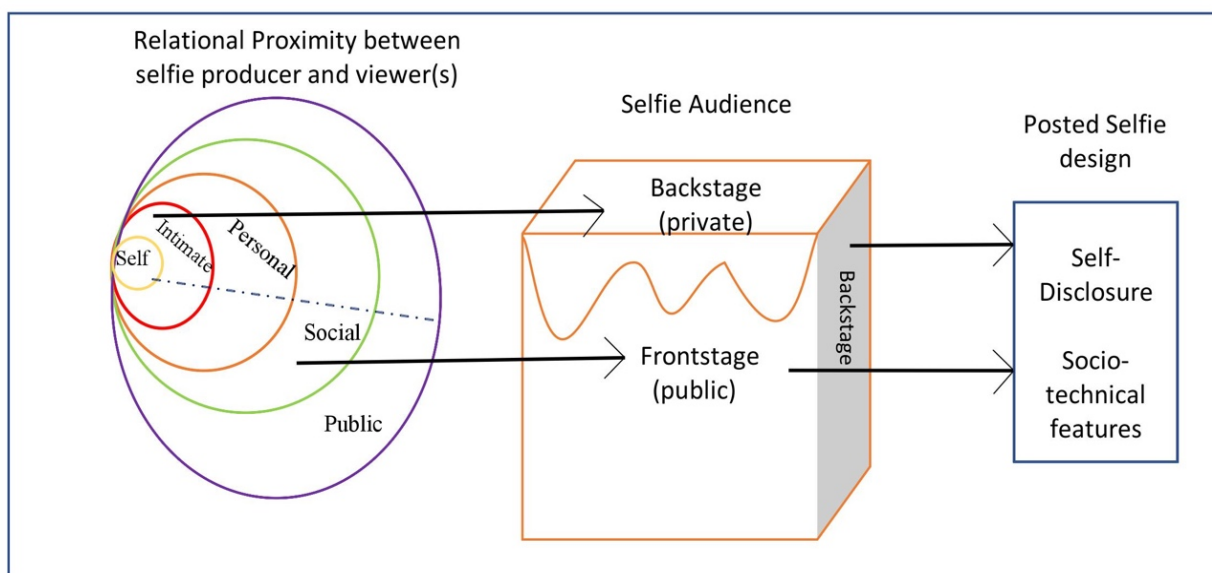


Figure 2.1 The Conceptual framework

In addition, the interpersonal proximity between the person posting the selfie and the viewers directs the location of posting the selfie either to the frontstage or the backstage of the SNS platform. For example, if a woman selfie producer wanted to share her selfies with close friends and/or family members, then it is likely that she will post the selfie in the backstage area, meaning the private snap or private message in Instagram. By contrast, the selfie-taker is likely to post the selfie in the frontstage if the target audience includes colleagues, extended relatives, or individuals in the social or public zones. The frontstage

refers to the public story in the Snapchat application, whereas it refers to the general profile page of an Instagram account.

Using private and public selfie posts is not the only strategy for customising the content depending on the audience. Having a number of accounts enables individuals to post personal selfies in private accounts to close friends, partners, and family members. Then, formal selfies may be posted to a separate public account to share the content with people in the social or public zones.

It is not of relevance here to explore whether private and public selfies are shared in the same account on the platform or in two different accounts. However, it is essential to point out that interpersonal proxemics lead to posting some selfies to a private audience while other selfies are posted to a public audience. Accordingly, the selfie producer adapts what is being disclosed and how it is being expressed depending on the target audience. In other words, women will think about the information disclosed about themselves and the technical features that it is appropriate to use when they are about to share the selfie with a private or a public audience. For instance, a young woman who took a selfie while smoking a hookah in a café may share her selfie as a private snap (backstage) with her close girlfriends. However, sharing the same selfie in the public space (frontstage) might be problematic since the general audience, including older women, might evaluate the scene negatively.

Apart from self-disclosure, the technological features that are applied to selfies may vary depending on the relational proximity with the audience. To illustrate, adding a location filter¹ to a selfie might be appropriate when sharing the image with intimate and personal viewers, whereas it might cause privacy issues or stalking behaviours if shared with public

¹ The Snapchat location filter may indicate the district, the campus, or the shopping area.

viewers. In addition, it would be a common practice to apply aesthetic features and filters to selfies that are shared with a wider public audience while less attention is given to aesthetic features when sharing selfies with close friends who are familiar to the selfie taker. Chapter Five explores the selfie designs in relation to the platform affordances and the viewing audience.

Moreover, the conceptual framework proposed that the virtual private and public spaces are not only influenced by the audience viewing the selfie, but also the actual offline location may determine if the selfie is going to be posted in a frontstage or a backstage space. For example, a selfie taken by a woman in a public place like a restaurant is likely to be posted in a frontstage space. This is assumed because the woman is presenting herself in the same veiled way in the offline and online environments. In this sense, the online public space could be perceived as an extension of the offline public space. Conversely, selfies taken in offline private locations like a house or a private ballroom would be expected to be posted in a private virtual space² considering that women are mostly unveiled and/or wearing revealing clothes on such private occasions.

2.3. Positioning the Thesis

In examining Saudi women's experience of selfie posting and sharing, this thesis contributes to the literature which investigated selfie phenomena such as, understanding the selfie phenomena (Senft & Baym, 2015), exploring selfies on Instagram (Souza et al., 2015), political usage of selfies (Nemer & Freeman, 2015), selfies in relation to self-esteem and narcissism (Barry et al., 2015), and selfie and sexting behaviours (Albury, 2015). Although these studies provided illuminating findings about selfie phenomena, the relationship between

² As a private snap or a private message in Instagram.

cultural norms and selfie-posting behaviours has not yet been clarified. Also, this is the first study providing a selfie model which explains that stages of selfie production as proposed in Chapter Four

Furthermore, most of the previous selfie studies were conducted in individualistic western cultures³, which might be influenced by different social norms compared to collectivist cultures like Saudi. Indeed, Chu and Choi (2010) indicated that individualistic and collectivistic cultures hold different values, which leads to distinctive online self-presentation in each culture. With that in mind, the current thesis attempts to close this gap in the literature through understanding selfie behaviours from the perception of a marginalised group of women in one of the most individualistic conservative cultures in the Middle East. Accordingly, this understanding might provide a novel way of perceiving selfies for those interested in researching selfie studies in general and in selfie cross-cultural research.

In addition, studying Saudi women's experience of selfies contributes to the literature on computer-mediated communications in the Middle East. A range of studies investigated the use of SNS in the Arab world, especially after the Arab Spring Uprisings. These studies focused on various areas including, the impact of SNS and blogging on politics in the Middle East (Eltahawy, 2008), Arab women and blogging (Alonzo, 2012), the digital divide in a gender segregated culture (Al-Saggaf, 2007), online communities in Saudi (Al-Saggaf, 2003), social media and political engagement (Allothman, 2013), social media effects on Arab and Muslim families (Alsharkh, 2012), privacy and security concerns about SNS (Al-Senaidey et al, 2012), Islamic presentation on social media communication (Shareefi, 2012), empowering

³ Nemer & Freeman's (2015) study that was conducted in Brazil is an exception

female Egyptian bloggers (Otterman, 2007), and Kuwaiti female political discourse on Twitter (Dashti, Al-Abdullah, & Johar, 2015).

Most of the earlier literature investigated older platforms like Facebook and Twitter because they were the leading platforms that triggered political reforms during the Arab Spring Uprisings. With this in mind, the current thesis will expand the previous research avenues to introduce digital self-presentation through selfie self-portraiture in trending platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram.

In addition, this study expands on the growing literature on Saudi women's usage of social networking sites: Saudi women's identity construction on Facebook (Alsaggaf, 2015), Saudi women's Facebook usage (Al-Saggaf, 2011), expressing Saudi women's online identity (Guta & Karolak, 2015), and Saudi women's online communications with the opposite sex (Al-Saggaf, 2004). Unlike previous literature on Saudi women and SNS, this thesis presents visual examples of Saudi women's selfies. It is also possible that investigating selfie presentation from a feminine perspective might be more comprehensive and provide rich data when dealing with Saudi participants. In Saudi, a man investigating a topic involving personal photographs of women would not have access to the same amount of data.⁴ With the objectives as previously outlined, here is the literature review that's been drawn for that objectives.

Next, I explore the following areas: the history of self-presentation, selfie-posting motives, selfie patterns and behaviours, presentation of Saudi women, and selfies on Instagram and Snapchat platforms. The history of self-presentation helps us to understand the transformations and innovations used before the rise of digital forms of self-expression. Saudi

⁴ It would not be socially acceptable in Saudi if a male researcher asked participants for access to their SNS profile or for permission to view their selfies.

cultural norms used to restrict female image sharing and so this literature outlines the transformations within the Saudi society. The literature on selfie patterns and platform affordances outlines how this phenomenon is practiced and conceptualised globally.

2.4. The History of Representing the Self

The word “selfie” was only added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013. However, the concept of the selfie has existed for decades. The idea of representing the self took the form of written personal diary, image drawing, sculpture, and portraits in oils (Rettberg, 2014). The invention of the camera produced a higher quality of self-reflection than earlier media, such as diary writing, sculpture, and oil portraits.

Today’s selfies include numerous features that make them a unique form of self-presentation. Selfies are different from self-portraits and performance art in that they are not displayed in art galleries or on stages (Rettberg, 2014). Instead, selfies are commonly shared on SNS to a broad audience that could include intimate partners, family members, friends, or even strangers met on a subway. Another feature of selfies is the possibility of self-documentation. For example, mirrors allow us to see a reflection of ourselves, yet it is not possible to go back and look at one’s exact reflection in a mirror an hour later. In addition, a selfie taker and the audience of a selfie taker can both view the same image simultaneously.

Furthermore, selfies can now be taken with a click of button and shared with others within seconds. In contrast, self-portraits, sculptures, and diary writing take a much longer time to accomplish. Additionally, this digital form of self-presentation allows the user to take multiple images of herself and to decide on the preferred images that will be shared with others on SNS. This ease of selectivity does not apply to making a sculpture or to painting a self-portrait.

There are a number of self-photography projects that have gained popularity. For instance, Suzanne Szucs took daily pictures of herself from 1996 for fifteen years. She then

displayed her project in exhibits and in an online diary (Rettberg, 2014. p. 34). Likewise, Ahree Lee started a self-photography video projects on YouTube in 2006. Lee's project went viral and 800,000 people watched the project in four days (Washburn, 2006). It is interesting that this new self-presentation genre, displaying three years of a graduate student's daily life, attracted so much attention. Lee's selfies highlights how this novel form of digital self-expression could be used for archiving reasons and digital storytelling reasons at the same time. Although she shared the video with public audience, she did not tend to appear more desirable or used enhancing filters.

In general terms, the selfie is a contemporary form of online self-presentation. The most empowering aspect about representing oneself online is having the opportunity to speak for oneself and to broadcast one's personal narrative to online communities (Thumim, 2015. p. 135). With this in mind, this study focuses on the visual narratives displayed by Saudi women in online spaces in which selfie producers were able to express themselves, to a certain extent, in a space that was not subject to male guardianship or social restrictions.

2.5. Motivations for Producing and Sharing Selfies

Previous literature on selfies indicated that individuals post selfies motivated by attention seeking (Sung et al., 2016), political reasons (Nemer & Freeman, 2015), sexual gratification (Albury, 2015), marketing intentions (Senft & Baym, 2015), pedagogical incentives (Trembley, Woolsey, Johnson, Werner, & Maiullo, 2014), and medical reasons (Criscito & Stein, 2016). These studies have provided insightful understanding of selfie-takers' motivations and intentions when sharing their selfies on SNS. However, the majority of the studies mentioned were conducted in western cultures. This suggests that it is possible that selfie-takers in a conservative society like Saudi will have additional, similar, or different motivations than those addressed by previous studies. Therefore, I will highlight key points in these studies explaining how they might relate to selfie posting in Saudi.

The research conducted by Sung et al. (2016) found that there are four motivations for sharing selfies on SNS: attention seeking, entertainment, communication, and archiving. The study also revealed that narcissism is a predictor of selfie-posting frequency. With these motives in mind, it is essential to address some key points. Firstly, this study pointed out that selfie takers seek the attention of a broad audience including members of the opposite sex. Considering that traditional marriage is still a strong norm in Saudi, it might be possible that some single women would post attractive selfies to be acknowledged by a groom's mother or sisters. Secondly, it is expected that posting selfies for archiving, communicating, and showing off reasons may be common motivations between those identified by Sung et al. (2016) and those discussed in the current study.

While Sung et al. (2016) provided a comprehensive conceptualisation for selfie posting motivations, another recent study (Kim et al., 2016) explored predictors of selfie posting behaviours. According to their study, there are three predictors of selfie posting behaviours (1) attitude towards the behaviour, (2) social norms or normative pressure, and (3) perceived behavioural control. It is interesting to note here how both the tendency for gaining the approval of others for selfie postings, and the user's perception that they have control over their selfie postings, work as predictors for selfie posting behaviours. Taking this into consideration, the current study intends to investigate filters as a way of controlling a selfie and the social norms influencing selfie posts. Although Kim's study (2016) highlighted key predictors of selfie postings, it presented a fairly general conceptualisation of social norms and selfie behavioural control. For instance, it would have been useful to understand which social norms are relevant to selfie-posting. This is one of the areas that this study aims to explore.

Other selfie studies suggested motivations for posting selfies (Albury, 2015; Nemer & Freeman, 2015) that may be less common within the Saudi culture. For instance, Nemer and

Freeman (2015) indicated that teenagers in the urban slums of Brazil post selfies to document their lives, to expose the violence in their region, and to assure their parents that they are safe throughout the day. In 2012, some Saudi women posted selfies of themselves driving as part of a protest and a call for political reform. As a result, those women were arrested and jailed, accused of challenging the law and the government by their actions and the selfies they posted. Knowing the consequences of these incidents, Saudi women are less likely to use selfies as a tool for political protest in the future. Similar to the Brazilian usage in Nemer and Freeman's study (2015), Saudi women living abroad may use selfies to reassure their parents and loved ones that they are safe.

The use of selfies for sexting purposes is a practice that may be less popular in Saudi. In Albury's (2015) interviews with teens, she identified a selfie theme known as "sneaky hats". In this theme, teens post semi-nude or nude selfies with hats or other objects covering the breasts and/or genitals. Although, in general, the teens who were interviewed resisted the term "sexting", Albury (2015) argued that the teens' selfies are being used as a sexting tool, that they are intended to be exchanged in intimate relationships for flirtation reasons. It is not my aim here to suggest that using selfies as a sexting tool does not exist in Saudi, it is rather to point out that it is less likely that individuals in Saudi who use selfies for sexting would admit that they do so. This is due to social norms and religious values that are embedded in the culture. Indeed, this topic did not emerge in any of my interviews.

Sharing selfies as a way of communicating with others and maintaining relationships has been reported in previous studies (Albury, 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Senft & Baym, 2015; Sung et al., 2016). Considering that the collectivistic Saudi culture values social connectivity and gatherings, it could be possible that selfie postings motivated by communicating with others are popular types of selfies. For instance, Saudi women in general have an active

social life and attend many celebrations that may inform the context and frequency of selfie taking with others, or while attending social events for women.

To summarise, individuals have different motivations for posting selfies including attention seeking, archiving, entertainment, sexting, marketing, self-documenting, teaching, political protesting, and communicating. Taking all of these elements into account, the current study is interested in selfie posting as a cultural artefact and a social practice that occurs among Saudi women and girls.

2.6. Selfie Patterns and Behaviours

Although posting selfies has become a trending practice, research suggests that there are differences in selfie-posting behaviours depending on the age and the gender of the selfie-taker (Dhir et al., 2016). The literature on selfies also identified various types of selfie and selfie viewers such as outfit selfies and leisure selfies (Carbon, 2017), mirror selfies (Uzlaner, 2017), adolescent selfies (Dhir et al., 2016), selfies taken by females (Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu & Zhu, 2015), selfies in relation to camera positioning (Tiidenberg, 2015), and selfies in relation to their purpose such as political empowerment or sexting (Senft & Baym, 2015). With these elements in mind, the next sections will address the following issues: selfie gender differences, selfie age differences, selfie types, and types of selfie viewers.

2.6.1. Gender and selfie posting

In terms of selfie gender differences, studies found that females take and share (Qiu et al., 2015) more personal and group selfies. They are more likely to crop their photos and to use photographic filters when compared to males (Dhir et al., 2016). The first study mentioned here engaged with a Chinese and Singaporean sample, the second study was conducted on a Norwegian sample. In addition, the study by Dhir et al. (2016) reported that women want to appear attractive and that they post photos for self-impression management more than men. This is consistent with earlier online self-presentation literature (Dunn &

Guadagno, 2012; Manago, Graham, Greenfield & Salimkhan, 2008). According to Sung et al. (2016), women feel that their social needs are met when they receive positive feedback from viewers. That explains why it is likely that women will post more selfies compared to men. Other technological features may lead to gender differences in selfie postings. As an illustration, selfie features, including the ability to view how one looks, the ability to retake and modify the image, editing and filtering options, the selectivity of which parts to show, and the application of makeup and lighting features, may be more attractive to females when taking and sharing their selfies. These are aspects which should be subject to further empirical exploration. The fact that body image and physical appearance can have powerful effects on young women's quality of life and self-esteem (Clay et al., 2005; Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel, & Stuckless, 1999), has been offered as a possible reason as to why young females are the most prominent group that post selfies (Souza et al., 2015). The implication is that taking and sharing selfies allow women to experience how they look and what others think of their looks and appearance.

Although a number of studies (Dhir et al., 2016; Qiu et al., 2015; Souza et al., 2015, Sung et al., 2016) suggested that females are more likely than men to share selfies and to want to appear attractive, other studies argue differently. As an illustration, some studies showed that narcissism and selfie-posting were more relevant to males compared to females (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Grijalva et al., 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2015). In Weiser's (2015) view, narcissism is positively correlated with selfie-posting frequently. Few studies have looked sufficiently at gender differentiation to say for certain whether there are distinctive uses according to gender. Some studies show evidence for some similar practices among both men and women motives to take and share selfies (Al-Kandari & Abdelaziz, 2018).

The findings relating to gender differences in selfie posting practices in the study by Dhir et al. (2016), which is one of the few studies that touched on gender differences and

selfie posting. Indeed, research into women's use of selfies suggests a gendered use that could show different motivations for men. Therefore, the investigation of Saudi women's selfies requires some in depth exploration of the role gender plays in the context of other influences like culture and technology. It is essential to note here that prior studies have not been sufficiently nuanced in their exploration of the process of taking, editing and sharing selfies. This is one of the precise objectives of this study.

2.6.2. Age and Selfie Sharing

Where age differences are concerned, previous selfie literature reported that adolescents (Dhir et al., 2016) and young adults (Qiu et al, 2015) post selfies and crop them more than older people. The research by Dhir et al. (2016) is the first study that presented empirical evidence that selfie behaviour differs among age groups. Their study examined gender and age differences for selfie taking and sharing among adolescents (aged 12–19), young adults (20–30), and adults (31–50).

Given that adolescents need approval from others to build their personal identity (Brown, 1999), this may explain their tendency to post frequent selfies as a way getting feedback and approval on the looks and/or the activities emerging in their selfies. Also, adolescences are more likely to post selfies compared to young adults (Dhir et al., 2016). This might go back to the fact that adolescents have more leisure time and are more concerned with imitating their peers within their network. On the other hand, young adults have more responsibilities such as completing educational degrees, perusing a career, and establishing a family.

2.6.3. Selfie Types

Previous studies identified selfie types depending on the activity of the selfie taker, the contents of the selfie image (Kim et al., 2016), the positioning of the camera (Tiidenberg, 2015), and the number of people involved in the selfie (Dhir, 2016). As a demonstration, the

study by Kim et al. (2016) identified several selfie types according to (1) the activity of the selfie taker, (2) people or pets appearing in a user's selfie, and (3) objects and belongings. According to their study, selfie types include the everyday/ordinary selfie, the travel selfie, the hobby selfie, the food selfie, the party/social selfie, the leisure selfie, the love/significant others selfie, the fashion selfie, the beauty selfie, the pet selfie, the fitness selfie, and the commercial brand/objects selfie. Bearing these considerations in mind, the current study intends to examine the types of selfie that are commonly shared by Saudi women and the motivation behind sharing particular types of selfie. It is expected that Saudi women will be seen to share all of the selfie types identified by Kim et al. (2016) except for the love/significant other.

Selfie types have also been identified based on the positioning of the smartphone camera while taking a selfie. A very common type of selfie, which is taken while standing in front of a mirror, is known as the mirror selfie (Tiidenberg, 2015). The ego-shot selfie is another type of selfie that is usually taken with an extended hand (Tiidenberg, 2015). Additionally, Dhir et al. (2016) categorised selfies as either personal selfies or group selfies. Group selfies were usually shared among young females. Carbon (2017) identified the following types of selfie: classic selfies, situation selfies, emotional selfies, optimisation selfies, celebrity selfies, sports selfies, leisure selfies, food selfies, car selfies, mirror selfies, drinks selfies, landmark selfies, outfit selfies, body selfies, purpose selfies, ultimate selfies, daredevil selfies, finger mouthing selfies, selfie-reference selfies, and selfie stick selfies. While he described a car selfie as selfie taken while driving, this study will refer to the car selfie as a selfie taken from the back seat of a car because women were not allowed to drive in Saudi at the time of my fieldwork. Most importantly, my study will examine selfie types that are commonly produced by Saudi females and it will explore their meanings.

Besides identifying selfie types, scholars examined types of selfie viewers. According to Senft and Baym (2015), selfie viewers perceive the authenticity of a posted selfie through: (1) the naturalness of the selfie, (2) whether the image is spontaneous rather than staged, and (3) the selfie looks cropped or filtered, even when presented as it is. With the technological filters and editing options provided, it could be challenging for viewers to decide whether or not the selfie has been edited. The perception of the viewer is an important factor because people change their performance according to the audience. Future research could explore the perceptions of a range of selfie viewers on a set of selfies posted by a single user.

2.7. Representations of Saudi Women

An understanding of how Saudi women nowadays express their identity in selfies calls for an exploration of the representation of Saudi women in visual portraiture and sculpture, in television and advertising, and in contemporary new media.

2.7.1. Islam and the Absence of Visual Representation

Before Islam, female portraits were not popular. However, female goddess statues like Allat-Minerva were popular and were worshipped in the Arabian Peninsula (The Quranic Arabic Corpus, n.d.). The rise of Islam in the seventh century resulted in the absence of women's representation in portraits and sculptures. Islam forbids the representation of people in painting and in sculpture. The prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever makes a (animate) picture will be punished by Allah till he puts life in it, and he will never be able to put life in it." (Sahih Al-Bukhari Hadith 3.428 Narrated by Said bin Abu Al Hasan).

The Islamic view of human portraiture has resulted in the absence of images of important figures like the Prophet Mohammed and famous Muslim scholars and influencers. Because drawing and portraits of living creatures is forbidden in Islam, there is an absence of oil painting portraits and drawings of human figures of both genders in Saudi, and in the wider Islamic world. Islamic scholars have distinguished between animate images and

inanimate images. Islam forbids its followers to draw portraits of people and animals; it permits drawing and sculpting of inanimate images like landscapes, abstract images, and geometric shapes.

Where photography is concerned, contemporary Muslim scholars indicate that it is permissible because photographic images do not rely on imitating God. Additionally, photographic images are necessary as a form of identification such as a passport photograph. However, portraiture of Saudi women is very limited. Figure 2.2 illustrates some portraits of Saudi women, which were displayed in exhibits in 2011, in settings that go back 65 years.



Figure 2.2: Art works from the Hijazi Heritage exhibition, held in 2011. The image on the left displays Saudi women (fully covered in black) when appearing in public in the 1950s. The image on the right is a Saudi bride in an old traditional costume while other women are playing drums and singing at a private female celebration.

2.7.2. Saudi Women and Television

In terms of visual appearances on screen, the history of Saudi women in the media is fairly recent and the literature in this area is limited. Saudi women have only been involved in advertising and in TV programs since 2000. Nassif and Gunter (2008) investigated 164 advertisements showing Saudi women and compared them to advertisements in the UK. Their findings indicated that Saudi women were associated with care products and household cleaning products while Saudi men were mostly associated with beverages and car products. In addition to being involved in advertisements, Saudi women have started to appear on

national TV programs. Although television was introduced to Saudi in 1965, Saudi women only appeared on the Saudi national news channel known as Ekbaryia in 2004.

It is important to note that the conservative nature of Saudi culture imposes certain dress codes on women appearing on television (Al-Makaty, Tubergen, Whitlow & Boyd, 1996; Nassif & Gunter, 2008). These studies indicated that Saudi is a male dominated society where women have to maintain certain standards when appearing in traditional media. Nowadays, some of these issues have changed. For instance, after Sara Attar, a Saudi woman, participated in the 2012 Olympics, four female Saudi athletes went to Rio in 2016 to represent Saudi and were displayed in both TV channels and social media while wearing sport clothes (Paul, 2016). It is worth noting that because TV channels are highly regulated by government, Saudi women are expressing their ideas and identities on social networking platforms.

2.7.3. Saudi Women and New Media

The last twenty years have witnessed numerous positive transformations in Saudi women's lives (Le Renard, 2014) including the engagement of Saudi women in The State Consulting Council in 2013, the establishment of female journalism departments in Saudi universities, allowing Saudi women to become lawyers in 2014, and allowing women to run businesses on their own behalf in 2005. In the past, Saudi women had very little control over their identities. Current social media have provided an opportunity for women to express themselves without male interference.

Accordingly, the current research will cast light on Saudi women's selfie posting experiences in an attempt to understand how cultural factors and power relations influence women's self-portraits on Instagram and Snapchat. For instance, it would be interesting to know whether women decide to post their selfies according to their personal vision or

depending on social norms or both. Overall, any choice women make regarding representing their identity is seen as empowering decision.

Saudi women hold differing opinions about sharing their photos online. The diversity of representations has been illustrated in Al-Saggaf's (2011) ethnographic study that was conducted on a sample of Saudi students in a female university. Subsequently, Guta and Karolak's (2015) recent study explored the correlation between social rules in Saudi and women's experience of building profiles on SNS.

There are three categories that describe Saudi women's photo sharing on SNS as illustrated in Appendix G. The first category of women, which will be the focus of my study, shares current photos and real information with others on SNS (Al-Senaidy et al, 2012). However, not all women in this category choose to have their profile open to the public. According to the study by Al-Senaidy et al. (2012), out of the 78% of participants who shared real photos and names on SNS, 26% stated that they had changed the privacy settings of the platform used according to their preferences.

Some women in the first category post personal photos of themselves wearing the veil (hijab), while others choose to post photos without the veil and while wearing revealing clothes. Their key point in making such decisions is closely related to two things: (1) privacy settings (who has access to the profile?), and (2) the name used in the profile (e.g., their real name vs. a pseudonym). The following quote by a Saudi undergraduate woman, as stated in the study by Guta and Karolak (2015), exemplifies the relationship between having personal photos on Facebook and the selectivity of accepting friend requests:

Well, if certain people add me on Facebook I wouldn't add them because of my pictures, because of the society we live in. Even some of my friends that I am close with here, I wouldn't necessarily accept on Facebook because of the pictures I have (p. 121–122).

In addition to the audience viewing the image, using the real family name of a woman on SNS could constrain women from posting personal photos online or discussing certain topics. In both studies conducted on Saudi females (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015), a number of participants indicated that they avoid using their real and/or family name. A female Saudi participant explains the potential impact on the family of using her real name on SNS “You don’t only represent yourself, but you represent your family...your name is connected to your family” (Guta & Karolak, 2015, p. 120). This idea of posting photos using a fake name as a way of avoiding judgment is debatable in terms of selfie use. In a selfie image, one could easily identify a person from their face. Hence, it might be meaningless to use a fake name while the face is obvious.

The second category of sharing of photos on SNS includes Saudi women who choose to use childhood pictures to represent themselves instead of their current adult photos (Guta & Karolak, 2015). The third category includes women who choose not to post their images on SNS (Guta & Karolak, 2015 p. 122). In such cases, the profile picture is either left empty or the user would add any random picture from the Internet.

As indicated by the second and third categories, there are women who chose not to represent themselves visually on SNS, or to use images from childhood. It would be interesting for future research to explore those categories that are beyond the scope of this study. As a final point, the diversity among Saudi female users in terms of communicating their identity could be perceived in multiple aspects such as the publicity of the profile, the number of accounts on a platform, the appearance of the female user (veiled vs. unveiled), the selection of the name used on the profile, and the audience accessing the account.

2.8. Selfie and the Platforms Used

2.8.1. Platform Vernacular

The platform vernacular refers to how the platform architecture and design influence the content produced, the process of reading the content, and the communicative habits of the users (Gibbs et al., 2014). Platform vernaculars are strongly informed by the affordances of the platform (Pearce et al., 2018). For instance, the anonymous nature of Tumblr's audience allows feminists to address sensitive issues on feminism like activism and rape which could be judged negatively if seen by the Facebook community including family members and friends (Keller, forthcoming). Therefore, this study will explore how the communicative habits and affordances on Snapchat and Instagram may shape the selfie practices of Saudi women. In Table 1, I identified some of the key features of Snapchat and Instagram that I expect will inform selfie behaviour on the different platforms.

Table 2.1: Comparison of Snapchat and Instagram selfie features that influence selfie production.

Features	Snapchat	Instagram
Viewing Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The images posted disappear 24 hours after posting. The viewing time of the image can be modified (1–10) seconds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The images stay permanently in the account unless the user chooses to remove them. The viewing time cannot be controlled.
Add “Likes” & comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A selfie viewer can comment on a selfie but cannot Like a selfie 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A selfie viewer may add a Like or comment on a selfie
Controlling viewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow the viewers to customise easily. Allowing sharing of a selfie with selected users, “snappers”, or selected groups. It is also possible to temporarily prevent certain viewers from viewing selfies posted by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once a follower is accepted, he or she may view any posted image in the account. It is possible to send a selfie as private message or to post it to all followers. It is possible to share a selfie through direct messages but it is not possible to share images

	customising the setting for a temporary block.	with certain groups or to temporarily block followers from viewing a selfie.
Use of filters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative face filters designed for selfie taking were originally introduced by Snapchat. • Snapchat provides face filters, geofilters, occasion filters, time and temperature filters, and filters that change speech speed. 	Instagram only recently provided face filters. At the time of data collection, Instagram did not provide face filters for selfie takers (They were introduced in September 2017).
Notification of viewers	<p>The selfie producer will be notified about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of snappers who viewed the selfie • The names of those who viewed the image • If a viewer took a screenshot of a posted image. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instagram provides notifications of viewers on stories and videos. • Notifications of viewers on standard photos are only available in business Instagram accounts using ‘view insights’ feature, which was not the case of the participants in my study.
Use of Bitmoji Avatar	A snapper may create a Bitmoji that appears while taking a selfie.	The Bitmoji feature is not available, but selfie producers may take a selfie with a Bitmoji on Snapchat and later reproduce it on Instagram.
Privacy setting	Privacy settings allow users to set the account as private or public. In cases where the account is set as a private account, the selfie viewer sends a friend request, which requires the selfie producer’s permission to be added.	

Note 1 of table 2.1: Creating groups on Instagram became available in June 2017. The collection of data for this study ended in January 2017.

Note 2 of table 2.1: There are tips and applications like Casper and ApowerMirror that allow a viewer to save Snapchat photos secretly without being detected.

Note 3 of table 2.1: All participants used private accounts and not business Instagram accounts. For more information on Instagram notification features, see (Super-Jenkins, 2016).

2.8.2. Instagram and Selfies

Instagram is appropriate for examining selfies since earlier studies (Kim et al., 2016; Laird, 2013) have confirmed that photo sharing and posting is a popular activity on this platform. Even though selfie taking and sharing are very common on Snapchat nowadays (Piwek & Joinson, 2015), Instagram is still one of the leading platforms for the selfie phenomenon (Souza et al., 2015). Additionally, it is expected that individuals who take selfies on Snapchat will repost the selfies on Instagram. This is based on the idea that Snapchat offers multiple selfie filters (e.g., makeup, funky, funny, silly, scary, masculine, feminine, and swapping filters) that are only available on Snapchat.

Instagram was created in 2010 and Snapchat was initially released in 2011. It is reasonable to assume that users have invested more time in the earlier app and therefore might wish to maintain their Instagram account. It might also be possible that individuals post different types of selfies on each platform depending on their network of followers. With these possibilities in mind, the current study attempts to understand how Saudi women post and share their selfies on Instagram and Snapchat and the cultural codes that may influence their choices.

2.8.3. Snapchat and Selfies

Snapchat includes features from multiple digital communications like the ability to post to a mass audience as in Facebook, the ability to send private instant messages as in SMS Text messaging, the ability to send audio and visual content to private individuals or groups as in WhatsApp. Additionally, Snapchat allows users to share timed images and to control the viewing time (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Other feature like adding selfie filters, adding location and time filters, and writing on the snapped image are exclusive to the Snapchat application compared to other apps like WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. Snapchat is used for small networks and close relationships (Piwek & Joinson, 2016; Vaterlaus et al., 2016).

On the other hand, Facebook is used with large networks and lacks close relationships (Vitak, 2012). All in all, the hybrid image-text nature of Snapchat might lead to escalating selfie posting and sharing on this application.

There are many reasons that make Snapchat desirable for Saudi women in particular. The privacy and affordances of Snapchat, like allowing the receiver to see the image for a particular duration, in addition to notifying the sender if the picture is viewed by the receiver (Piwek & Joinson, 2016), would suggest that Saudi women's selfie sharing would increase on Snapchat in particular. Additionally, the control and privacy features provided by Snapchat, such as the disappearance of the image after 24 hours, the ability to send public and private selfies easily, the ability to adjust the viewing time of a selfie (1–10 seconds), the ability to know who has viewed the selfie, and the ability to know which snapper took a screenshot of the selfie. These features are exclusive to Snapchat and not available on other platforms like Facebook or Instagram, which explains why selfies may become popular on Snapchat in Saudi. Indeed, Al-Harbi (2018) confirmed that out of the 9,000,000 Saudi Snapchat users, 55% are women.

Applying filters to Snapchat selfies is becoming increasingly popular among people of both genders (Piwek & Joinson, 2016), and Snapchat has been continuously adding new filters that include aspects of typical gender norms such as head bands with roses, applying makeup, moustaches, etc. Since the study will involve selfies posted on Snapchat and Instagram, I asked participants about the filters and editing features for selfies that incorporate aspects of gender and playfulness.

2.9. Conclusion

This thesis is one of the first to address women's experiences of selfie posting in Saudi. In the eye of the media, Saudi women are always seen as oppressed, voiceless, submissive, and uneducated (Mishra 2007; Qutub 2013). The current study is important

because it seeks to find out more about the ways social media give a voice to two marginalised groups, namely women and young adults.

This chapter outlined the theoretical framework of the thesis, the positioning of the thesis, and the literature review of selfie phenomenon. The conceptual framework of my study argues that selfie posting behaviours are informed by interpersonal proximity with viewers, cultural norms, and the platform used. In particular, I argue that backstage selfies are expected to be shared with personal and intimate viewers whereas frontstage selfies will be posted with a public audience in mind. I also suggest that the affordances of Instagram and Snapchat will inform selfie construction on these platforms.

The literature review explored the historical background of self-representation, selfie-posting motivations, selfie patterns related to gender and age, Saudi women's representation, and selfie posting on Instagram and Snapchat. In short, the present thesis attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the selfie phenomenon as a way of communicating the identity of Saudi women. It is expected that this thesis will raise awareness for future research within the area of presentation of women in the new media in the Middle East. The next chapter will present the qualitative methodological design I used to conduct this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1. General Overview of the Research Design

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the thesis. This study used qualitative methods, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, online observation and photo-elicitation interviews, to explore participants' habits of selfie posting experiences. In the evolving field of new media, qualitative research provides insights into how people (users) engage with virtual communications. The qualitative design is also suitable for identifying the influence, if any, of cultural factors on the decision-making process and on the production of selfie images. This study contributes new knowledge to the understanding of cultural, religious, and technological factors that influence how women choose to portray themselves through posted selfies and to whom they give access to view their digital self-portraits. Overall, the qualitative design serves the purpose of providing interpretive understanding of the selfie experience.

A combination of qualitative data collection methods was used to examine the following six research questions (RQs):

1. What motivates Saudi women to take and post selfies?
2. What modes of self-presentation emerge from selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat?
3. How do platform affordances inform selfie production?
4. To what extent are women veiled or unveiled? Do these factors change for women with multiple accounts or varying platforms?
5. How do cultural factors play a role in presenting oneself through selfies?
6. How do Saudi women make decisions about representing themselves through selfies?

These research questions aim to help the understanding of the following matters. The first question focuses on the motivation(s) for taking and posting selfies. The second question investigates whether a user has tendency to present a desirable self rather than a casual looking self through selfie portraiture as claimed by Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory, which originated in offline spaces (see section 2.1). The questions also attempt to investigate if backstage and frontstage performances (Goffman, 1959) occur when sharing selfie contents. The third question investigates how Snapchat and Instagram features including: privacy setting, viewing time, selfie face filter and image sharing options may result in distinctive types of selfies on each platform. The fourth question discusses the association between the platform vernacular (Gibbs et al, 2014), veiling practices, and the publicity of the account. In particular, the question investigates how the technological affordances and architecture of Snapchat and Instagram influence selfie production. The fifth question interrogates how family values and social norms could influence selfie posting on Snapchat and Instagram. Finally, the sixth question outlines factors (e.g., parent's surveillance, judgement of others, meeting expectations, power relations, and gender of the audience) that may influence how Saudi women decide to portray themselves through selfies.

As discussed in the literature review, the conceptual framework of this study frames selfie posting in terms of frontstage/backstage theory (Goffman, 1959) and the concept of a platform vernacular (Gibbs et al., 2014). The interpersonal proximity between the person posting the selfie and the viewers determines the location of posting the selfie either on the frontstage or the backstage the platforms. In other words, the selfie producer adapts what is disclosed and how it is expressed depending on the target audience and the platform used.

3.1.1. Phenomenological Approach

Considering that the research topic is relatively new and has not been addressed from the perspective of Middle Eastern women, I used a qualitative methodology applying a

phenomenological approach for this project. My objective in using a phenomenological approach was to describe the lived experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Husserl and Heidegger developed phenomenology to understand the nature and meaning of an experience in great depth (Davis, Powell & Lachlan, 2013, p. 329). Phenomenologists explore a phenomenon as it actually occurs and on its own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Hence, I selected this approach to explore selfie behaviours produced and shared in daily communication. Moustakas (1994) pointed out that phenomenological research examines a small number of participants through extensive understanding of the phenomenon to develop patterns of meaning. Accordingly, I interviewed a total of 25 Saudi women exploring their selfie taking and sharing behaviours in multiple stages to understand the meanings of selfie practices and selfie posting experiences.

Phenomenology involves the description and interpretation of a phenomenon focusing on what participants have in common (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 49). With this in mind, the analysed data was interpreted considering personal experiences within the context of Saudi culture. Additionally, I developed themes and categories based on patterns occurring among participants to build a broader philosophical understanding of Saudi women's experiences of selfie taking and posting. Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based on the understanding of subjective experiences. In this study, a phenomenological approach was proposed because this study explores the experiences of selfie posting as described by the participants.

3.1.2. The Rationale for Using Multi-method Design

In this qualitative study, I used four data collection methods: focus groups (1 week), in-depth interviews (6 months), observation (8.5 months), and photo-elicitation interviews (4 months). My adoption of multiple qualitative methods and an interpretive paradigm was guided by the objective of the study, which is to understand the behaviours of Saudi women

when they post selfies on Snapchat and Instagram. In addition, different sources of data were used to triangulate and enhance the accuracy of the study.

Triangulation is the process of combining evidence from multiple sources for data validation (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation is useful in ensuring that all relevant perspectives are reflected in the study (Davis et al., 2013, p. 192). I used a triangulation type known as data source triangulation, which uses multiple interviews, multiple field sites, and different types of data sources (Davis et al., 2013, p. 141). I included focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, and photo-elicitation interviews. In addition, I examined the participants' perceptions of selfie posting in offline settings and their selfie posting activities in online settings. Subsections 3.3.2, 3.4.2, 3.5.2 and 3.6.2 will address the association between each method and other methods showing how they were built up sequentially to create an original methodological design.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the order of techniques, the objective of each phase and the number of participants in each phase. Next, I will discuss the research design of the study.

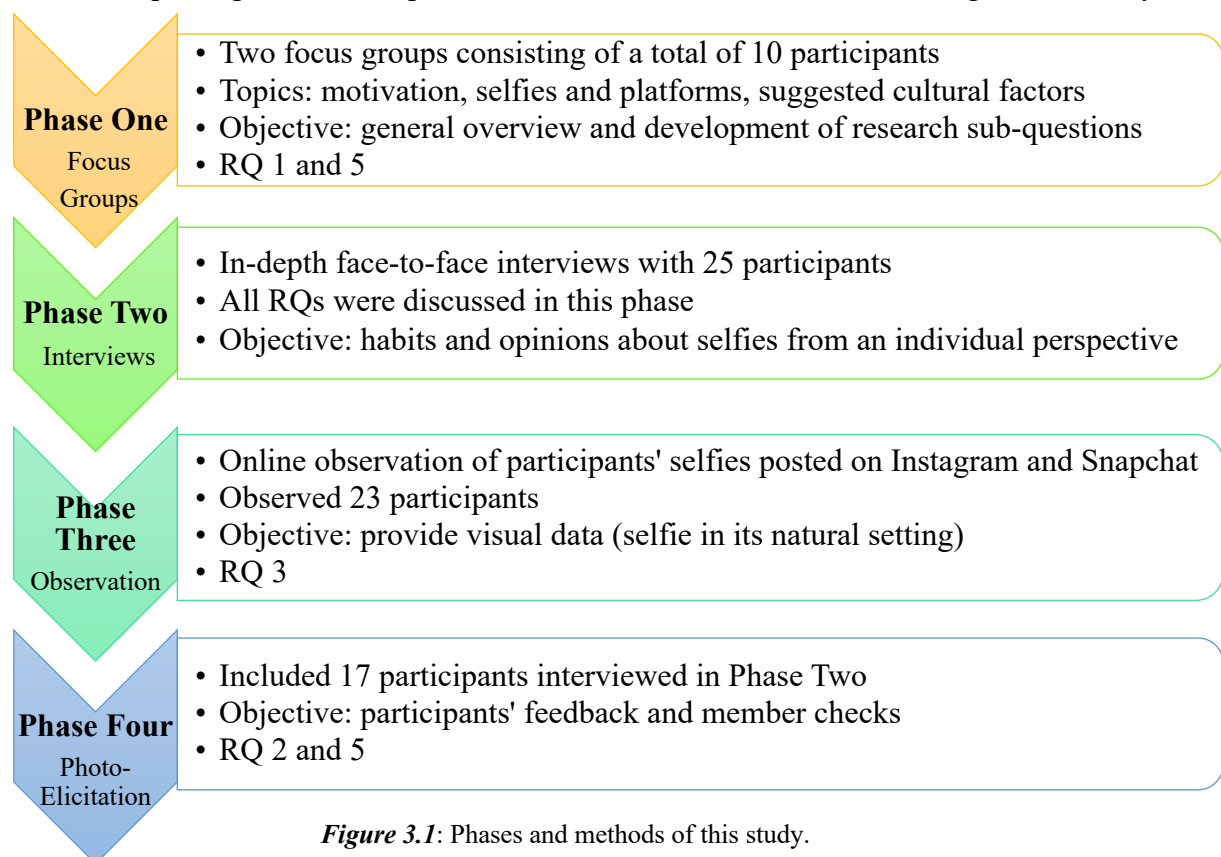


Figure 3.1: Phases and methods of this study.

3.2. Data Collection and Sampling

I collected the data for all the phases of this project over about a year, from 25 April 2016 to 4 May 2017. Given the cultural sensitivity in relation to female images in Saudi, the participants were recruited using snowball and network sampling. The information sheet and the consent form indicated how the data would be treated and who could access the participants' SNS accounts.

The focus group (Phase One) was the primary form of data collection, while individual face-to-face interviews (Phase Two) were conducted to identify unique information about selfie posting behaviours on the selected platforms and the cultural factors that might influence selfie posting behaviours. The focus groups and in-depth interviews lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and were audio recorded. All discussions were conducted in Arabic, transcribed, and then translated into English.

Textual data were collected from the focus groups and face-to-face interviews. Visual data were collected from participants' Snapchat and Instagram profiles during the online observation. Participant's selfies were collected between 3 May 2016 and 11 January 2017. A total of 340 selfies were collected from participants' Snapchat and Instagram profiles. I collected the selfies based on a variety of contexts, such as people included (no other person, girlfriends, family members, co-workers, pets), places where selfie was taken (car, in front of a mirror, at a private house or party, in a public place such as a café), type of clothing (e.g., veiled and unveiled selfies), the season (Ramadan, Eid, Christmas, Halloween, holiday trip, working day), activity (hookah, studying, relaxing on a bed, beach, dancing, applying makeup, standing around at an event with friends, dining with family, exercising, diving, at a wedding, walking in a botanic garden, celebrating an event, promoting a product).

The collection of data that included participants' personal images had to be treated with caution. Saudi women are more likely to allow a female participant to look at their

personal images. In fact, female participants may refuse to show their images to a male researcher. Al-Saggaf (2015) reported that if a male researcher were to interview Saudi women, it would lead to fewer participants and more limited information.

3.2.1. Snowball and Network Sampling

My study used a combination of network sampling and snowball sampling procedures. Network sampling is a sampling method that uses social, workplace, or community networks for locating and recruiting the study participants (Davis et al., 2013, p. 164). Snowball sampling is a type of sample in which a researcher identifies study participants who fit the criteria of the study, asks them to make referrals for other participants who in turn suggest other participants and so on (Tracy, 2013, p. 136). Although some may claim that snowball sampling is a weak form of sampling, studies have confirmed the validity of this sampling in qualitative research. Balter and Brunet (2012) indicated that snowball sampling is an effective technique in descriptive research that requires a high degree of trust. Indeed, their Facebook study confirmed that virtual snowball sampling can increase the size of a sample compared to traditional sampling.

Network and snowball sampling are useful when researching sensitive matters (Browne, 2005). Where this study is concerned, it would be expected that Saudi women would refuse to participate in the study when approached by a stranger asking for access to their personal photos. Sheu, Wei, Chen, Yu, and Tang (2009) found that snowball sampling was an effective technique to encourage nurses to disclose information about medical errors. The rationale for adopting these types of sampling was the cultural sensitivity that exists regarding the viewing and sharing of photos taken by and of Saudi women. Participants are more likely to trust the researcher and to participate in the research when introduced to the project by someone familiar (my female acquaintances in this case) or someone who has already participated in the project.

This study had very specific sample requirements: Saudi women who have Instagram or Snapchat accounts on which they regularly (at least three per week) post selfies and who are willing to allow the researcher to access these accounts. Therefore, networking sampling was appropriate to approach such a narrow selection of participants. Hence, the researcher's personal networks, including relatives, co-workers, friends, reading club members, and self-development trainees, used their connections and positions to recruit participants. The snowball sampling was used for a secondary sampling in which initial recruits were used to recruit further participants. Using snowball sampling, I was able to approach and interview only two participants. Thus, network sampling was a more useful strategy as Saudi women were more willing to participate when approached by someone they know and trust rather than a participant who took a part in a research project and suggest participating in the study.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using this non-random form of sampling. Network and snowball sampling make recruiting easier for such a potentially sensitive research study compared to other random types of sampling. However, the downside of using network sampling is that it can lead to one type of group or demographic, as participants are likely to recommend others like themselves (Tracy, 2013). This limitation was witnessed in this study as my sample consisted of a highly educated and privileged cohort. As exemplified in Appendix B (in-depth interview participants), network sampling factored in the issue of class, as the sample consisted of educated women from the middle or high economic classes. In addition, most participants in Phases Two, Three, and Four were from the western region of Saudi. Therefore, future selfie research should consider other groups, such as low-income women, children, men, or a cross-regional sample. As a result of the sampling techniques used and the small-scale nature of this research, the findings must be read as indicative and they are not meant to provide broad generalisations.

In terms of network sampling, I asked my female acquaintances to kindly forward the project information sheet (using email, WhatsApp, and a paper version), which included an overview of the project, the involvement and rights of the participants, and the researcher's contact information, to their network of Saudi women, all of whom were over 18 years old and used selfies on SNS. My acquaintances asked the participants to contact me directly by email or phone for further questions and to make arrangements to meet. I requested the contact information for those willing to participate in the project to follow up with them and to arrange interview locations and times. I recruited 23 participants using network sampling.

Where the snowball sampling procedure was concerned, I had copies of the information sheet, including my contact information, with me during the interviews (Phase Two). At the end of each interview, I asked participants to kindly pass the copies of the information sheet to friends, family members, or colleagues who might be interested in participating in the study. I also sent an electronic version with an invitation message to participants to remind them to pass it on to others. This was done using WhatsApp, as it easier for participants to forward material to their contacts. Two participants were recruited using snowball sampling, while most participants were recruited using network sampling.

3.3. Phase One: Focus Groups

3.3.1. Overview of Focus Groups

A focus group is a type of interview that engages participants in an interactive dialogue about a particular issue (Tracy, 2013, p. 167). It may consist of brainstorming sessions, formal group discussions, or informal group discussions (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015, p. 174). The focus group method falls under the interpretive and the critical paradigm. This method is widely used in mass communication and social science research (Berg, 2009; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). It is often used to identify general background information and to generate insights about a particular topic. Bearing these attributes in mind, the discussion

attempted to identify key ideas about cultural norms and technological trends which might shape selfie construction in online spaces.

A focus group interview typically includes three to 12 participants (Tracy, 2013). Carey (1994) recommends including at least six participants and a maximum of 12 participants. In his view, including less than six participants is less likely to generate the “group effect”. The group effect is a transformative or cascading effect in which a participant’s expression of an idea motivates another participant to talk about the same issue (Tracy, 2013, p. 167). However, a group with more than 12 participants may be difficult to manage.

There are benefits and drawbacks to using a focus group as a research method. In terms of benefits, a focus group mirrors the social interchange between participants in a naturalistic way. It also provides a voice to groups that may be marginalised (Davis et al., 2013). Considering that this study attempts to understand Saudi women’s perception of selfie posting in a male dominated society, a focus group allows women to speak their mind as to what they think and how they feel about posting selfies that reflect who they really are. In addition, it makes it possible to interview a large number of participants within a short time (Tracy, 2013). Most importantly, it is a useful form of collecting preliminary data in phenomenological research. In other words, it generates the participants’ thoughts and beliefs about an experience, and this could be used in other stages of the research. Finally, a focus group provides an understanding of the group dynamics and communication.

In terms of focus group drawbacks, the presence of others may lead to the expression of socially desirable opinions to avoid being judged (Acocella, 2012). To overcome this limitation, I conducted individual in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation interviews in Phases Two and Four. A focus group is not as in-depth as other forms of collecting data, such as one-to-one interviews. Some participants may hesitate to express their feelings or share

personal stories in front of others. Indeed, Bailey (1982) indicated that sometimes there can be a convergence of opinions towards the opinion of the majority of participants. In addition, controlling the discussion could be a challenge as participants may move away from the intended topics (Franz, 2011). It is also the case that introverted participants may hesitate to speak when others control the discussion.

For the above reasons, I selected focus groups as an initial step for the project to generate a wealth of information that could be used in developing the sub-questions that stem from the main research questions. As focus groups are valuable for producing insights from group interactions (Tracy, 2013), the objective of the focus groups in this study was to learn about popular selfie posting platforms and trends, as well as to understand to what extent Saudi women view this experience in relation to cultural norms.

The focus group discussion concerned understanding how Saudi women may have multiple viewpoints and varying preferences in presenting themselves online using digital self-portraits. For instance, open-ended questions such as “What motivates you to take a selfie?” produced a variety of answers as each participant had her own reasons. Overall, the focus group outlined and discussed what women think of selfie posting and selfie taking, and this impacted the research design in a number of ways. For example, from the focus groups I discovered that the two most common selfie platforms at the time were Snapchat and Instagram and, as a result, these platforms became the focus of this study. As boyd and Ellison (2007) explained, on a continuing basis, SNS users are attracted to, and then lose interest in, platforms because of factors like their network of friends and technical difficulties. Therefore, a pilot study is a crucial research strategy in social media studies, because SNS preferences of users change rapidly.

3.3.2. Focus Groups and Other Phases

Although all of the methods used were aimed at understanding the experience of selfie posting, each method had its own strengths and specific objectives. Conducting the focus groups in Phase One of the study was useful for directing the research focus prior to the individual interviews in Phase Two. While the focus groups highlighted general ideas related to selfie posting and Saudi culture, the individual in-depth interviews explored matters such as the wish to look desirable, the technical face filters applied to selfies, and the relational closeness to persons viewing the selfies. In other words, the focus group provided a general idea of the participants' perceptions whereas the individual interviews emphasised personal habits and opinions related to selfie posting.

In addition, the focus group discussions identified key social factors related to selfie posting that were used to develop the in-depth interview sub-questions. This explains why a focus group was chosen as the initial research move. The focus group findings were used to cast light on RQ 1, "What motivates Saudi women to take and share selfies?", and RQ 5, "How do cultural factors play a role in presenting oneself through selfies?"

3.3.3. Focus Groups Participants

The current study involved two focus groups. The first focus group took place on 25 April 2016 and consisted of six Saudi women. The second focus group took place on 29 April 2016 and consisted of four Saudi women. Participants ranged between 23 and 43 years old. Appendix A illustrates the sample information, the location of the interview, and notes of the discussions. The focus group samples came from a diverse regional background, including Tabuk (northern region), Kubar (eastern region), Riyadh (middle region), Jeddah, and Taif (western region). The first focus group consisted of students and staff affiliated with King Abdulaziz University (KAU), which is one of Saudi Arabia's leading universities. Students from all Saudi regions move to Jeddah to complete their academic degrees there. The

members of the second focus group came from the western region, but its members were at different levels in terms of their professional careers. The type of sampling, namely network sampling, determined the selection of the sample used in this study. In this sampling strategy, the researcher recruited participants through her social, professional, or community network (Davis et al., 2013, p. 164). (See 3.2).

3.3.4. The Procedure of Focus Groups

A pilot study was conducted to test aspects of the research design (Baker, 1994, p. 182). Two focus groups were convened for piloting purposes. I used focus groups as an initial pilot study to explore a wide range of ideas about how Saudi women post selfies and what are the preferred platforms for posting selfies. According to Melander's (2010) study, the focus group is an effective method for understanding users' interactions with SNS.

The two focus groups each lasted approximately 40–60 minutes. In line with the ethics protocol of the University of Leicester, all participants signed an informed consent form before taking part. The discussions were conducted in Arabic, recorded, then transcribed and translated into English. I had planned a discussion guide in advance and that shaped the conversation. As Tracy (2013) advised, having a discussion guide helps the researcher to address topics naturally as they arise during the focus group discussion. Although there was a discussion guide, participants were given the opportunity to lead the discussion during the focus groups, to expand on important relevant issues, and to talk about examples and stories related to their selfie posting experience.

The focus group discussions mainly concentrated on the following matters: (1) the experience and motivations behind selfie taking and sharing on SNS, (2) selfie posting on Snapchat and Instagram platforms, and (3) the cultural factors involved in presenting oneself through selfies. The focus group discussions were beneficial as the dialogue helped to develop the sub-questions of RQs 1 and 5.

3.4. Phase Two: In-Depth Interview

3.4.1. Overview of the In-depth Interviews

I chose the interview method for my study because it allows participants to provide historical and cultural information (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). The in-depth interview is a qualitative method in which participants exchange ideas, meaning, and narratives with the researcher (Davis et al., 2013). Furthermore, interviews enable the researcher to develop an understanding of new phenomena, such as selfies. Qualitative interviewing is a conversational practice that gives attention to the phenomenological positions of humans (Brinkmann, 2013). The current study seeks to understand individuals' experiences as they relate to social norms. For this reason, I selected qualitative interviewing because it allows participants to express themselves using their own terms rather than numeric data.

Qualitative interviews have benefits and drawbacks. In-depth interviews provide rich descriptive information about the phenomenon being researched, allowing participants to describe their worlds and to construct their own narratives (Tracy, 2013, p. 354). Therefore, the in-depth interview is a way to connect with a broader community and to become knowledgeable about topics from personal perspectives (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). In addition, the interview design is built on inductive reasoning (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006), which relies on specific observations to make general conclusions. Consequently, it would be problematic to generalise the research findings due to differences among populations. Furthermore, interview transcribing and translating is a time-consuming process.

Previous selfie studies have used interviews as a method of investigation. For instance, Milcot (2015) focused on whether the selfie form of communication is reflective of the real self. She used three rounds of interviews over a three-month period with six participants. Moreover, a relatively recent study (Sung et al., 2016) applied in-depth interviews to understand motivations for posting selfies, after which a quantitative selfie scale

was generated from the interview transcripts. The interviews revealed that attention seeking, communication, archiving, and entertainment are the main motivations for selfie posting (Sung et al., 2016).

3.4.2. Interview and Other Phases

In Phases Two and Four of the study, I conducted in-depth interviews with 25 participants. While the focus groups provided a broad understanding of the selfie phenomenon in Saudi culture, the in-depth interviews explored matters such as the wish to look desirable, the technical face filters applied to selfies, and the relational closeness with the person viewing the selfie. Also, the individual face-to-face in-depth interviews allowed participants to share personal stories about selfie posting, to show examples of their selfies using their mobile phones, and to relate family values to selfie posting behaviours. It is possible that participants might be reluctant to disclose these relevant stories and examples during focus groups, which is why I raised them in Phase Two. I conducted the in-depth interviews to answer all of the research questions and sub-questions (Appendix E). The experiences and narratives of the participants guided the follow-up questions and the amount of time spent focusing on particular research questions.

The in-depth interview was one of the most insightful methods for collecting data and understanding the experience of selfie posting in this study. A qualitative interview helps to establish rapport with the participants and to learn from their experiences (Davis et al., 2013, p. 354). The relationship built with participants interviewed in this phase extended to Phases Three and Four of the project. Phase Two was the most challenging in terms of participant recruitment, as it took time to develop rapport with participants and to secure their commitment to the study. For instance, I had to send a number of emails, SMS message reminders, and WhatsApp messages to participants explaining the objective of the project and arranging meetings. It took six months to recruit participants and to gain their trust and

collect the data for the in-depth interview phase. In Phase Two, the face-to-face interview was an opportunity to get to know the participants and their feelings and beliefs about selfies. The subsequent observation phase allowed the researcher to view how the feelings and beliefs of the participants are communicated in a visual way on Snapchat and Instagram. After Phase Three, there were some participants who did wish to be involved in the photo-elicitation interview and who did not respond to my efforts to reach them. The final photo-elicitation interview gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on the collected selfies and to explain how social norms may have influenced the images.

The in-depth interview was followed by online observation in Phase Three, discussed in section 3.5. While the interview provided data in the form of conversation and texts, the observation provided visual data. Observing selfies posted on social media platforms provided insights into emotions, contexts, contents, places, face filters, people included, and appearance. For instance, listening to a participant say “the main reason for posting selfies is to make others laugh” when examining a selfie in which she changes her eyes or adds a face filter so that there are worms all over her face, provides a comprehensive picture of the participant’s experience. It seems evident that it would be challenging to understand or imagine what participants mean when describing an online experience in interviews without observing such online interactions.

In Phase Four of this project, semi-structured interviews were used as part of the photo-elicitation process, discussed in section 3.6. The objective of the first round of in-depth interviews (Phase Two) was to get to know the participants, to inform the participants about their rights, to provide detailed information about the research, to obtain consent, ask the participant about her username on Instagram/Snapchat, and to acquire a general understanding of the participant’s experience of selfie-posting. In contrast, the second interviews in Phase Four, which took place after approximately four months of online

observation, discussed specific selfie images posted by the participants. During the time between the two interviews, the researcher observed the participant's selfie behaviours, interactions, and related activities.

3.4.3. Participants of the In-depth Interviews

In Phase Two, I conducted face-to-face interviews with 25 Saudi females who have Instagram/Snapchat accounts and who regularly post selfies to them. There were two rounds of interviews. Participants were first interviewed in Phase Two of the study and they were interviewed again during the photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four). Out of 25 participants, 17 participants were re-interviewed for the photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four). Some participants dropped out of the final interviews in Phase Four because they were busy with exams and they had other priorities. As illustrated in Appendix B, participants in this phase were aged between 18 and 57 years. In terms of occupations, participants held different positions, including undergraduate student, executive manager, dentist, nurse, photographer, graduate and doctoral students, academic lecturer, retired, administrator, and unemployed. As for social status, the participants were single, married, engaged, divorced, previously engaged, or married but living apart from their spouse. The sample included participants with middle or high economic status. Selfies are mostly produced and shared via smartphones. It is to be expected that individuals with low-income status would not be able to afford a smartphone. Participants in this phase came from three cities in Saudi: Jeddah, Mecca, and Riyadh. Most participants were from the western region, as the study was conducted in the city of Jeddah.

Two factors influenced the selection of the highly educated participants, who were middle class at a minimum. Firstly, higher education in a public university is generally non-fee paying, which means students from any economic class, including low-income groups, can enrol in a public university. This means that anyone with a high school certificate can earn a bachelor's degree. However, not everyone can afford to buy a smart phone. Most

importantly, using network sampling meant that the researcher had to use her network of colleagues, relatives, and friends, who in turn used their connections and power to recruit participants. Eventually, the sample requirements and the type of sampling led to this narrow sample. As indicated in the information sheet, participants considered for the study should have Instagram or Snapchat accounts and post selfies, all of which require a smartphone. Future research should acknowledge this limitation in the sample by examining other groups, like Saudi men, young girls, and lower-income participants.

3.4.4. In-depth Interviews Instrumentation

The in-depth interviews addressed all of the main research questions through specific sets of questions. The interview included open-ended questions to elicit opinions from participants about their experiences of selfie posting. As illustrated in Appendix E, sub-questions were developed to explore the six main research questions. In total, there were 58 questions: six main research questions and 52 sub-questions. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of open-ended questions and allowing the opportunity to ask follow-up questions when participants talked about issues that were interesting and relevant to selfie posting. The order of the questions depended on the flow of the conversation.

Open-ended questions focused on the general experience of selfie taking, such as “When taking a selfie, what is the experience like?”, “What interests you about selfie communications?”, and “How often do you take selfies?”. Questions specific to Saudi culture were also used in this study, such as “Do you post veiled and unveiled selfies? When and why?”, “How might cultural norms relate to your selfie behaviours, if at all?”, and “How might the inclusion/exclusion of certain individuals like male guardians influence your self-expression through selfies?”

In the interviews, I asked participants questions specific to posting selfies on multiple social media platforms, such as “How might your posted selfie on Snapchat differ from

selfies that are posted on Instagram?” and “How might the social media platform inform your selfie appearance and content?”. Individual interviews provided more details about the role of the platform and the technical features on the selfies posted. Some participants showed me some of their posted selfies using their mobile phones. As was the case with the focus groups, the interviews were conducted in Arabic, transcribed, and then translated into English.

3.4.5.Procedure of In-depth Interviews

I conducted the in-depth interviews between 3 May 2016 and 7 November 2016. All in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face to build rapport with participants and to obtain their consent to participate. At the beginning of the interview, I explained the interview process to the participants, gave them the information sheet, took their demographic information, and notified them that the audio recording was about to start. Participants were given the choice of doing the interview in their native language or in English. The interview questions, consent form, and information sheet were available in English and Arabic. All interviewees preferred to conduct the interview in Arabic. Two interviewees chose to sign the English language version of the consent form while 23 participants signed the Arabic language version. The interviews lasted between 35 and 120 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded. I transcribed them and I translated a total of 27 hours of interview material into English.

The interviews in Phase Two took place at a convenient and comfortable location for the participants, such as their home. Other interviews were conducted in a public place, like a café, university campus, shopping mall, or office at their place of work. Regardless of the interview location, informed consent was ensured and a signed consent form was obtained from all participants. A copy of the information sheet was also given to participants. Before the interview started, data collection, data usage, and participants’ rights were explained.

At the end of each interview, I asked the participants about their Instagram/ Snapchat accounts. Then, I sent each participant a follow-up request from the Instagram account, which was set up for this selfie research study, and I asked the participants to accept my request. This Instagram account includes electronic versions of the information sheet in English and Arabic. As for participants posting selfies on Snapchat, I added their account either using the participant's username or Snapcode.⁵ I also asked participants to include their preferred contact information to arrange the photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four).

3.5.Phase Three: Online Observation

3.5.1.Overview of Online Observation

Observation is a qualitative method used to gain insight into participants' motivations, emotions and behaviours while completing daily actions (Davis et al., 2013, p. 351). Conducting observation is sometimes referred to as fieldwork when applied in a natural setting. Online observation is based around virtual spaces, sites and platforms, such as chat rooms, blogs, forums, and SNS (Hine, 2005). As Hammersley and Atkinson explained (1995), online observation examines how individuals construct meanings and reconstruct connotations when using the Internet. Therefore, I used online observation to understand how women represent themselves through selfies and what contexts and content are conveyed in their posted selfies on Instagram and Snapchat. During the observations, I was a complete observer (Gold, 1958). I did not interact with the selfies posted by the participants nor did I provide feedback, comments, or likes.

⁵ A Snapcode is a unique black dots pattern surrounding the ghost icon on a Snapchat profile. A Snapcode is like an RQ code except that it is associated with a Snapchat account. To add someone using a Snapcode, I would take a picture of the other person's Snapcode. There are multiple ways of adding users on Snapchat, like adding people from a contact list or nearby friends.

The online observation supports the purpose of exploring the social phenomena of selfie postings for several reasons. Firstly, online observation has the ability to explore phenomena that occur in virtual settings and in offline settings (Benetio-Montagut, 2011). In other words, during this phase I was a silent observer viewing selfies posted online without interacting with the producers. This might allow the participants to interact more spontaneously and openly compared to a situation where the researcher is located in the same physical space.

Secondly, trying to understand selfie presentation using methods like self-reported questionnaires or interviews alone could lead to partial or limited results. The phenomenon being explored, selfie posting by Saudi women, takes place on social media. Therefore, exploring the interaction in its original environment and focusing on related details like veiling practices, comments on selfies, and appearance should provide a holistic understanding of the selfie posting phenomenon. The rationale for conducting interviews and online observation together is linked to the idea articulated by the anthropologist Margret Mead: “What people say, what people do, and what people say they do are entirely different things” (cited in Maxwell, 2007, p.201). Accordingly, I observed the posted selfies online and interviewed the participants afterwards to allow them to reflect on the images. Observation also enables the researcher to explore the participant’s selfie interactions in a natural environment without relying solely on their narrative accounts or experiences.

Some earlier studies used observation to investigate social media interactions. Al-Saggaf (2015) used both offline and online observation to explore Saudi women’s identity construction on Facebook. While the online observation was done by looking at the Facebook platform, the offline observation took place at the participants’ houses or in a café. In a manner that is similar to Al-Saggaf’s (2015) study, this study conducts online observation

along with a qualitative interview to gain insights about self-presentation on Snapchat and Instagram.

There are several advantages and limitations when applying observation in social research. Observation could be useful when exploring matters that could be sensitive or uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). Observation also is a useful method when observing a small group, as it enables the observer to compare and contrast what is observed (Tracy, 2013, p. 113). In terms of limitations, a key one is that participants may perceive the researcher as an intrusion (Creswell, 2009). Such a perception could lead to managing their actions on social media, enhancing their presentation, or excluding the researcher from viewing certain posts or images. This could be a limitation even though I am using online observation, which is not expected to create the same feeling of intrusion as face-to-face observation. In the interview in Phase Two, I tried to overcome this potential limitation by asking participants to discuss the selfies they capture and decide not to share and also their reasons for blocking viewers.

There are interrelated terms for observation taking place in virtual settings such as netnography and visual ethnography (Kozinets, 2015; Pink, 2013). Netnography uses mobile data and online sources to provide ethnographic understanding of online social experiences. It is based on participation and it requires the netnographer (researcher) to reach out to the participants online, to reflect and connect with them (Kozinets, 2015, p. 67). As netnography is a participant observation research method, this was not an appropriate method for this study as its aim was to observe participants online without interacting with them. Visual ethnography also focuses on visual content and is guided by the ethnographic approach. Visual ethnography is a practice that uses the Internet, hypermedia, motion pictures, photographs, or any visual source to explore a particular culture (Pink, 2013). Like netnography, visual ethnography is usually informed by the participant observer type of

observation (Pink, 2013, p. 6).

Netnography and visual ethnography are not suitable observation practices for this study for the following reasons. Firstly, my selfie study is guided by a phenomenological approach, not an ethnographical approach, because it emphasises the experience of selfie posting as opposed to understanding the Saudi culture through selfie-posting. Secondly, the observation conducted in this study is a completely selective observation rather than a participant observation. In other words, the researcher does not interact with the participants while observing their online profiles.

3.5.2. Observation and Other Phases

The online observation phase was conducted after interviewing participants (Phase Two) and was later followed by a photo-elicitation interview. In other words, participants interviewed in Phase Two were also involved in Phases Three and Four of the study. The total period of online observation lasted for 8 months.

The in-depth interview and online observation were interrelated but each had its own objective. While the interview in Phase Two provided data in the form of text, the observation provided visual data. Observing selfies posted on social media platforms provided insights on emotions, context, contents, places, face filters, people included, and appearance. I used the observation method to answer RQ 3, “What are the different types of selfie presentations of Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat?”. Observing the posted selfies over a period of four months provided a sense of the varying looks, social contexts and overall lifestyles expressed. Thus, observation was an opportunity to understand how selfies are used in the daily life of Saudi women.

The photo-elicitation interview depended on the online observation. In the online observation phase, I outlined the selfie types, frequency of posting, and cultural aspects included in selfies. In other words, the observation reflected snapshots of the participants’

lifestyles. Additionally, the photo-elicitation interview allowed participants to reflect on the context and memories of the selfies posted. All in all, the online observation provided the content—participants’ selfies—to be discussed in the photo-elicitation interviews.

3.5.3. Participants on Instagram and Snapchat

After sending friend requests to the participants’ Snapchat and Instagram accounts, the online observation period began. In this phase, I observed a total of 23 participants. As illustrated Appendix C, three participants (numbers 4, 14, and 16) were excluded from the final phase because of the lack of posted selfies such as only posting one or two selfies during the observation period or not accepting my friend request, which prevented me from accessing their account. I tried to contact those who did not accept my request using a WhatsApp message but they did not reply.

All 23 participants were Saudi women who were interviewed previously in Phase Two. In terms of the platform used, four participants preferred posting their selfies on Instagram, while 12 participants preferred using Snapchat to post selfies. Nine participants posted selfies on both Snapchat and Instagram. According to Al-Harbi (2018), this preference for using Snapchat over other SNS like Instagram could stem from the exclusive features provided by Snapchat, like viewing the selfie for a limited time, notifying the user if a viewer took a screenshot, and providing face filters to attract selfie takers.

Instagram:

Instagram is a social media platform for which online users produce the content themselves (Fatani & Suyadnya, 2015, p.1090). Instagram provides features such as posting images, collaging images into a single layout, “*Liking*” an image, sending direct messages, posting *status updates* and *check-ins*, adding captions to images and applying face filters to

selfies.⁶ I will be using the term Instagram selfies to refer to selfies posted on Instagram to differentiate them from Snapchat selfies, the term used for selfies posted on Snapchat.

Snapchat:

Snapchat is exclusively a smartphone App that is time-limited and provides instant messaging services (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Snapchat users may add 32 characters of text to a photo or create a finger drawn doodle on the image before posting it. Compared to other instant messaging services, it was found that Snapchat is mainly used for selfie producing and sharing (Piwek & Joinson, 2016). Snapchat indicated that the cities of Jeddah and Riyadh top the worldwide list for daily usage of Snapchat (Saudi Gazette, 2018) and that there are 8.2 million users in Saudi Arabia (Radcliffe & Lam, 2017).

3.5.4.Procedure of the Online Observation

I conducted the online observation between 3 May 2016 and 11 January 2017. The type of observation employed in this phase is known as complete selective observation. During this phase, the researcher was a complete observer (Gold, 1958). This means that I did not participate in posting selfies with participants. However, the observation included taking screenshots of relevant data, like selfies posted on Snapchat and Instagram accounts. The observation was focused on selfie posting activities while ignoring other types of posts, like images of places, people not including the participants, and anything not identified as selfies. This type of observation, in which a researcher concentrates on certain activities based on other analysis or interviews, is known as selective observation (Davis et al., 2013, p. 352).

⁶ This is a new feature which was provided after I finished my fieldwork.

In the face-to-face interview (Phase Two), participants signed a consent form indicating they would be willing to be considered for participation in Phases Three and Four of the project, which would include observing their Instagram/Snapchat accounts and meeting for another interview to discuss particular selfies. The consent form also stated that participation in the project consisted of two interviews and online observation. All participants interviewed in Phase Two agreed to be involved in the two other phases of the project. Hence, in the first interview, participants were asked to reveal their usernames on Instagram and Snapchat. Accordingly, I sent a friend request from my SELFIE-RESEARCH Instagram account and/or Snapchat account. I asked the participants to kindly accept the friend request so that I could access the participants' profile and view their posted selfies. Once this process was complete, the online observation took place.

After accessing a participant's Instagram/Snapchat account, I began observing each account continuously over a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 4 months. While observing participants' Instagram/Snapchat accounts, I took notes about the posted selfies for each participant. I did not observe selfie postings while in the same location as the participants. Instead, the observation was conducted while I was at my home or office. This design allowed the participants to act in a more flexible way and to post their images as part of their daily routine. The participants were aware that I was observing their account, because I had obtained their consent and they had accepted my Instagram/Snapchat friend request. Participants also were notified that I took screenshots and viewed their selfies on Snapchat.⁷

During the online observation, I focused on the following elements in selfies posted by participants: the user's profile biography, events, Instagram/Snapchat filters, collaged

⁷ This feature is provided by the Snapchat application. A person who posts an image on Snapchat will receive notification of users who view it and of users who take a screenshot of it.

images, caption and image integration, facial expression, context, number of selfies taken per week, number of friends (followers), number of followers, comments on a selfie, number of likes on a selfie, participant's response to others' comments and likes on their selfie, demographic information associated with the selfie, username, indications about family and social life, appearance in selfies, and face filters. When it came to documenting the data, I took screenshots of participants' selfies, especially as Snapchat images expire 24 hours after posting. The next step was to upload participants' selfies to a Dropbox folder for each participant. A total of 340 selfies were collected from participants' accounts.

The observing researcher is expected to be sensitive towards her research participants (Benetio-Montagut, 2011) and knowledgeable of the cultural norms and social expectations. Accordingly, I took field notes, which are records of meaningful things that occurred throughout the observation process (Davis et al., 2013, p. 352). Field notes were useful for the analysis of data. In addition, the field notes facilitated the photo-elicitation interview conversation and the framing of particular questions depending on the selfies observed. These notes were usually archived in SuperNote, with notes recorded from the in-depth interview. At the end of the observation period, participants were contacted for the second round of interviews (photo-elicitation, Phase Four), which was aimed at understanding the participants' reflections on their posted selfies.

As Tracy (2013, p. 112) noted, researchers rely heavily on their own interpretation of what has been observed. To overcome this limitation, the online observation was followed by the photo-elicitation interview to obtain participants' reflections on the data that had been gathered. This research strategy aimed to create a balance between researcher interpretation and participant feedback. The next section discusses the photo-elicitation interview rationale and process.

3.6. Phase Four: Photo-Elicitation Interview

3.6.1. Overview of the Photo-elicitation

After finishing the online observation period, I contacted participants for a second round of interviews (photo-elicitation interview) in Phase Four. Photo-elicitation is a visual method designed to analyse photography, and it is based on the idea of incorporating photos into research interviews (Rose, 2012, p. 304). It is a useful method when aiming to understand how participants perceive their sense of self or examine the meaning of their behaviour (Wright, 2016, p. 154). This method seems appropriate as it allows participants to reflect on their own selfies during the interviews and the project attempts to explore the experience of self-photography (selfies).

Photo-elicitation is widely used across different disciplines. Fatani and Suyadnya (2015) applied photo-elicitation to examine how people use Instagram to create a tourism destination brand. Their study found that Instagram has become a new channel for promoting tourism in Indonesia, as users post attractive photos on this app to attract others to Malang and Bali. Interestingly, Pink (2007, 2009) used photo-elicitation to understand participants' sensory engagement with the environment. Participants were given video cameras to film their journey and to reflect on it later. Holliday (2004) used video dairies of participants during photo-elicitation interviews to answer questions of identity and visual appearance.

Warfield (2016) used the photo-elicitation interview to examine selfies and discursive practices on feminine beauty standards. However, she examined selfies that were either taken during the interview or earlier selfies saved on the participants' devices. Therefore, the present study is the first to use the photo-elicitation method to examine selfies combined with online observation. Photo-elicitation can be very productive as it provides insightful accounts of participants' lives (Rose, 2012, p. 312). In other words, discussing a photograph may prompt talk and insights more than an ordinary interview.

3.6.2.Photo-Elicitation and Other Phases

The photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four) was conducted after the online observation to give participants the opportunity to reflect on the selfies. The online observation provided insights into participants' selfie posting types, activities and preferences. In contrast, participants provided feedback and commented on selfies during the photo-elicitation interview. In other words, the photo-elicitation interview allowed participants to recount their narratives and recall the experiences of their selfies.

The in-depth interview (Phase Two) is also related to the photo-elicitation interview. In the in-depth interview (Phase Two), participants expressed their opinion about selfie posting and Saudi culture in general. In contrast, the photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four) narrowed their focus to particular selfies and contexts. Participants discussed the meaning of the images and commented on them. This interview provided an understanding of the relationship between personal selfies and the cultural values based on the perceptions of the participant. In other words, the purpose of the first interview (Phase Two) was to get to know the participants and to obtain their consent and general point of view on the topic, whereas the photo-elicitation interview aimed to explore the participants' personal impressions about their selfies.

A secondary objective of the photo-elicitation interview was to obtain participants' feedback on the interpretations and findings collected from the in-depth interview and the online observation. This strategy is known as member checks, and it is used to enhance the credibility of the data (Davis et al., 2013, p. 191). Member checks, which are also known as member validation or host verification, emphasise the collaboration between the participants' viewpoints and the researcher's finding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Such a process is built on sharing a dialogue with participants about the conclusions of the study and it provides opportunities for critiquing, confirming, asking questions and providing additional insights

(Tracy, 2010, p. 844). As the photo-elicitation interview is the final phase of the study, member checks were designed for this phase prior to finalising the analysis.

3.6.3. Participants of the Photo-elicitation Phase

In this phase of the study, I asked all participants who were interviewed in the first interview to return for the photo-elicitation interview. Out of the 25 interviewees, a total of 17 participants agreed to be interviewed for a second time to reflect on between 14 to 31 of their selfies posted on their Instagram/Snapchat accounts. Two participants who were interviewed in Phase Two did not post enough selfies and a third participant did not accept my friend requests on Instagram and Snapchat. All three were subsequently excluded from Phase Four of the study. The remaining five participants were approached but they were unwilling to participate and did not give reasons for their decisions. In line with the University of Leicester ethical procedures, after contacting them a few more times, they were excluded from Phase Four of the study.

Appendix D lists the number of selfies collected from each participant's profile(s) and the interview date and type. The number of selfies collected ranged between 14 and 31. Participants who posted fewer than 14 selfies during the online observation (Phase One) were excluded from the photo-elicitation interview (Phase Four). The photo-elicitation interviews were conducted using WhatsApp interviews, phone interviews, and face-to-face interviews.

3.6.4. Photo-elicitation Procedure

I conducted the photo-elicitation interview between 15 January 2017 and 4 May 2017. A total of 340 selfies were discussed during this phase. The selected selfies from participants' accounts displayed differing contexts, poses and activities. In this phase of the project, I asked participants to describe how their selfies relate to social codes and to meeting viewers' expectations, if at all. I also asked them to explain what they intended to communicate in the selected selfies and to elaborate on the experience of communicating with others through

those selfies. These were semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. This phase was designed to give participants the chance to provide feedback on aspects that are significant to them, including appearance, cultural values, technical features, or the people in the selfie. In the photo-elicitation interview, I aimed to provide insights into the main RQs addressed below through a set of nine questions that related to the participants' selfies, as illustrated in Table 3.1.

RQ2: What modes of self-presentation emerge from selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat?

RQ3: How do platform affordances inform selfie production?

RQ5: How do cultural factors play a role in presenting oneself through selfies?

Table 3.1: *Photo-elicitation interview questions.*

Photo-Elicitation Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Has your selfie behaviour changed in the last month? How and Why? 2) In viewing your selfies for this study, describe how each of those selfies represents your virtual self and your real self within your culture? 3) What are you communicating to the members of your virtual communities in these selfies and why? 4) Based on your selfies, how do you think people perceive you? 5) In your opinion, how does selfie relate to Saudi culture if at all? 6) What cultural factors might be influencing selfies? 7) If you were to delete a certain selfie from your profile, which one would it be and why? 8) Please share any final thoughts or ideas on the selfie as: (a) A social communication platform; (b) The influence of culture on the practice of selfie taking, and (c) The experience of selfies from a woman's viewpoint. 9) Which face filter(s) do you like using and why?

The photo-elicitation questions were prepared for each participant prior to the interview, as each had her own selfie collection. I assigned selfies taken from a participant's account during the observation period to the photo-elicitation questions numbers 2 to 6 (see Table 3.1). The selfies were selected based on the nature of the context, whether the location was public or private, the technological effects applied such as face filters, the variety of activity and appearance. In this step, I used two software programs. I used Blur Effect to blur the faces of other people included in a group selfie to maintain the confidentiality of the participant's network while keeping the participant's face as is. I then used PicLab to collage selfies categorised under the same question, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. Then, I arranged all questions in sequence and sent them to the participants before the interview day, using WhatsApp. During the phone interview and face-to-face interview, the participant and I would refer to the question by its number (1–9).

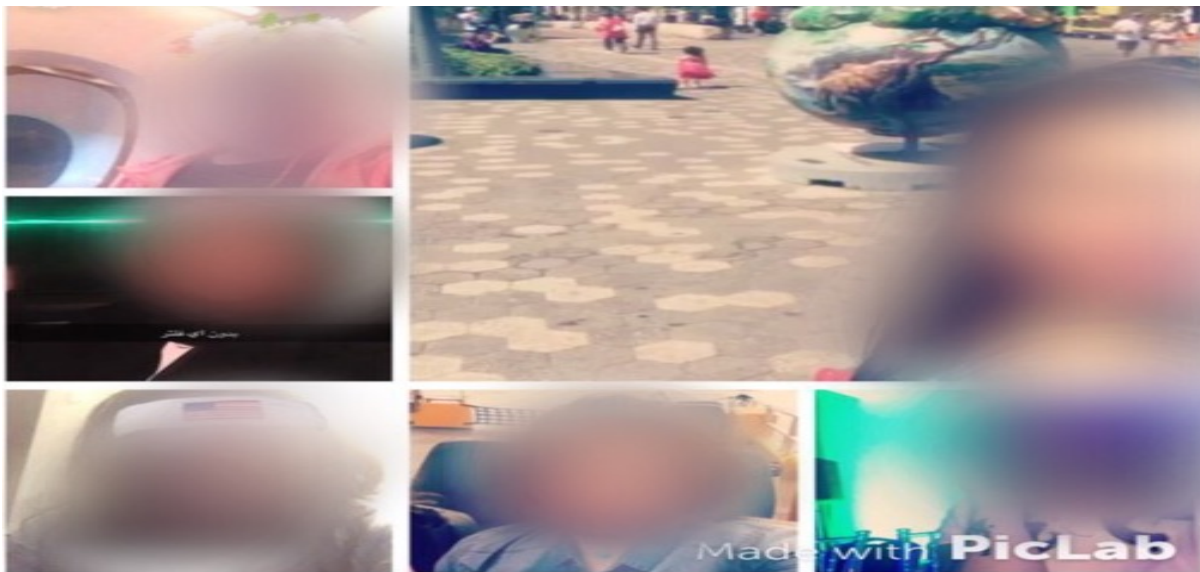


Figure 3.2: An example of a participant's collaged selfies used in the photo-elicitation interview.

Based on my field notes, some participants were asked questions in addition to the nine questions listed in Table 3.1. For example, I asked a participant to comment on why she always wrote a caption when posting selfies with males to indicate their names and relationship to her, but she did not do this when posting selfies with girls. After customising the photo-elicitation questions and selfies for each participant, I approached each participant

to schedule a meeting. The interview lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. The duration of this second interview was determined by the short number of questions and the fact that the participants were familiar with the images and the context. Additionally, for the WhatsApp interviews, participants would record text or audio responses minutes after thinking about the questions. Participants' comments and new ideas about the topic were welcomed during the interviews.

Where participants who chose to have the interview through WhatsApp or phone call were concerned, I asked the participants to kindly refer to the question number so I would know to which question she was responding. I also told them they could use voices messages or written texts when answering. Most participants answering through WhatsApp, clicked 'reply' on the forwarded selfie, and then added the written answer or voice memo to that selfie. This feature was convenient because it ensured that both the researcher and the participant were discussing the same question and selfie. I asked the participants for further clarification when reading or listening to something that was not clear at the end of the interview.

3.7. Analysing the Interviews and Photographs

3.7.1. Thematic Analysis

The objective of my qualitative study is to understand selfie posting experiences and the cultural influence on such phenomena from the standpoint of Saudi women. I used thematic analysis (TA) to achieve this objective. TA is a method developed by Gerald Horton to identify patterns of meaning in data units (Braun & Clarke, 2006). TA determines themes that are substantial in the description of the phenomenon studied (Daly, Kellehear & Gliksman, 1997). TA is a common form of qualitative data analysis that emerged from grounded theory and phenomenological analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Historically, TA was rooted in the quantitative tradition of content analysis and was widely used in psychology. However, TA has been recognised as an independent method and it is used across many disciplines within the social sciences (Boyatzis, 1998). As Joffe (2012) noted, TA is useful for understanding textual data, like focus group and verbal interview data, in addition to mass media materials, like images and videos (pp. 211–212). There are benefits and drawbacks to using TA. It is beneficial in that it provides an opportunity to link multiple concepts in one phase of a research study and to compare them to data collected from other phases of the phenomena under investigation (Alhojailan, 2012, p. 10). However, TA can be reductive. The data is broken down into smaller units, so it is possible to lose context.

In terms of applying TA, I analysed the data using three levels of coding: (1) developing a coding frame, (2) creating conceptual categories, and (3) developing themes. Firstly, I examined all the data, including interview transcripts, field notes, selfie images, participants' reflections and reactions, to develop a coding frame. I conducted this process using manual coding, in which each code is named, defined, and assigned to text and image from the data. Joffe (2012) stated that this is an essential step in conducting TA.

Secondly, I grouped similar codes, which I had developed at the first level, into conceptual categories. A category is a higher level of coding in which concepts are grouped together (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Thirdly, major themes were identified relying on the categories developed in the previous step. Appendix F illustrates a mind map I built when developing codes, categories, and selfie themes. A theme is an extended phrase that recognises what a set of data means. Themes can include many forms of ideas, such as participant narrative, description of behaviour, iconic statement and explanation of a phenomenon (Saldana, 2016, p. 297). Themes may contain manifest content that can be directly observed, and latent content such as indirect references in transcripts. Deductive themes are drawn from earlier theories, whereas inductive themes are generated from raw

data (Joffe, 2012, p. 210). I used a dual deductive-inductive and manifest-latent set of themes to understand the selfie phenomenon.

I considered a number of techniques to identify themes for this project, including looking for the following in the data: repetitions, metaphors and analogies, differences and similarities, and linguistic connectors. Repetitions of topics and issues could signal obvious themes in the data (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 83). I also considered recurring types of selfies as part of this technique, such as the mirror selfie and the car selfie. In addition, metaphors and analogies were found to reflect people's experiences, thoughts and behaviours (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), especially as metaphors and analogies are widely used in everyday Arabic language. I looked for similarities and differences, which involved examining pairs of expressions from one participant's data or multiple participants' data, and then asking how the expressions are similar or different to one another (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 91). Finally, I focused on linguistic connectors such as 'as a result', 'because' and 'since' as they tend to signal causal relations as when a relation is implied between the platform design and selfie posting behaviours. On the other hand, terms like 'instead of', 'if' and 'then' indicate conditional connections (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 91) as when referring to situations when selfie posting is avoided or when selfies are shared with a selected audience.

Throughout the coding process, I used NVivo software for qualitative analysis to create codes, to assign sections from the data to codes, to create queries and memos, and to organise the data in a meaningful way. NVivo allow users to conduct multiple qualitative analysis functions, create codes, and sort raw data (Phillips & Lu, 2018). All interview transcripts were imported to NVivo software. However, I applied manual coding in order to identify the coding frame (first level of coding). A word frequency analysis was applied in NVivo on all interview transcripts. The most frequent words emerging included: selfie,

veiling, filter, Instagram, Snapchat and participants' names. Although it provided some insight, it indicated that systematic types of analysis, like content analysis, are not the best way to analyse the data. All in all, the objective of the TA is to identify patterns and themes to gain an understanding of key concepts and ideas about the selfie posting experience from the perceptions of Saudi women. NVivo was helpful in terms of data organising, but in order to identify patterns and themes I had to consider manually what piece of information was significant and link it to the relevant node in the software.

3.7.2. Photographs Analysis

While most scholars treat photographs and transcripts as one body of data (Rose, 2012), I decided to examine them independently first, and then later to look at them in combination. In a manner that is similar to Keats's (2009) approach, I decided to analyse the textual data and visual data separately and then to investigate the relationships between text and image. This seemed to be useful as photos can evoke different aspects compared to transcripts. However, at the same time, exploring the relationship between textual and visual data was significant as Collier (1967) argued that the information provided by the photos accessed by the researchers should be interpreted in relation to interview transcripts, which explains why I conducted the photo-elicitation interview after collecting the participants' selfies.

First, I transcribed the photo-elicitation interviews and organised my notes from Phase Three, the online observation. Then, a total of 340 photographs were interpreted using conventional social techniques (Rose, 2012. p. 314). In particular, I divided photos into simple categories such as: selfies posted on Instagram, selfies posted on Snapchat, selfies with face filters, non-filtered selfies, mirror selfies, selfies with girlfriends, solo selfies, posed selfies, selfies in public spaces, selfies in private houses, selfies while travelling, selfies with

multiple filters, selfies and feedback, veiling and selfie. These were interpreted in light of the participants' narratives in former stages.

I explored the relationships between photographs and interview transcripts by conducting constant comparisons between what a particular participant said and posted. I also compared and contrasted varying types of coded selfies among participants such as the posted selfies in the Instagram category and the posted selfies in the Snapchat category. In order to acknowledge the complexity of selfie production, I compared the photographs posted with the transcripts on the topic of "unposted selfies". This was also useful in understanding the rationale behind what is visible and what is invisible. I made links between the coded images and transcripts from Phase Two, my notes from Phase Three, and the transcripts from Phase Four. This transition between participants' opinions in Phase Two, online actions in Phase Three, and reflections on images in Phase Four, was useful in enhancing the validity of the data and building the selfie production model. In sum, the interpretation of the photographs depended on the data generated from the visual codes and the written codes.

3.8. The Multi-method Design

This study conducted multiple forms of data collection to enhance the validity of the results. Each method focused on answering the research question(s). However, all of the methods collectively answered the six research questions. The focus group identified general beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to selfie posting. The in-depth interview emphasised participants' preferences, narratives, intentions and knowledge related to selfie posting. The observation provided visual data and insights on selfie activities, as they happened on SNS, such as face filters and enhancing effects added to selfie. Finally, photo-elicitation interviews helped in understanding participants' reflections and in enhancing the validity of the data.

A single method design may not explore the selfie phenomenon with the same depth of information provided by the multimethod design. The in-depth interview provided rich

information about Saudi women's perception of selfie posting, but it lacked the ability to illustrate how selfies are used as a visual diary in everyday life, as provided by online observation. On the other hand, accessing Saudi women's private SNS accounts may not have been possible without first building rapport and gaining trust through the face-to-face interview (Phase Two). The focus groups outlined social norms that should be considered when posting selfies but did not provide a space for personal reflections on selfies posted online. This limitation of the focus group method was compensated for by the photo-elicitation interview. The photo-elicitation interview was useful for understanding an individual's selfie posting activity, but it provided a narrow understanding. Whereas the focus group emphasised how producers collectively speak about selfie practices in relation to the Saudi norms and expectations.

The multimethod design is one of the contributions of my study, and it sought to offset potential limitations arising from applying a single method. As an example, the online observation produced additional questions like "What is the participant communicating when posting a double face selfie?", "Why are mirror selfies the most prominent type of selfie in participant's x profile?", "What is the motivation behind posting selfie while smoking a hookah? How does that relate to culture?" and "Why does participant x post half face selfies instead of full face selfie?". The photo-elicitation interview provided an opportunity to ask those questions that are relevant to the focus of the research and that arose during the online observation (Phase Three). The multiplicity of motivations is another example in which participants identified one or two motives for posting selfies during the in-depth interview while other motives emerged during the online observation phase and were confirmed in the photo-elicitation phase.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the qualitative research methodology that informed this study. I conducted a mixture of qualitative methods, including focus group, in-depth interview, online observation, and photo-elicitation interview, to understand Saudi women's experiences of selfie posting. My methodological design presented a unique element of the study to social media literature by providing a design consisting of in-depth investigation to understand visual online presentation. Most importantly, the methodological design resulted in a number of empirical and theoretical contributions, which I will explore in the upcoming chapters. These contributions include the selfie production model, the multiplicity of motivations, the understanding of technological and non-technological selfie enhancing effects, and the acknowledgement of frontstage and backstage selfie performances in digital spaces.

This chapter began with a general overview of the research design, sampling strategies and data collection process. I then explained the research design and discussed each of the four phases in great depth. Additionally, I explained the significance of using a mixed method design and exemplified how it countered potential limitations arising from a single method design. Finally, I highlighted the process of written data and visual data analysis.

The findings of this study will be presented in the next three chapters, while the conclusion chapter will address the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study. Chapter Four presents findings on motivation and cultural factors, and it introduces the selfie model. Chapter Five examines how selfie producers create varying online circles and share varying types of selfies on different platforms. Chapter Six concentrates on the notion of “upgrading” oneself in the selfie posted and the idea of constructing selfies in relation to gendered beauty ideals and the seeking of the gaze of other females.

Next, Chapter Four will present the findings about two areas of inquiry: selfie producing and sharing motivations in addition to the cultural practices informing selfie

production, which emerged among Saudi women's selfies leading to the selfie production model.

Chapter Four: Selfie Motives, Culture, and the Development of the Selfie Model

Overview of Finding Chapters

Moving on from Chapter Three, which explained the multi-phase methodological design of the study, Chapter Four outlines results developed from all phases of the study: focus groups, in-depth interviews, observation, and photo-elicitation interviews. This chapter presents an overview of selfie taking and posting motivations, the Saudi cultural norms informing selfie practices, and introduces a selfie model that emerged from all the methodological phases. I argue that selfie taking and posting practices are not static, but are informed by multiple motives depending on what is going on. Crucially, I argue that within the Saudi context, cultural norms such as veiling habits and respect for parents strongly inform selfie activities and practices. As a result, I argue that it is incorrect to assume that selfie taking and posting is a single flippant action captured with the click of a button (Carbon, 2017). Instead, there is a series of preparations and factors considered by selfie producers which I have conceptualised in a seven point ‘selfie model’ which will be detailed further in this chapter.

Chapter Five presents findings about the role of the affordances of Snapchat and Instagram in shaping selfie production. In doing so, I explore how the frontstage and backstage performances developed by Goffman (1959) could be enhanced in selfie online communications. The chapter also explains selfie producers’ management of audiences by exploring sharing and blocking behaviours based on interpersonal proxemics and virtual intimacy.

Chapter Six focuses on the concept of self by highlighting both the technological and non-technological strategies used to present what I term “the upgraded version of the self”.

Furthermore, I outline how selfie production is tied to the notion of gazing at the producer as in the case of mirror selfies and how it invites a particular gendered gaze, as in the case of female matchmakers.

Introduction

This chapter concentrates on results pertaining specifically to the research question focusing on motivation as framed in RQ1: What motivates Saudi women to take and post selfies? From the data, I have identified six motivations for taking and posting selfies: communicating-the-self, attention-seeking, experimentation, entertainment, education, and empowerment, which will be explained in this chapter.

Of these motivations identified in my study, four of the six motives had previously been identified including: attention-seeking, communication, and entertainment motives (Sung et al., 2016), gender empowerment (Souza et al., 2015), and selfie feeling of empowerment (Senft & Bayam, 2015). However, my study also identified filter experimentation and educational motives which no scholar to date has discussed. Filter experimentation refers to the ability of selfie producers to apply face filters to their selfies in addition to geofilters and special occasion filters. The ability to experience varying face filters allow users to explore backstage performance and to play differing roles in online spaces. Taking a selfie for entertainment reasons was previously identified by scholars (Sung et al., 2016), yet car selfies, a popular kind of selfie taken in the back seat of the car to pass the time, have emerged because of specific legal and cultural contexts. It is essential here to note that the six identified motives are interrelated with the first stage of the selfie model focusing on the decision to take a selfie.

Secondly, the chapter investigates RQ5 focusing on the cultural factors that inform selfie behaviours. Here, I argue that understanding the selfie phenomenon is more comprehensively explored with both a micro and a macro lens. In other words, specific

cultural practices such as veiling habits, privacy concerns, cross-gender presentation, and hookah smoking by females were found to influence selfie posting behaviours and resulted in selectively sharing the selfie or avoiding posting the selfie online. On the other hand, I found that there are shared selfie practices among Saudi users and selfie producers worldwide. These included: the desire to edit selfies (McLean et al., 2015), capturing mirror selfies (Shipley, 2015; Uzlander, 2017), attention-seeking motives, communication and entertainment motives (Chae, 2017), and archiving motives (Rettberg, 2014). Therefore, exploring the cultural norms, in addition to common selfie practices shared by selfie takers coming from varying backgrounds, provides a holistic and, up to now, under-researched means of understanding this phenomenon.

Finally, I will introduce a proposed selfie model which consists of seven stages of selfie production: decisions to take selfie, pre-selfie offline preparations, decisions over editing the content, decisions to post or not to post, decisions to share selectively, decisions about the platform to be used, and decisions to reproduce the selfie. Although introduced in this first findings chapter, the selfie model was developed through the final stages of the data analysis. The selfie motives and the cultural factors outlined in this chapter constituted two stages of the selfie model, particularly stages one and four. In Chapter Five, the findings point to stages five and six of the model focusing on platform vernacular and audience management. Stages two and three of the model are examined in Chapter Six through the findings on enhancing ones image. This chapter briefly introduces the model while my three findings chapters address a discrete range of themes to explore the evidence offered for the model. In the Conclusions chapter, I will discuss how this model relates to existing selfie literature.

The selfie model is informed by Goffman's (1959) theories of theatrical performance and impression management. Initially, the model suggests that selfie taking and posting goes

through a series of stages in which the producer first explores their backstage self and later decides to present their frontstage self. Indeed, I argue that selfie producers use non-technological preparations like removing an unwanted item or standing next to an interesting scene before taking a selfie as implied by stage two. These changes are in addition to technological preparations such as using beautifying face filters, as suggested by stage three, to present a more desirable frontstage self. Furthermore, the model asserts that selfie producers use “impression management” techniques like posting different self-presentations on Instagram and Snapchat thereby segregating the audience based on virtual intimacy and gender, and that they avoid posting selfies that may be negatively judged based on cultural codes. The selfie model emerged in an attempt to answer RQ6 focusing on how Saudi women make decisions about their online selfie presentation.

While other studies briefly outlined what I term the first stage of being motivated to take a selfie (Kim et al., 2016; Sung et al, 2016), I go on to develop other stages which I encourage scholars to explore when they conduct selfie research. Furthermore, this model challenges Carbon (2017) who asserts that selfie production “takes merely of the blink of an eye”. In contrast, the findings of this thesis provide strong evidence that selfie production in Saudi is rarely an impromptu process, but requires the processing of many careful decisions before the final image is produced and posted. As a result, this selfie model, informed by in-depth investigation, makes a significant and original contribution to social media scholarship by providing a better understanding of the processes and rationale of selfie production and distribution.

This model contributes to selfie literature by providing a step-by-step framework of how selfie visual communication occurs and it highlights the cultural and technological dimensions considered by the producers. As noted, in this chapter, I will expand on stage one of the selfie model by exploring selfie motives and on stage four by identifying key cultural

factors, while other stages of the model will be highlighted through findings presented in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

4.1. Generating Themes

As stated in the methodology section, thematic analysis was used to examine the motives for taking and posting selfies. After carefully reading through the transcripts of the focus groups and the in-depth interviews, recurring patterns were identified. The qualitative analysis of data was conducted through developing a code frame, creating conceptual categories, and developing themes. The techniques used to generate themes include the following: looking for repetitions of issues in the data, examining pairs of expressions from multiple participants' data. The location of linguistic connectors that signal conditional and causal relations was used as a technique to generate sub-themes. Online observation was insightful in identifying motives such as filter experimentation and showing off, which were not explicitly stated in the interviews.

Themes:

A total of three themes were developed to answer research questions 1, 5, and 6.

Two themes were generated from the participants' narratives:

I- Motives for selfie producing.

II- Cultural practices informing selfie taking and sharing activities.

III- The process of selfie production

4.2. Selfie Producers' Motivations

It is essential to understand what motivates Saudi women to post selfies before investigating how the cultural practices or the platform design inform their selfie self-portraiture. Goffman's (1959) theory of backstage-frontstage performances was applied to explore why Saudi women post selfies. According to Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, frontstage performance is meant to be viewed by a public audience and so people present a

desirable self, while backstage performance tends to be relaxed as it is viewed by a small familiar group.

The findings of this study identified six motivations for selfie activities: attention-seeking, communicating-the-self, experimentation, entertainment, education and empowerment. Previous literature (Sung et al., 2016) has recognised attention-seeking, communication, and entertainment as motives for posting selfies. However, my study explored the interrelation between attention-seeking and communicating-the-self motives. Indeed, I argue that the selfie producer's consciousness of the imagined audience, and the desire to seek positive attention from viewers, informs selfie producers' online self-presentation. This is witnessed through the non-technological preparations occurring in the second stage of the model and the technological preparations made in the third stage (see 6.1). Additionally, this study explored patterns of selfie practices: the desired self, the selfie as a digital self, the selfie as visual mirror, and archiving. These patterns are part of the communicating the self-motives that will be addressed in Chapter Six.

One key finding to emerge from this study is the way many participants engaged in what we might refer to as "playful experimentation" through selfie practices. Selfie producers experimented with face filters and other customisable digital options, which we can understand in reference to Goffman's backstage performance in which the actor uses a physical object like a mask that suits the role he or she is about to perform (Goffman, 1959). In this sense, selfie producers use these functions creatively to help to show their playful self to close family and friends.

In addition, selfie producers' experimentation with face filters and masks can give the experience of a virtual role that is not usually played in an offline environment. Trying an animal face filter or a masculine face filter could be seen as an aspect of part of backstage exploring. Subsequently, the selfie producer decides whether to keep the experimental filter

at a backstage level or to transfer it to the frontstage as implied in the fifth stage of the selfie model. Sending a filtered selfie as a private snap or message is conceptualised as a backstage performance whereas posting the selfie as a public story on Snapchat, or as a public image on Instagram, is seen as frontstage. Therefore, in some cases, the backstage performance was really a trial for a frontstage performance. The significance of this shift in performance is that it enables selfie producers to play “safely” or to experiment in a relatively safe space. Accordingly, motives for experimenting with face filters were related to entertainment and trying out a popular selfie trend.

Several participants talked about the power of selfies to empower and educate others, which challenges the many preconceptions that selfies are narcissistic endeavours of little social benefit (Weiser, 2015). Earlier studies explored selfies within the context of gender empowerment (Souza et al., 2015) and their ability to generate affective feelings of empowerment (Senft & Baym, 2015) – a finding confirmed in my study. For example, Halah, a 57-year-old, uses both image selfies and video selfies to empower and inspire other women to take action and to know their rights. Video selfie refers to taking a selfie in which the user talks while filming live movement instead of a stable voiceless image. In a similar manner, Elaf, a 21-year-old, devotes her account to spreading awareness about making healthy choices. For instance, she occasionally posts selfies with products and food portions highlighting how to prepare healthy meals and advising viewers to read the nutrition information on food labels.

The analysis of the narratives of the participants on selfie motives, as described in the in-depth interviews and online observation, identified six motivations for selfie taking and posting: attention-seeking, communicating-the-self, entertainment, experimentation, education and empowerment. The popularity of attention-seeking and communicating-the-self motives, compared to other motives, suggests that the selfie is mainly perceived as a

contemporary tool for self-expression to an online audience. This explains the expectation on the part of those who make selfies that they will receive comments and “likes”.

4.2.1. Attention-seeking

Although the findings classified “attention-seeking” and “communicating-the-self” into two separate categories, they are closely related. The selfie is a digital photograph meant to be shared with others online; at the same time, it is a self-oriented image. However, selfie producers tend to communicate the self but not just any self, a desirable self that will be recognised by viewers. For the most part, users present an edited ideal self to receive positive feedback in the form of comments, likes, or emoji.

In photo 4.1, which received 112 likes, participant Shaza a 21-year-old posted a mirror selfie on Instagram with the caption “Waiting be like” and a female emoji opening her hand. This illustrates how selfie producers share selfies on a frontstage level and expect audience attention and positive feedback, even asking for it in captions. The selfie in photo 4.1 is also about how producers “curate” the content in a way that invites particular responses from the audience. Here, we can see the subject providing verbal and physical cues as to how audiences should respond (by giving likes).



Photo 4.1: Participant posted a mirror selfie on Instagram asking viewers to like the image.

One of my key findings was that selfie producers shared beautified selfies, in which digital effects enhance the facial features, on Instagram and Snapchat. On the other hand, certain types of selfies, including those with funny, ugly, or ironic face filters were only shared on Snapchat. This means that selfie producers want to share “beautified” selfies with the maximum network of online friends. This was confirmed by the participants in the photo-elicitation interviews. Shipley (2015) stated that funny and ugly faces are used in selfie visual communication for the purpose of getting attention and being funny. However, she did not make any correlation between the attention gained and the platform used. Selfie producers post enhanced selfies on Instagram to gain the unlimited attention of current and future followers,⁸ whereas funny selfies, ironic selfies, ugly selfies, and unveiled selfies are shared on Snapchat to gain temporary attention. Snapchat deletes the selfie after 24 hours and allow the user adjusts the viewing time from (1-10 seconds). Chapter Five will expand on Snapchat selfies and Instagram selfies in theme 1: the platform vernacular.

Attention-seeking was one of the most common motivations for sharing selfies. Yet, participants did not explicitly state their desire to get attention. Instead, during my interviews they expressed cues such as: waiting for feedback from others, continuously checking who viewed the selfie,⁹ checking comments, waiting for the selfie to be liked, evaluating the number of likes, blocking viewers who repeatedly view the selfie and do not comment on it, feeling delighted by positive comments, and feeling confident when their appearance is appreciated. The majority of participants implied expecting viewers, especially girlfriends and family members, to interact with the selfies that they posted. Thus, attention-seeking motives guided selfie producers’ decisions as to viewers’ accessibility to the image. Only

⁸ Instagram allows current followers and future followers to access the images posted in the profile.

⁹ This option is provided by Snapchat but not by Instagram.

viewers who post positive feedback are allowed to continue viewing selfies, whereas viewers who are not providing attention were often blocked.

Afaf's case illustrates how Saudi selfie producers sometimes try to attract the attention of a more specific audiences. Afaf's selfie posting was communicating her "beautified self" to attract the attention of ladies looking for a bride to be recommended to a groom. Traditional marriage in Saudi happens when female members of the groom's family, who can include his mother, sister, or aunt, find a bride, primarily during offline ladies social events, based on the groom's desired characteristic and preferences. Later, the groom's family officially proposes and the groom visits the girl's family to see her and to chat with the prospective bride.¹⁰ However, as my research has revealed, some SNS users use their private accounts to promote their beauty and character as a way of attracting the attention of a groom's mother or sisters who may come across their selfie. For instance, Afaf a 32-year-old who lives in the USA while she completes her doctoral degree said:

I post feminine selfies. I sometimes intend to draw the attention of older women related to my family or myself so that if they were looking for a bride or something ... So I don't directly disclose to my friends or people I know that I wish to get married but imply that by sharing my attractive and good-looking selfies and I intend to show them multiple aspects of my life: the serious Afaf on campus, Afaf while visiting places, while driving my car, while being with my family, and sometimes while feeling sleepy in my bed to indicate to others than even when I am in my bed and in my house I look neat and so does my place.

¹⁰ Not all marriages are traditional marriages in Saudi yet traditional marriage is common. Some marriages happen after the couple happens to meet at work or in a public place or even after interacting online with one another. Dating before an official proposal is not acceptable by the majority of Saudi families.

This exemplifies how using selfies has allowed some women to represent themselves virtually to female matchmakers without having to attend social events in Saudi. While previous research highlighted the use of online spaces as a form of digital matchmaking in which the couples are introduced to one another (Carter & Buckwalter, 2009), my findings illustrate how selfies are used to attract the attention of matchmakers who are already on their social networks. With that in mind, selfie visual communications are being used as a digital space for desirable self-presentation instead of the female gatherings that take place in Saudi where single ladies go to be seen. Afaf lives in the USA but she wishes to get married to someone in Saudi. She uses selfies to signal to women looking for a bride that she is qualified to be a future wife because of her clean house, her ambition, her focus on family, and, most importantly, her attractive appearance. Her motivation to secure a marriage proposal, which she stated in the interview, influenced all her selfies posted on her Instagram and Snapchat accounts. Her selfies are edited, and they present her in a desirable way. This case also illustrates the interplay between attention-seeking motives and communicating-the-self motives, which can be difficult to disentangle.

In sum, selfie producers expect viewers to praise their beauty, post positive comments, give likes to their selfies, post an emoji, or even offer a marriage proposal. In addition to self-promotion, underlying motives such as showing off and finding a mate were implied from the collected visual data.

4.2.2. Communicating-the-self Motives

According to normative gender expectation, women have historically been praised for beauty and this was a key tool and symbol of their feminine standards. As Nugali (2016) pointed out, past and present poetry depicts Arabian women as a source of affection and focuses on their external beauty. Therefore, it was to be expected that Saudi women would use selfie visual communications to emphasise their beauty as the finding indicated. This

assumption was reinforced by historical factors and technical factors. The historical factors are linked to the traditional standards of beauty for Arab women that emphasise long black hair, wide eyes with eye-liner, fair skin tone, straight Arabian nose, and thin body. The technical factors are embodied in the application of technical affordances to edit and enhance the selfie. Chapter Six will expand on three selfie practices observed among Saudi selfie producers including: communicating a desirable selfie using technological and non-technological effects, using the selfie as a digital mirror, and using the selfie as a visual diary.

Drawing on Goffman's (1959) concepts of "give" expressions and "give off" expressions, I argue that selfie producers control both given verbal expressions and given off non-verbal expressions in selfie visual communications by customising the appearance of the digital avatar bitmoji and the accompanying text. In fact, I argue that when taking a selfie, the selfie producer's feelings are informed by the imagined audience and the desire to seek attention from their audience. Participants' narratives and selfies showed that selfie producers use personalised bitmoji¹¹ avatars along with their human face in selfie. This is significant because these aspects are an extension of the self.

Selfie producers were found to use bitmoji avatars in their selfies as a form of communicating a digital self. In the context of selfies, it was found that the bitmoji is a technological affordance of Snapchat that enhances Goffman's (1959) theory of give and give off expressions. During the photo-elicitation phase, selfie producers occasionally include their bitmoji avatar in their selfie. In other words, both the human face and the avatar are included in a selfie as in the selfies numbered 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. Accordingly, I approached participants with follow-up questions to understand their reasons for including their

¹¹ Bitmojis are cartoon avatars developed by a Bitmoji application and linked to Snapchat to be included when taking selfies. A user can use body, facial features, and clothing from a wide selection.

personalised bitmojis in their selfies. It was noticed that selfie producers use bitmojis for three reasons: for fun and entertainment, to be expressive, to be sarcastic or playful. Therefore, bitmojis are expressive vernacular practices that emerged in the observation phase.



Photo: 4.2



Photo: 4.3

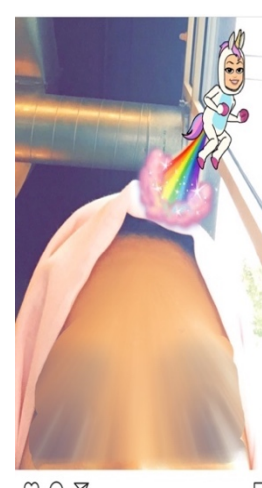


Photo:4.4

In image 4.2, the selfie producer took a selfie in a bowling centre showing her enjoying an ice-cream. When asked to comment on the selfie, she said: “my mom was visiting me and I took her to this bowling place ... I was feeling so happy to have her in Canada and to be at this place... my bitmoji express the joy and excitement”. The Arabic quotation in the selfie said “DJ lights and ice cream”. The posted bitmoji is a novel digital tool to express the emotion of joy. The joined hands of the bitmoji and the red hearts are symbols of delight and happiness. Goffman (1959) theorised the frontstage performance of a single performance, but here we can see how the performer, who is the selfie producer, is controlling the give and give off signals of the human face in addition to the signals of the created cartoon avatar. In other words, the technological affordances provided the users with varying options to present the self and the ability to meticulously control the performance. Bitmoji avatars stress the non-verbal cues, which Goffman referred to as given off expressions that cannot be controlled. The participant in image 4.2 is veiled but she selected

an unveiled bitmoji avatar.¹² Her choice of an unveiled bitmoji was not addressed as this is beyond the scope of my study.

In image 4.3, the bitmoji was designed to look similar to the human face as suggested by the long black hair. In this selfie, the participant has her eyes closed to show her white eyeliner and her false eyelashes. The selfie was taken at a girls' Halloween party in a private house and the participant was in fancy dress. The bitmoji seems to express positive feelings. It is as if the virtual self bitmoji is in love with the human self as indicated by the heart-shaped smoke. The bitmoji's smiley and excited facial features seem to say "wow, you look pretty" in a visual digitalised way. In other words, the digital bitmoji avatar is complimenting the human version of the self and both versions are posted online for additional attention and comments from viewers. It is important to note that this use of bitmoji is part of the "curatorial" process where the bitmoji plays a role in guiding the viewer as to how to respond positively to the selfie.

Image 4.4 displays a participant on campus at the end of a Friday. The bitmoji in this selfie seems to signal "can't wait to leave campus", or "let the weekend begin". The selection of a unicorn bitmoji that is about to fly communicates her wish to leave immediately. In the context of bitmojis used with selfies, the affect is communicated visually through a bitmoji medium, which shows a strong desire to leave the place through the positioning of hand and leg and the wide eyes. Apart from being entertaining, bitmojis allow selfie producers to communicate feelings and action in digital spaces that may not be appropriate in an offline environment. For instance, it would look strange if the postgraduate student in image 4.4

¹² The option of applying a veil to the bitmoji is included with hair style options.

suddenly started running on campus or wearing a unicorn costume, whereas the same actions are acceptable and are viewed positively in digital spaces.

When asked about the reasons for using a bitmoji in addition to a selfie that already communicates the actual person, Shorog, an 18-year-old student said “I mean bitmojis are more expressive when comparing them to real facial expressions and so I like to use them”. This indicates that selfie producers use bitmojis as a way of presenting a more “expressive” digital version of themselves. Not only did participants use bitmoji avatars to communicate authentic emotions, but they also used them to be sarcastic or to express an opposing emotion. For instance, a selfie is taken with a normal facial expression while using a crying bitmoji and a caption like “school work never ends”. Participants pointed out that the frequency of using bitmojis is determined by how much they liked how the bitmoji looked. For instance, Riyanaa said:

I don't use bitmojis that much because I couldn't customise one in a way that really looks like me; there wasn't a hair option that looked exactly like mine. I just created it for fun with my girlfriends. I might have used it a lot with selfies if it looked more like me ... but you know some people's bitmoji looks so like them. My uncle's selfie and his bitmoji are identical.

This confirms that the popularity of this practice lies in the subjectivity of the process of creating the bitmoji and meticulously selecting the hair style, skin tone, outfits, face shape...etc. (Greenfield, 2015). Although selfies are often used as a form of digital self-portraiture, we can see how using bitmojis adds another layer of digital presentation. Both human and bitmoji images are digitalised; one captures the human image and the other is a cartoon version. Bitmojis can be recreated, changed, and can play different roles (Berman et al., 2017). Goffman's ideas of personas relied on the performance of a role or a character one at a time. However, in online self-presentation, the shifts of selves are synchronised and

complex. A user could perform multiple roles to multiple audiences at the same time. Indeed, two opposing emotions could be displayed in one selfie using bitmoji's expressions and human face expressions. The significance of this is that the variety of visual and technological effects applied to online self-presentation enables selfie producers to be creative about their performance but, at the same time, it requires knowing the producer offline, or the inclusion of text in the selfie, to read the intended give and give off expressions in online space.

4.2.3. Experimentation

Experimentation motives refer to experimenting with digital filters applied to selfies. These include face filters, geofilters, and special occasion filters. Experimenting with face filters was one of the surprising underlying motives that emerged in the photo-elicitation interviews after observing varying types of selfies and filters and discussing their motives.



Photo: 4.5

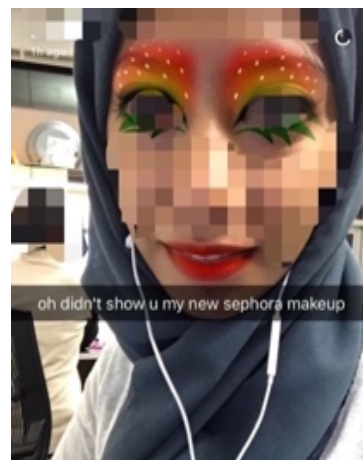


Photo: 4.6

When the participant in photo 4.5 was asked about what a particular selfie communicates, or to comment on a selfie, she said “This selfie here is not narrating anything, I was just trying out the face filter”. In other cases, filter experimenting motives were linked to the dominant platform vernacular as expressed by participants, “This was a filter that everyone was trying at the time, so I took a selfie and shared it with my friends”, and entertainment motives, “It is fun to try out face filters”. As Snapchat continuously provides

new face filters for selfie takers, participants liked the process of experimenting with the filters to express emotions, to look better, to be funny, and to follow a selfie trend. In his recent book *Exploring the Selfies*, Ruchatz (2018) addressed the practice of taking playful selfies. I argue here that selfie producers are engaged with Snapchat face filters as a form of playful experimentation and personal entertainment.

Applying face filters to selfies allows participants to play varying roles in the digital space. According to Arwa:

When filters were first launched, I used to apply them and perform, for instance add the old woman filter and perform that role, so the filters helped in creating those stories and playing different roles in my video selfies.

Goffman (1959) highlighted theatrical performance in an offline setting. Experimenting with face filters gave selfie producers the opportunity to exchange varying persona in digital space and to share those roles publicly with a selected audience. As an illustration, photo 4.6 displays a participant, who in reality dislikes applying makeup, using a digital filter that applied exaggerated makeup. It is essential here to point that experimenting motives are related to entertainment motives as illustrated in the makeup filtered selfie. Trying out filters is a way of being playful and of keeping up with what is trending and being used by other selfie producers.

4.2.4. Entertainment

Most participants took selfies as a form of entertainment, which is closely linked with experimentation motives. In terms of posting selfies for leisure and entertainment, participants indicated that they mostly post selfies in the car since they are banned from driving and they pass the time by taking and sharing selfies. For instance, when Lamar, who is 19-year-old, was asked what interests her about selfie communication, she said “I feel that taking selfies with Snapchat in particular occupies my time while being in the car”.

It is not only Saudi women who post selfies to pass the time and to be entertained. Korean women also take selfies as a leisure time pursuit (Sung et al., 2016). However, the car selfie, which has emerged because of a specific legal and cultural context, is a feature unique to Saudi women as exemplified in photo 4.7 in which the participant took the selfie in the back seat while working on her laptop. Passing time, escape, and entertainment were previously identified as motivations for media use (Rubin, 1984). However, in my study, those motives were associated with the car selfie in particular. In photo 4.7, Hanadi, who has been living abroad for a while, added a caption to a selfie saying, “I miss lying in the back seat reading some random books!” and she added a smiley emoji. This exemplifies how Saudi women occupy their time in the back seat while being escorted: reading, using a computer, checking emails, talking on their phones, and taking selfies.



Photo: 4.7

As a result of the June 2018 legalisation of women driving, it is expected that car selfies taking from the driver's seat will be trending instead of car selfies taking from the back seat. This development could lead to future research. It is worth pointing out here that, in the future, the significance of Saudi women taking car selfies from the driver's seat would no longer be a way of alleviating boredom but rather a way of showing off their new found freedom.

Previously I discussed how the activities of selfie producers are guided by leisure and the need to alleviate boredom. Now, I expand on cases in which producers posted selfies to entertain other users by using playful visual cues and face filters.

Participants indicated that it is fun to take selfies and that selfies allow them to express a playful dimension of their identity. Batool stated: “I like the filters that swap two faces and I would use them with someone just for fun but I wouldn’t post it online.” This illustrates the distinction between the frontstage and the backstage performance. To Batool, funny selfies taken with a partner in which the faces of selfie takers are swapped is to be on the background stage instead of being posted publicly. Religious restrictions might be a main reason for restraining the posting of swapping face filters. The religious scholar Nassir Al-Omar used his Twitter account to state that face filters that change the creation of God are forbidden (Snapchat filters, 2017). With that in mind, posting filtered selfies made for entertainment might be judged negatively by viewers, which explains selfie producers’ being hesitant about posting their performance on the backstage of Snapchat to be viewed by selected girlfriends.

In a similar manner, other participants indicated that they used selfies to communicate humour and the funny sides of their personalities, which they cannot express in face-to-face interactions. For instance, Maha a 19-year-old student, used to apply silly and playful filters that added worms all over her face, to distort her face by adding four eyes, or to enlarge her face size for the purpose of making her audience laugh. She explained:

Of course I cannot do things like that with my face in real situations because people will think that something is wrong with me, but in selfie digital space it is okay to do so...people accept it and in fact wait for my selfies.

It is interesting here to note that selfie takers manage backstage and frontstage performance based on their motives and the image they want to maintain in front of their online audience.

While in Batool's case, the action of taking funny selfies was positioned as a backstage performance using private snap messaging, Maha's funny face selfies is a frontstage performance that is posted online in the public story of her Snapchat account (see section 5.1). These filters also allow women who are restrained by cultural or religious norms some freedom to play and experiment.

4.2.5. Education and Empowerment

Some of the unexpected motivations to post selfies were education and the empowerment of women. As noted, selfie producers intending to spread awareness about an issue want to be viewed by as many users as possible. Accordingly, their selfies were goal oriented and communicated frontstage performances. Examples would be selfies highlighting matters like exercise, healthy food choices, and women's legal rights in Saudi. Unlike the previous cases in which selfie producers emphasised aesthetic elements, those motivated to educate and empower others focused on the content to be delivered. For instance, Elaf, who is a 21-year-old nutrition student, stated her motives for producing selfies as follows: "Because I have a strong belief that it is going to educate people about their health and help them maintain a healthy life style." Other participants indicated using selfies to present makeup tutorials or to address educational issues while attending a conference.

Using selfies to empower women was another unexpected motivation for selfie posting. Halah, who is a 57 years old activist, uses her social media accounts in general, and selfies on Snapchat in particular, to communicate her empowering vision to her female followers of varying ages. According to her, "women should be empowered on multiple levels including family, career, legal, financial and intellectual." In her Snapchat account, she posted selfies about topics such as how women can pursue legal actions if they are in an abusive relationship, the services and funding available for divorced women and widows, strategies for starting a new small business, educating mothers about dealing with family

members and in-laws in an effective way, dealing with conflict in the family setting, how to be effective in society and reach out to orphans, and how to volunteer for community services. She sometimes presents these aspects from her own experience while, at other times, she illustrates how to do something in steps. As she stated, many members of her online audience, which includes her former students, see her as a role model. Her age and her experience in dealing with multiple institutions have helped her to present useful content. By contrast, younger selfie takers tend to emphasise appearance and college related topics. Halah is able to use her selfies on Snapchat to motivate and to empower because, nowadays, the young Saudi audience prefers Snapchat over other platforms.

4.3. The Multiplicity of Motivations

Previously, I identified six major motivations for selfie postings: attention-seeking, communicating-the-self, entertainment, experimenting, empowerment and education. This section clarifies how multiple motivations may influence selfie posting. In most cases, selfie producers were rarely motivated by one factor. It was observed that varying motivations may be found among selfie producers. There could be more than one reason for taking selfies and sharing them online depending on the context, situation, and the mood of the producer. For instance, Batool who is a 22-year-old married student, and who is an employee at a media production company, said “I take selfies because I feel that the image comes out very pretty when captured as a selfie”. Later, as we were discussing the feelings communicated in a selfie, she mentioned: “sometimes I would be very bored with university work or sleepy, or sometimes I would be feeling happy as when being at a gathering.” Yet, when asked about the most prominent kind of selfie she usually posts, she commented: “sometimes I would get an invitation to a restaurant opening so I have to post images to my followers and cover everything; at other events we would take a group selfie so I share it for the memory.” The three previous quotes emphasised varying motivations depending on the situation. Batool

posts selfies because of self-love, boredom, communicating the self, and promoting places or objects. Such a variety of motives informs the technological and non-technological preparations shaping the production of the image as stages two and three of the selfie model outlines.

Of course, these varying motivations reflect different roles in her life, once as a student and, on another occasion, as a blogger. In this sense, the selfie is used as a digital tool to enable the performer or “actor” to play multiple roles to different audiences as Goffman (1959) theorised. The multiplicity of motivations for posting selfies was implied by the variety of contexts displayed in participants’ selfies posted during the photo-elicitation interview. A number of participants posted selfies at home, while travelling, alone, with others, and at work. Such variety indicates that selfie producers have multiple motivations, which is important because this reflects varying dimensions of their identity and highlights how producers use platform affordances to fulfil their motives.

In addition, participants mostly mentioned one motivation when asked ‘What motivates you to take a selfie?’ but when asked questions like ‘What are you trying to communicate through your selfies? What does your selfie say about you? What kind of selfie do you mostly post and why?’ participants revealed that there a number of motivations. This shows the significance of my multi-stage methodological design to uncover other motives recognised in the photo-elicitation discussion, highlighted in the focus group discussion, and described in the face-to-face interview.

Not only did the context and location inform selfie-posting motivations, but also the personality of the selfie producer played a significant role. For instance, Lamar who is a 19-year-old student, was mainly motivated to communicate the self and seek attention using black and white filtered selfies. Shaza, a 21-year-old, posted selfies for attention-seeking motives. In her account, she used a lot of mirror selfies so that viewers would comment on

her outfit. In fact, in a selfie posted on Instagram, she wrote “waiting be like” under her selfie, as in photo 4.1, to seek viewers’ attention.

Participants between 21 and 32 years old including Kholood, Shehana, Afaf, Nayar, Ghaida, and Basma were all motivated to seek attention through the posting of an edited and improved selfie. They used a flower crown filter to “beautify” their selfie. Conversely, Donia, Arwa, and Mozn posted unedited selfies that had the purpose of communicating an “authentic” self. Hanadi (31 years old), Maha (22 years old), and Shorog (18 years old) applied ironic filters that are rarely used and posted selfies for the purpose of experimenting with filters. Rema aged 26, and Rotana aged 18 posted selfies for entertainment reasons and to pass the time while being transported in a car. Elaf, Halah, and Nehal’s selfie postings were related to educational and empowering motives.

A recent selfie motivation study confirmed that selfie motivators are related differently to different personality characteristics (Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017). This study used quantitative measures to assess the relation between selfie behaviours and the big five traits. My study relied on patterns in participants’ selfie postings in relation to their expressions during both in-depth and photo-elicitation interviews. Thus, relying on quantitative methods to understand selfie motives as in the study by Etgar and Amichai-Hamburger (2017) is useful in making broad generalisations. However, in-depth research is needed to unravel the complicated and nuanced motivations as demonstrated in Batool’s three quotes and the experimentation motives identified in the online observation phase instead of the textual narratives of the interviews.

4.3.1. Distinctions between Taking, Editing, and Posting Selfies Motives

A significant body of literature investigated selfie behaviours (McLean et al., 2015; Milcot, 2015; Senft & Baym, 2015; Tiidenberg, 2015; Warfield, 2014) yet few studies made distinctions among motives related to behaviours in taking selfies, editing selfies, and posting

selfies (Al-Kandari & Abdelaziz, 2018; Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017; Sung et al., 2016). With this in mind, I address the question of selfie producers having varying motivations depending on what is done with the selfie including: taking, editing, or sharing.

The findings of this study associated selfie entertainment motives and experimenting motives with taking selfie activities as in the cases of experimentation with rarely used face filters and animal face filters (see 5.1). Participants' narratives also align with the study by Al-Kandari and Abdelaziz (2018) associating documentation motives with taking selfies. Indeed, in the opening questions of the in-depth interviews, participants used phrases such as: "to archive the moment", "to save the memory", "to remember the gathering and event" as the first reasons used to explain the reasons for their interest in selfie communication. Etgar and Amichai-Hamburger (2017) have also associated documentation with selfie taking in addition to self-approval and belonging motives. The consensus between the three studies on associating documentation with the action of selfie taking is significant because it shows that common selfie practices exist regardless of cultural diversity. The tempting desire to "freeze the moment" through a selfie image enables the producer not only to document the event but also to document being in the event and being able to access the image easily on their phone. This also explains why participants posted more selfies when travelling on holidays and being outdoors compared to the number of selfies taken while being indoors.

Selfie editing and selfie posting were found to be associated with communicating the self and attention-seeking motives. As Goffman (1959) suggested, humans tend to present an enhanced self to an audience. Thus, the process of digitally adjusting one's image is guided by the desire to receive positive feedback and the admiration of viewers. This conclusion was reached based on participants' narratives on using editing effects and applications and on the selfies they posted. Chapter Six provides details and examples of the use of enhancing strategies. Similarly, appraisal seeking self-presentation motives were associated with editing

selfies as the Kuwaiti cross-gender sample implied (Al-Kandari & Abdelaziz, 2018). It is of interest to note that male selfie producers also edit their selfies to seek viewers' approval.

In addition to attention-seeking, the findings also associated posting selfies with educating and empowering motives. As such content is meant to spread awareness among viewers, it is not surprising that these motives are associated with posting selfies. The study by Sung et al. (2016) associated attention-seeking motives, communication, archiving, and entertainment motives with selfie posting. My findings disagree with the study by Sung et al. (2016) in two areas. First, my data associated attention-seeking motives with both editing selfies and posting selfies as the producers tend initially to "perfect" the image through a virtual makeover and then share it with others online. This difference could be as a result of the methodological designs of both studies. While I conducted multiple stages, including discussing selfie practices with participants before they produced a selfie, observing the posted selfie online, and then discussing the posted images, Sung et al. (2016) relied on interviews and a quantitative survey. Secondly, my data associated archiving and documenting motives with taking selfies instead of posting selfies. Participants in this study indicated taking the selfie on memorable occasions so that later they could revisit them and view them again and they did not necessarily post the images online.

In sum, this section presented findings resulting from the motivations for taking, editing, and posting selfies. The thesis identified six motives: communicating-the-self, attention-seeking, experimentation, entertainment, educating and empowerment. In particular, entertainment, experimenting, and documenting motives were associated with the practice of taking selfies. Communicating the self was associated with editing selfies, whereas attention-seeking motives were associated with both editing and posting selfies. Empowering and educating motives were correlated with posting selfie practices. It was also argued that selfie producers are generally influenced by multiple motivations depending on

the context, the location, and the mood of the producers. Next, I highlight how cultural practices shape selfie presentation.

4.4. Selfies and Saudi Culture

Research question six asked whether cultural norms influence selfie behaviours. The Saudi culture was found to inform selfie takers in various areas as suggested in Chapter Two. With that in mind, this section consists of four sub-sections: unposted selfies, the shift in image sharing, veiling habits, and the consideration of specific norms. The following sub-sections 4.4.1- 4.4.5 extend Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management to digital spaces. Afterwards, I will explain aspects of selfies as a cross-cultural phenomenon in terms of the study findings in section 4.5.

4.4.1. Unposted Selfies

Examining selfies that are posted online is essential to understand the personal experience and online interaction with viewers such as commenting on the selfies, liking the selfie, or even ignoring the selfies. However, investigating the types of selfies that are taken, but were not posted online, may provide indications about cultural taboos, personal preferences, and how a user tries to manage their presentation through sharing some selfies while blocking viewers from seeing others. In order to get a sense of the cases in which users do not share selfies, participants in the individual interviews were asked questions such as: 'What selfies do you avoid posting and why? What cultural norms may occur to you when you are about to post a selfie? How does your selfie relate to avoiding criticism, if at all? Do you, for instance, avoid posting certain selfies in order not to get negative comments or be judged by others on your network? Before uploading your selfies on Instagram or Snapchat, do you think of what people value in you? How they will perceive you? Have you thought about posting several kinds of selfies in order to connect with multiple audiences (girlfriends, family members, foreigners, consumers, students, males)? Can you give examples?'

Participants' responses indicated that users will not post selfies online in many cases including: if the producer is not satisfied with the appearance of the selfie, if a similar selfie was already posted, if the selfie included inappropriate jokes, if the producer was wearing revealing clothes, if the selfie was taken while dating someone (illegal relationship), if it was an intimate selfie with a spouse, if the selfie taker were smoking a hookah, if the selfie included someone who does not want to share their picture online, if the selfie included an inappropriate hand gesture, if the selfie included an undesirable item like a cigarette, or if the background was untidy.

Participants indicated that they would not share those selfies online but that they might keep the selfie to preserve the memory. For instance, when Merna, who is 22 years old, was asked about selfies that she does not post, she noted that this happened: "if someone appeared by mistake in the background of the selfie, or if I took the selfie with the intention of keeping it to myself". There are factors related to the privacy of others like the appearance of another person, while in other cases it is mainly about not being satisfied with image as in the case of Malak, a makeup artist. When I asked her about her unposted selfies, she said "the one showing my face pimples or I didn't like how my eyebrow or nose looks so ... um really shallow things".

Afaf, another participant, does not post selfies that could be negatively judged or that are not satisfying in terms of appearance. She said: "Any photo that I might be judged on, I will avoid posting. If I didn't like how I looked or if I didn't like how the other person with me in the selfie looked." In her case, all of the people in the selfie should look good before she would post the selfie on her account. This implies that her idea of impression management extends to other people in the selfie. If everyone is looking good, that makes her look better in her frontstage performance.

Most participants revealed that they do not want to be judged by others, which is why they chose not to post certain selfies. Kholod is a 33-year-old single lady who runs her own designing company in Riyadh. The following dialogue with her demonstrates the kind of selfie which may invite criticism in the Saudi culture:

Researcher: What kind of selfie do you avoid posting and why?

Kholod: Ummm, when I travel, for instance, I avoid posting selfies in which my headscarf is not placed properly or parts of my hair are obvious because some people (e.g., my sister-in-law or my brother Mohammed) may critique those selfies. Also, there are some selfies I took with celebrities but I haven't posted them because I don't want others telling me "why have taken a picture beside so and so?" or "he is standing so close to you"

Researcher: You mean male celebrities in this case?

Kholod: Yeah, male celebrities. So, such selfies I intentionally avoid posting them because I don't want to get a headache because of them.

As Kholod suggested, selfies that show parts of the body or include opposite sexes standing next to each other could be judged negatively by Saudi viewers including family members. Even if the selfie producers were not practising veiling or did not mind standing next to a stranger, posting such selfies online means giving viewers an opportunity to judge and to gossip about the person.

There are cases when users would not post the selfies in their public story (frontstage) but would share them in a private message (snap) as in the quadruple selfie in photo 4.8.

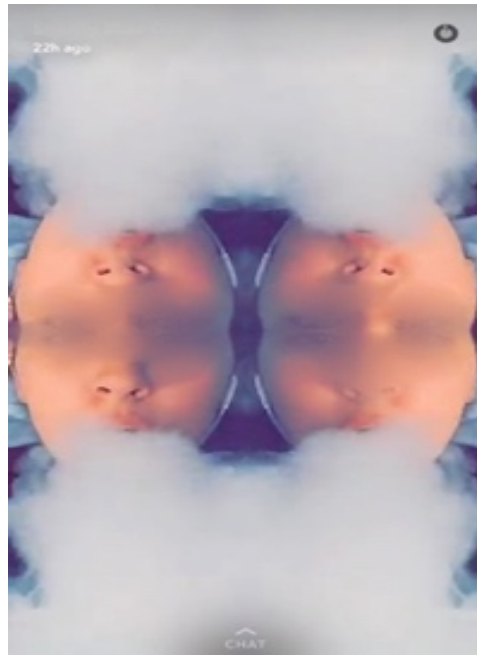


Photo: 4.8

This selfie 4.8 would have been problematic if posted on a public account or viewed by older members of the family. Knowing that, Donia took a selfie while smoking an electric hookah on her bed. Donia decided to use a quadruple Snapchat filter at the moment of blowing smoke. She then posted her selfie on her Snapchat account to be viewed by her girlfriends. She did not post it on the Snapchat account viewed by family members and relatives. When asked to comment on the selfie, she said: “I was in a good mood relaxing in my bedroom and wanted to share the moment with my girlfriends”. I then asked her why did she post the selfie on this account in particular, and she said: “It is not that I am trying to hide anything, my family knows that I smoke, it is just not appropriate to post this kind of selfie in front of relatives who might and would judge me or my parents.” This illustrates the fact that smoking a hookah is negatively perceived when done by women. The context of the selfie and Donia’s comment also reveal that parents’ approval of some actions and the online documentation through selfie portraiture are two separate things.

Other situations in which selfie producers prefer to post selfies in a backstage setting include: selfies with revealing clothes, selfies while smoking a hookah, and selfies applying funny face filters. These three types of selfies are shared with close networks like girlfriends and sisters using Snapchat private messaging. This distinction between the public and the private audience could be explained in terms of a user's desire to maintain a certain image in front of others and to avoid being judged. Unlike the public audience which includes older women, the close private community is less likely to judge negatively or to comment. In some sense, these virtual spaces are a simulation of women's offline social events in Saudi in which younger girls prefer to sit together at a separate ballroom table (or on a sofa if the party is in a house) to discuss topics of interest or to get up and dance. The major difference between girls' gatherings in offline and online spaces is that a selfie that is shared as a private message is confidential compared to a conversation that takes place between two or more individuals in a house or a ballroom where the rest of the family are present.

In the dialogue of impression management (Goffman, 1959), the findings declared that Saudi selfie takers avoid posting particular selfies such as: selfies while smoking a hookah, selfies with revealing clothes, selfies with a male celebrity, unveiled selfies taken in a public place, selfies showing a cigarette or a hookah, selfies containing inappropriate jokes or unwanted items, selfies while out on a date, intimate selfies with a spouse, selfies in which the producer is not satisfied with their appearance, and selfies that include inappropriate hand gestures. Participants avoided posting such selfies as part of maintaining their image and because they were being cautious about what others would think of them. These situations in which Saudi selfie producers hesitate to post their selfies online exemplify the role of cultural elements in shaping selfie practices forming the fourth stage of the proposed selfie model I will introduce in section 4.6.

4.4.2. The Shift in Image Sharing

The literature review presented a discussion on the representation of Saudi women (section 2.8). This section points out how former family values regarding girls' photo sharing relate to posting selfies nowadays according to the participants in this study. Today, every girl in the family has her own camera on her phone and, to some extent, there is a shift in people's perceptions about girls taking and sharing photos. In order to understand how cultural codes might impact on selfie posting, I asked Batool, a 22-year-old married student who works part time in an advertising company, 'How does the practice of selfie posting relate to the culture of Saudi in your opinion?' She replied:

Because of the restrictions on girls. I remember when I was young we weren't allowed to be pictured with someone else's camera. So on the graduation party day, when a girl used to bring a camera to school to take pictures, my mom and dad would always say: "Be careful! Do not allow someone at school to take your photo, you don't know that someone" and that was right back then. And the previous repression on girls leads to how some girls are using selfies and Snapchat inappropriately nowadays. I don't really like taking selfies and using Snapchat but because I am working in the media industry and everyone is using them ... so I am following the trend but I use in an appropriate way.

In Batool's view, putting many restrictions on girls' photos led to misuse in selfie activities. The last decade witnessed some transformations in Saudi related to the empowerment of women. These transformations included: the creation of a women's council, allowing women to vote in local elections, and allowing them to be appointed to the Consultative Assembly. The 2030 Saudi vision attempts to increase women's integration into the workplace by 8%. With that in mind, it is expected that women's empowerment in the future may result in further changes in people's perceptions about Saudi women's self-presentation in social

media. This does not suggest that society will fully accept women posting their unveiled images on social media. However, families and women themselves might be less hesitant about using personal images on SNS either to present a professional profile or for entertainment reasons if it becomes a trending practice. To illustrate, a participant, who is 24-year-old, was asked if the public/private aspect of girls' SNS accounts relates to the cultural norms in Saudi said:

Of course, our traditions here dictate that women shouldn't be seen by anyone, not all the public can see her, a few years ago if a man took a picture of a woman he might blackmail her for the image. But now it is different. I mean people are not fully accepting that Saudi women work in media but the society has become so open compared to the past. Many people have my photo because of my job it is posted in most social media platforms.

Below is another quotation explaining the social change regarding sharing women's images in social media in Saudi:

So, previously, they used to warn us a lot from putting our image online. I was even afraid of putting my image in the messenger profile photo but now women and girls are posting their images everywhere, I mean society has changed a lot in terms of posting women's images in the last few years ... suddenly women of different ages are posting their selfies on Snapchat.

This social change regarding Saudi women's online presentation is not welcomed by all Saudi families in all regions. Values regarding women's identity are strongly rooted in the culture. For instance, many families impose a lot of restrictions and rules to be obeyed by females while the same rules do not apply to Saudi men. Such rules regarding veiling and public presentation and reputation may guide the choices women make when presenting themselves through selfie portraiture. When Donia, who is a 22-year-old, was asked "How

does the public/private aspect of girls' SNS accounts relate to the cultural norm in Saudi?", she declared:

I think it depends on whether the account was a girl's account or a boy's account ... our society treats boys and girls differently, what boys can do, girls can't. So, girls might be afraid or reluctant to present their images online whereas boys will present themselves without fearing that they may be judged or their photo maybe misused, I mean if males did something wrong they won't be judged as girls would be.

Not only should women be aware of their appearance when posting a selfie but also the context of the selfie is also important. While some contexts like dining with family or attending a women's social party are socially acceptable, other newly emerging contexts like work meetings including both genders and travelling with girlfriends for holiday reasons may be negatively judged by viewers when posted by women. For instance, when a participant was asked about how the cultural norm might relate to her selfie behaviours, she said:

"People will talk anyway ... so if a girl is travelling with her girlfriends people will say things like "Where are her parents? How come they let her travel alone?" even if they didn't do anything wrong, many people don't accept the idea.

The same selfie behaviours are expected to be judged differently when posted by Saudi men and their male friends due to the social construction of the culture. In offline setting, it is socially acceptable for males to travel for entertainment whereas single Saudi women are likely to be judged if they are travelling without a male guardian whether for holiday or study purposes. As selfies are visual reflections of one's life, viewers may judge users' selfies in a similar manner when judging one's behaviours in an offline setting. Future research may examine cross-gender selfie contexts and social judgement among the Saudi population.

Although sharing selfies with others is common among Saudi women who adjust privacy settings and use control over who has access, the older generation still hesitates to

participate in such practices. To illustrate, Halah who is 57 years old and a mother of five daughters express her concerns:

If the account is a private account, that is ok but I would still say it is preferable not to post a selfie while putting on makeup. And, if the account is public, then it is unacceptable. I personally don't post any unveiled selfies or selfies with makeup on SNS. And, I would really get annoyed if one of my daughters posted such a selfie.

Participants addressed some selfie cases that could invite social judgement such as posting a selfie while travelling abroad with friends, a group selfie including males and females, a selfie with makeup, and a selfie that is posted to the public on social media. Although those selfies might be unacceptable, the current and future transformations in Saudi may enable people to act in non-traditional ways. These reformations include the legalisation of women driving and the lifting of the ban on cinemas. In addition, allowing both genders to work in the same workplace in the private sector is being considered.

4.4.3. Veiling Habits

Veiling habits and their relation to selfie posting was another key finding that applies to the Saudi context. The practice of veiling was one of the themes that emerged repeatedly in participants' interviews. Participants clarified that posting a veiled selfie or unveiled selfie is determined by the location where the selfie is taken. For instance, veiled selfies were commonly taken in restaurants, cafes, travel trips, and cars. Conversely, unveiled selfies are usually taken at female wedding parties, female social gatherings, female university campuses, and private houses. When a participant was asked about this issue, she explained her view, saying 'I take a *Mohajaba* [veiled] selfie when I am in a public place, whereas I take an unveiled selfie when I am in a private house or event and I would post those selfies online since I don't have unrelated males in my account'.

Moreover, participants associated online selfie presentation with offline self-presentation. Accordingly, those who choose to post veiled selfies online adhere to social norms which require being veiled in offline public places. A participant who only posts veiled selfies discussed this issue:

Well, the value of veiling appears in my selfie, yet I don't post my selfie with a veil to give others the impression that I practice veiling, it's just the way I appear in public so that also applies to my photos on SNS.

In her view, the virtual space is an extension of the offline self-presentation that occurs in public places. Thus, posting a veiled selfie maintains the image which veiled women attempt to show in their daily offline life. This suggests that Muslims who do not practice veiling may post unveiled selfies. Hanadi commented on this matter:

People have a preference in the way they set their account, so, if a girl is not practicing the hijab, then it is likely that she would post unveiled selfies. But, it is also possible that someone who is practicing the hijab may have a public account which includes her veiled photos, in addition to a private account where she would share her unveiled photos with only close girlfriends and family members.

The publicity of the account also influences veiling practices. The findings noted that women are likely to post a veiled selfie if the account is set to public and it is viewed by an unlimited number of users. On the other hand, private accounts that enable the user to control the selfie viewers easily may include a combination of veiled and unveiled selfies at the same time.

According to Shaimaa,

If I changed my account to be public, I would be more selective about the selfies I am posting, I would make sure that all of my selfies are decent and veiled since I do not know those viewing my selfies closely.

4.4.4. Privacy Concerns

The finding inferred that Saudi selfie takers value their own privacy highly as well as the privacy of other females. Respecting the privacy of girlfriends¹³ was common among participants. Girlfriends was the term used by the participants. In Saudi, women would use this term in reference to female friends they associate with. For the most part, this relationship is not a romantic or sexual relationship. Most women would gather on private occasions, in the workplace, and in educational institutions, in designated female areas. As women's photographs are associated with their reputation and family name, participants highlighted the importance of making sure that when taking a group selfie that included female friends, such selfies will not be viewed by males who should not see the image. Participant Donia elaborated when I asked her about the reason for having two Snapchat accounts:

Simply because of the male Snapchatters in my family, my uncle, my cousins, my aunt's husband ... these male individuals are not supposed to see selfies that include my girlfriends. And I don't want to go through the hassle of sending some things as a private snap and others in a public story. I mean one could easily post a selfie in the public story by mistake and I want to avoid that with my girlfriends' pictures ... my girlfriends' photos are a big responsibility. I may forget, I may try to erase it after it has already been posted ... so I don't want to worry about all that. So, it is better to have two accounts, it was such a relief when I did that.

Considering that Donia has 700 Snapchatters viewing her Snapchat account, the process of selecting individual Snapchatters from the friend list would be a tedious one when sending

¹³ Relationships between unmarried couples are not acceptable in Saudi. For more on this see Le Renard (2008).

images as private snap. Also, this interview was conducted before Snapchat launched the feature that enables a user to create multiple groups within the same account.

In addition, participants used strategies other than creating dual Snapchat accounts to ensure the privacy of their friends' photos, such as temporary blocking. Nada made the following observation:

In our culture, the network of family is so embedded in selfie sharing interactions. So, for instance, many girls would either not add male cousins to Snapchat or would block them when the girl shares a group selfie that includes her girlfriends.

This theme of the privacy setting is interrelated with the platform vernacular that will be explored in section 5.1. The architecture of Snapchat enables various privacy settings. This has an impact on the types of selfies that are produced and shared on the platform.

Apart from temporary blocking on Snapchat and having multiple accounts, some users set their account(s) to be private (requiring user consent to see the account) to ensure that only a limited number of Snapchatters may view the posted selfie. When I asked Shaimaa to tell me about her perceptions of the private account setting, this was her response:

Setting my Snapchat account as private makes me feel more relaxed and that enables me to post group selfies taken with family members or with my girlfriends but I wouldn't be able to do so if the account was a public account.

As has been indicated, Saudi women treat group selfies that include female friends with caution, to prevent unrelated males from viewing these selfies. Therefore, creating multiple accounts, temporary blocking, and setting the account as a private account, were the three strategies used by Saudi women to protect the privacy of their girlfriends.

4.4.5. The Consideration of Specific Cultural Norms

This study suggested that Saudi selfie takers consider specific social norms such as respect for the elderly, parents' feelings, and the religious boundaries while dealing with

males. According to social norms, family members such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, mothers-in-law, and elders in the family are respected and honoured. With this in mind, young selfie takers avoid posting selfies that include bad language¹⁴ or inappropriate behaviour in an account viewed by those members. As an illustration, Hanadi who, is a 31-year-old, stated that she does not post selfies that might hurt her mother's feelings.

In a similar manner, selfie takers avoided posting selfies that, if viewed by others, might cause embarrassment to their parents. For instance, participant Ghaida, who is a 19-year-old single student indicated that she does not practise veiling and she travels with her father and brothers without wearing a head scarf. However, because she knows her father would not be happy to know that her unveiled selfies are posted online, she decides to share her travelling selfies with selected girlfriends on Snapchat using a private snap rather than posting the selfies in the public story where they could be seen by relatives. Ghaida's selection of the platform and her selectivity in regard to her audience exemplifies stages five and six of the proposed selfie model. Merna revealed that her mother knows that she smokes a hookah in a public café with her friends but posting a selfie while smoking a hookah would be a digital documentation of her action which would be likely to be negatively judged. So, in order not to disappoint her mother by posting such a selfie, she saves such selfies offline.

The relationships with related but non-mahram males were also pointed out by participants. To a Muslim female, a mahram is an unmarriageable male family member like a father, a brother, a son, an uncle, or a grandfather with whom marriage or sex is considered illegal in Islam. These male family members are allowed to see the Muslim woman without her veil. With that in mind, there are non-mahram members who attend face-to-face family

¹⁴ These could be added using the text feature in image selfie.

gatherings such as brothers-in-law or cousins with whom the women interact formally and appear veiled, if they practise hijab. In this study, participants indicated that they maintained the formality of relationships in digital space. For example, Reham, who is a 31-year-old married working mother said:

I feel that my brother-in-law who also happens to be my cousin can view my Snapchat account and thus I am very cautious about the selfies I post in the public story, I send funny and unveiled selfies using private snaps.

Conversely, Nehal, who is a 32-year-old married nurse said: “The selfies posted in my Snapchat account should not be viewed by my brother-in-law anyway, that is why I did not accept his request. This is a space for me and my girlfriends”.

Unmarried younger participants had the same notion of digital male exclusion but, in their case, it is intended to protect the privacy of girlfriends. Donia a 22-year-old mentioned that:

I have a lot of cousins and I don’t practise veiling in front of them, but because of the privacy of my girlfriends I made a separate Snapchat account that includes my family and relatives and another Snapchat account to share selfies with my girlfriends.

As we have seen, these classifications involving including certain male Snapchatters in the family while excluding others were informed by the religious framing of relationships between males and females which extends to digital spaces and informs the presentation of selfie portraiture. While this finding is applied to Saudi culture, it is possible that it replicated in other Islamic societies like the Gulf countries. Future studies should examine to what extent does Islamic framing of cross-gender relationships apply to selfie posting behaviours.

Although the cultural norms informing selfie behaviours such as: veiling habits, religious boundaries with males, privacy concerns, religious opinions on using a particular filter, cross gender presentation, wearing revealing clothes, and hookah smoking by females

were addressed in this section, there are key cultural ideas that apply to selfie behaviours that will be explained in the next chapters. Chapter Five will outline the management of the selfie audience in varying online proxemics, as informed by gender, power relations, and the fear of the evil eye. Additionally, Chapter Six will explore selfie construction in relation to the notion of the gaze in terms of the Saudi context. Next, I explain how the selfie phenomenon might be understood as a cultural phenomenon.

4.5. Selfies as a Cultural Phenomenon

The former section emphasised key factors which make Saudi selfie producers distinctive in relation to other selfie producers worldwide. Nonetheless, selfie producing is a popular cross-cultural phenomenon (Etgar & Amichai-Hamburger, 2017). I argue that investigating selfie behaviours of one ethnic group provides an understanding of how the offline environment is reproduced in online studies. The examination of selfie practices from the perspectives of varying backgrounds develops insights about the technological dimensions of social media. Thus, this section addresses the notion of selfie practices that were found to be held in common with non-Saudi selfie takers. These include: self-enhancing effects, mirror selfies, and shared motives for selfie posting.

This study supports the idea that at least some selfie takers applied enhancing effects and beautifying filters to appear more desirable as part of a frontstage performance (see Chapter Six). This finding is in keeping with selfie research conducted on a sample of Korean females which asserted that selfie-editing is related to the desire for more ideal self-presentation (Chae, 2017). Also, a survey consisting of 1,710 American selfie takers, noted that 50% of the participants edited selfies (Renfrew Center Foundation, 2014). In addition, Chua and Chang (2016) reported that Singaporean girls (12–16 years old) edited selfies based on the judgements of their peers. Taking into account the different nationalities and the age of sample, it could be implied that selfie editing is a common digital selfie practice.

The mirror selfie, which is a selfie taken in front of a mirror, was a selfie type observed in this study and in previous studies. Shipley (2015) described the mirror selfie as a projection of an inner dialogue about public presence (p. 407). Uzlaner (2017) examined various aspects of the gaze in relation to the mirror selfie. The collapse of the object into the subject in this type of selfie provides a holistic view of the selfie producer, the camera phone, and the background. Since this type of image is common among selfie users, it is not surprising that selfie takers from varying cultures take mirror selfies.

Throughout this study, six major motives were identified: communicating-the-self, attention-seeking, entertainment, experimenting, empowerment and education. Some of these motives have been previously addressed while others are being identified for the first time. Sung et al. (2016) revealed that attention-seeking and entertainment are major motives that drive selfie-posting behaviours. It is essential here to note that selfie studies did not make a clear connection between communicating-the-self-motives and attention-seeking motives as this study hypothesised.

Posting selfies for experimenting, empowerment and education reasons has not been addressed in earlier research. A number of studies (Chae, 2017; McLean et al., 2015) indicated that selfie producers edit selfies, which includes the use of filters, yet the experimenting face filter was not identified as a reason for taking selfies. This could be because the studies relied on one phase of research. By contrast, the multimodal phase design of this study allows the researcher to observe posted selfies and later, in the photo-elicitation interview, to ask the participants about filtered selfies. This process can lead to the emergence of this particular motivation.

Taking selfies for documentation reasons was mentioned by Rettberg (2014) and Chae (2017). Similarly, this study reported documentation and archiving, which are parts of communicating the self motives. Additionally, this study draw attention to common digital

effects like special occasion filters and seasonal filters used with a selfie to signal a particular location or event. In their research, Senft and Baym (2015) noted that selfies could be used as an empowering tool to address political issues. The present study shows how selfies are used as an empowerment tool to educate Saudi women, in particular about their legal rights. The use of selfies as an educational tool in the context of a public issue has not been reported in previous research.

All in all, this section highlighted common selfie practices among Saudi and non-Saudi selfie takers including the tendency to edit selfies and the taking of mirror selfies. Attention-seeking, entertainment, and documentation were common motives among Saudi and non-Saudi selfie producers. Next, I will demonstrate how the motivations for selfie production and the cultural norms are building blocks in the proposed selfie model.

4.6. Introducing the “Selfie Production Model”

The selfie model describes the process or structural approach of taking, editing, and sharing selfies online. These stages were developed from interviews, observation, and photo-elicitation interviews phases of this study. Future scholars should use this model to see how it applies to selfie producers in other geographical and cultural contexts. The model was developed based on participants’ narratives, expressions, the rationale of the virtual makeover, and the selfies posted in their account. The in-depth methodological design was a key factor in developing the model at the final stage of data analysis as it provided a chance to understand what selfie producers in focus groups think collectively of the phenomenon, the personal narratives and choices articulated in interviews, and the applications of these decisions to daily online communications witnessed during observations and reflections of participants on selfies during the final photo-elicitation interview.

The selfie model suggests that selfie producers are aware of their audience, considerate of cultural norms, and tend to present a desirable online self-presentation. Thus, the stages of

the proposed selfie model in selfie online communications enhance Goffman's (1959) theory of frontstage and backstage performances. Now, I will briefly explain the selfie model illustrated in Figure 4.1.

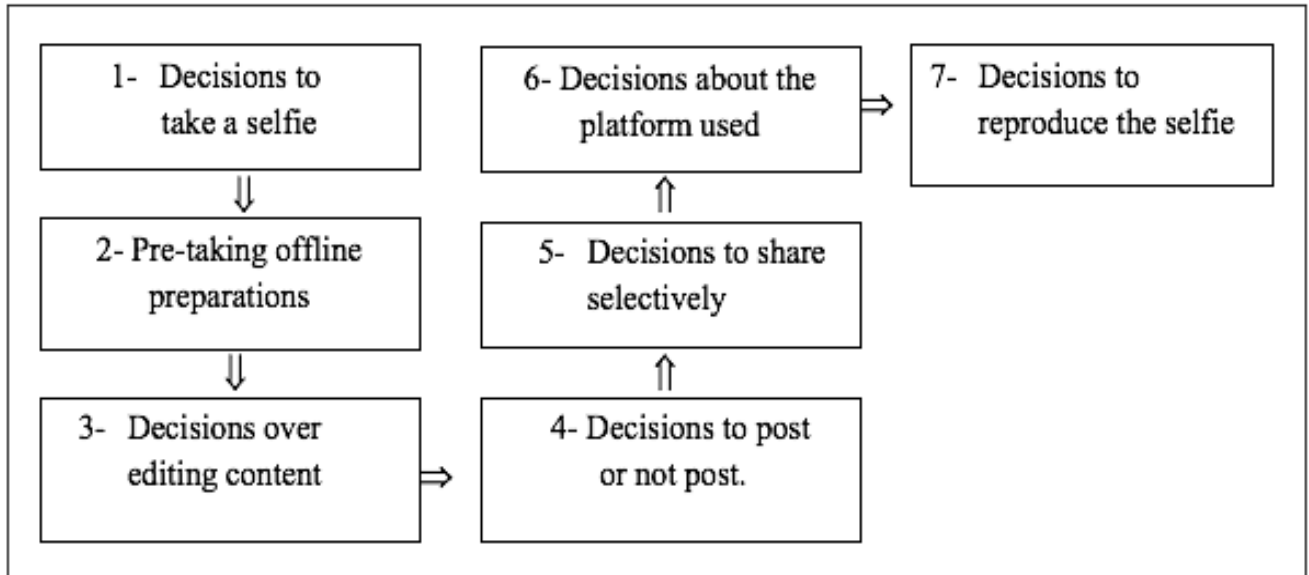


Figure 4.1: The proposed selfie production model.

4.6.1. Stages of Selfie Posting

The analysis of the four phases of my study suggested a structural approach to the experience of selfie taking and posting. According to this approach, the selfie process goes through multiple stages as follows: (1) decision to take selfie, (2) pre-taking preparations, (3) decision on content, (4) decision to post or not to post, (5) decision to share selectively, (6) decision about the platform used, (7) decision to reproduce selfie.

In the first stage, the selfie producers become motivated to take a selfie depending on the context, the location, or the mood of the user. In section 4.2, I expanded on six motives identified by this study: communicating-the-self, attention-seeking, entertainment, experimentation, educating and empowerment. In the second stage, the producer makes offline preparations in the location of filming the selfie such as arranging the room or the selfie taker's appearance and posing or fixing her hair. Thirdly, the producers will take the selfie and apply digital enhancing effects to make it appear more desirable, for example

applying a fair skin filter. In the fourth stage, which I have addressed in this chapter in section 4.4., the producers assess cultural aspects and decide whether or not to post the selfie or, perhaps, just to save it to the phone memory. Then the producers will consider the imagined audience and decide to post the selfie as a public post on the selected platform or through the private messaging option to selected users in the fifth stage. In the sixth stage, the selfie producer will assess the affordances of the platform and decide whether to post the selfie on Snapchat or Instagram. Finally, if the image was posted online and received positive feedback from viewers, the producer would be more likely to repost the selfie on other SNS.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter Four focused on three main areas: the motivations to take and post selfies, the cultural practices informing selfie behaviours and introducing the selfie model. By exploring reasons for selfie activities and the Saudi cultural practices informing selfie taking, Chapter Four set the scene for the upcoming chapters focusing on platform affordances, managing the selfie audience, strategies used to present an upgraded version of the self, and inviting the gaze of female viewers via selfies.

First of all, the study found that Saudi selfie producers post selfies to seek attention, communicate-the-self, be entertained, experiment with filters, and empower and educate others. This section contributed to the literature by identifying experimentation as a new motive for selfie taking and by highlighting the interrelations between attention-seeking and communicating-the-self motives according to Goffman's (1959) frontstage performance conceptualisation. Secondly, I framed selfie behaviours in light of Saudi cultural codes by exploring how veiling practices, parental feelings, and social taboos affect the decision to post or not to post selfies online which is the fourth stage of the selfie model. Lastly, I compared the selfie behaviours noticed in this study to selfie aspects presented in cross-cultural selfie literature concluding that editing selfies, mirror selfies, and attention-seeking

and entertainment aspects are shared motives among Saudi and non-Saudi selfie takers. With that in mind, I proposed that technical aspects of selfie behaviours could be understood by focusing on cross-cultural studies whereas examining individual culture highlights illustrates how social norms are reproduced in digital spaces. Accordingly, Chapter Five will explore how technical dimensions like platform vernacular and affordances, in addition to cultural codes, shape selfie behaviours.

Finally, I introduced the selfie production model which emerged from the findings resulting from selfie motives themes and cultural norms themes in addition to findings that will be discussed in upcoming chapters. The selfie model consists of seven stages: (1) decision to take selfie, (2) pre-taking preparations, (3) decisions over content, (4) decision to post or not post, (5) decision to share selectively, (6) decision about the platform used, (7) decision to reproduce the selfie. In this chapter, I discussed stage one by exploring the motivations for taking and posting selfies. I have also highlighted, in stage four, the cultural norms and constraints informing the decision to post or not to post the selfie. The significance of the selfie model lies in providing an understanding of how contemporary self-presentation occurs in online spaces.

The model also showcases how selfie producers use backstage and frontstage performances for impression management reasons. Some may think of the selfie as a single action (Carbon, 2017). The selfie model confirms that selfie taking and posting requires a series of actions in which audiences are segregated, technological and non-technological effects are applied, given and given off expressions are controlled, cultural norms are considered, and various performances are staged on various online platforms. Next, Chapter Five explores the role of platform affordances in shaping selfie practices and selfie producers' management of audiences which both draw evidence to stage six "decision about the platform used" and stage five "decision to share selectively" in the proposed model.

Chapter 5: Proxemics and Digital Elements

Chapter Four explained how cultural practices and selfie motives inform selfie presentation. This chapter explores the findings in terms of the relationship between selfie production, platform design, and producers' online social networks, drawing on theories of platform vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2014), platform affordances (Costa, 2018), and proxemics (Hall, 1966) to advance the building of the proposed selfie model. In particular, this chapter explains how platform vernaculars and affordances result in varying selfie practices based on the used platform. Therefore, I demonstrated how and why selfies production processes differ on Instagram versus those on Snapchat. The selection of the platform on which to post a selfie is ranked as the sixth stage in the selfie model. Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory was used to understand selfie production on both platforms. This is one of the first studies to highlight how distinctive types of selfies are produced on different platforms, thereby revealing the importance of examining multiple SNS accounts to understand online self-presentation better. The chapter also discusses how multiple layers of digital filtering on selfies are used for impression management purposes.

This chapter discusses three main ideas: selfie presentations and platform affordances, selfie producers sharing behaviours in relation to the management of online spaces, and selfie producers' blocking activities. First, section 5.1 aims to answer RQ3 focusing on the different types of selfie presentations of Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat by exploring frontstage and backstage performances in selfies posted. The findings revealed that the platform's affordances are a significant factor in shaping the selfie produced. I argue that selfie producers actively use the affordances of Snapchat and Instagram to present varying frontstage and backstage acts, as in the case of the flower crown filtered selfie and of the animal face filtered selfie. The findings also supported Goffman's (1959) idea that people present varying performances to different audiences. This section supports the formation of

the sixth stage of the selfie production model termed ‘decisions about the platform used’ in which the producer considers the affordances of the platform (see 4.6).

Second, the chapter explores selfie practices in relation to online proxemics to answer RQ4, which inquires how veiling habits and having multiple social media accounts inform selfie practices (see 5.4). The findings confirmed that selfie producers intentionally keep different audiences separated (Costa, 2018) by sharing personal selfies with close networks of friends on Snapchat while sharing fewer personal selfies with social audiences on Instagram. Indeed, I argue that selfies are shared on two levels within the same platform. An image can be shared on the public interface of the platform, or, it can be shared using private messaging. Sharing selfie photos with certain viewers while blocking others from accessing the image forms the fifth stage of the selfie model known as ‘decisions to share selectively’ as producers include and exclude viewers using the platform features.

The findings on sharing selfies through audience segregation were informed by Hall’s (1966) proxemic theory about the human use of space in face-to-face communications. Coining the term ‘online proxemics’ in reference to share selfies selectively with viewers, I argue that online photo sharing is determined by virtual intimacy rather than physical distance. Therefore, I developed a framework of online proxemics that illustrates how selfie producers share selfies using three spaces: a social space that includes Instagram viewers, a personal Snapchat space, and a private Snapchat space. The significance of the framework is that it extends Hall’s proxemics theory to online spaces by exploring selfie sharing activities. It is also important in exploring how a private audience is disconnected from a personal audience to avoid negative judgements. With these conditions in mind, I focused on analysing the private space that forms a relaxed female sphere on Snapchat.

Third, I presented findings on blocking behaviours and reasons for rejecting some selfie viewers. I argue that blocking viewers from accessing selfies plays an essential role in

understanding selfie behaviours. Accordingly, I investigated why selfie producers reject new friend requests and block current friends from viewing selfies in terms of proxemics theory (Hall, 1966). I found that factors like power relations, fear of the evil eye,¹⁵ the interactivity of the viewer, and interpersonal distance shaped Saudi women's selfie blocking decisions. These factors are linked to RQ5 highlighting the correlation between cultural norms and selfie practices. Selfie blocking behaviours are understood in relation to stage five in the proposed selfie model, which focuses on the sharing selfies selectively with others.

In short, this chapter argues that the platform affordances and interpersonal online proximity are equally significant factors in selfie production. The importance of this finding lies in showing that selfie producers are actively producing acceptable normativity to suit the expectations of their intended audience. The majority of social media research focused on platform affordances overlooked the role of social and cultural dimensions (Postigo, 2014; Trepte, 2015; Vitak, 2012; Wellman, Quan-Hasse & Boase, 2003). Therefore, my argument is that online photo sharing and photo blocking are shaped by online proximity, which is to a great extent informed by cultural norms, in addition to the platform architecture.

Online Performance and Technology

5.1. Platform Vernacular and Affordances

Drawing on frontstage/backstage theory (Goffman, 1959) and the concept of platform vernacular (Gibbs et al., 2015), this section explains how the platform design shapes selfie production as implied in stage six of the selfie model (see Section 4.6). The concept of a platform vernacular describes how particular stylistic conventions evolve within SNS. It also refers to how the platform architecture and design influence the content produced and the

¹⁵ The evil eye or *Aian* is a common concept in Middle Eastern cultures that refers to accidents and damages caused by the envy of others.

process of reading the content (Gibbs et al., 2015). Technological affordances depict the interactions between the users and the used tools (Carter, Westbrook, & Thompkins, 1999).

Specifically, this section explores how Snapchat and Instagram affordances shape selfie performances. I will be using the terms ‘Instagram selfie’ to refer to selfies that are posted on the Instagram application and ‘Snapchat selfie’ to refer to selfies posted on the Snapchat application. According to the findings, participants indicated that there are major differences between the selfies posted on Instagram and the ones posted on Snapchat. Thus, I will outline how the affordances of the used platform inform selfie norms, practices, and conventions in terms of the motivation for selfie posting, the audience permitted to view selfies, the context of the selfie, liking posted selfies and commenting on them, and reproducing a posted selfie in a platform like Snapchat to other platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp.

5.1.1. Goffman’s Dramaturgical Analysis and Selfies

In Goffman’s view, people perform on a backstage or a frontstage level. The selfie practices observed indicated that there is a complexity of staging. Yet, despite this, in their selfie study, Çadırcı and Güngör (2016) stated that there is no apparent backstage in selfies. The present study challenges such assertions and identifies various ways backstage settings are indeed part of selfie practices. Considering that my study examined both Instagram and Snapchat platforms used by Saudi females, the conceptualisation of frontstage and backstage will be illustrated in the next subsection by exploring selfie producers’ varying performances on Instagram and Snapchat. I argue that selfie producers created different frontstage and backstage personas to suit each audience by considering the affordances of the selected platform.

Participants’ narratives and images identified three ways of conceptualising dramaturgical analysis in relation to selfie presentation.

- I- A Snapchat selfie is framed as a ‘backstage act’ while an Instagram selfie forms a frontstage performance.
- II- Editing a selfie is a backstage performance, while the ‘polished’ selfie posted online counts as a frontstage performance.
- III- A selfie posted on the public interface of the platform (e.g., public story or Instagram public profile) is a frontstage performance, while a selfie shared through private messaging is a backstage performance.

First, I conceptualized an Instagram selfie as a frontstage performance and a Snapchat selfie as a backstage performance based on participants’ perceptions of the ‘more relaxed’ Snapchat selfies versus the ‘luxurious’ Instagram selfies in addition to the context of selfies displayed in the photos. For instance, Photos 5.1 and 5.2 were both posted by the same participant.

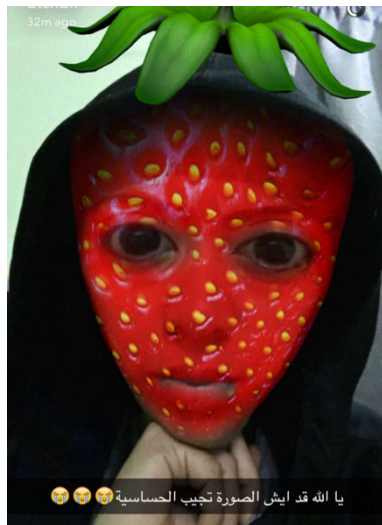


Photo 5.1



Photo 5.2

In Snapchat selfie 5.1, the participant applied a strawberry face filter, made a joke ‘OMG this image irritates my skin’ and shared it with her close network of friends, which includes about 20 snappers. In selfie 5.2, she applied a beautifying flower crown filter and included the location of the café, which indicates she was having a good time on a day out. She then posted it on Instagram where 72 of her 80 plus followers liked the selfie. Therefore,

selfie producers share varying aspects of their identities depending on the audience of a particular platform. Photos 5.1 and 5.2 are illustrations of the first example of a Snapchat selfie as a backstage performance (Photo 5.1) while the Instagram selfie displays a frontstage persona.

A second level of conceptualising dramaturgical analysis in relation to selfie practices position place the actions of editing selfies as a backstage level in which the selfie taker or ‘actor’ uses virtual possessions like face filters, geofilters, bitmoji avatars, digital makeup and contouring; includes text; and adjusts lighting and posing. As noted, selfie producers usually apply more than one digital effect. Afterwards, the action of posting the selfie in the public story of Snapchat or reposting the selfie on Instagram is the frontstage performed self. See Section 6.1 on the process of editing selfies.

Third, another level of performance emerged within Snapchat selfie interactions. The public story selfies could be seen as a frontstage performance compared to private snap selfies, selfies shared with a Snapchat group, or selfies posted while excluding certain snappers. As Rema said in reference to private snap selfie ‘Because I am sharing the selfie with my close friends so it is ok for them to see me in whatever condition.’ From here, the distinction between selfies posted on Snapchat’s public story forms a frontstage story compared to a private snap selfie that serves as a backstage situation in which the performer is more relaxed and unmasked. As Instagram also provides private messaging and public posting on the account page, this applies to Instagram too.

Although I framed selfie practices in relationship to Goffman’s (1959) theory in three ways, it is challenging to project how Goffman would frame selfie presentation and set the boundaries between what counts as frontstage and backstage performance in online spaces. In fact, Goffman’s theory is very useful in providing a general framework for selfie activities, but it could be problematic when focusing on the process of editing and posting selfies on

varying platforms. For instance, if a Snapchat selfie was seen as backstage performance compared to selfies posted on Instagram being seen as frontstage performance, how would professional selfies posted on a platform like LinkedIn be perceived? Another issue is that if we framed the process of editing as backstage and the end result of the posted selfie as frontstage (see Section 5.1.1), then it would be challenging to conceptualise re-editing and reposting the selfie in another platform. With that in mind, the following subsections frame participants' selfies in relation to Goffman's theory based on the editing applied to the final produced selfie on one platform at a time without tracing how the same selfie was reposted on other SNS.

5.1.2. Frontstage Selfies

Frontstage selfies are identified as selfies in which the producer tends to display desirable dimensions of the self like pretty facial features, elegant outfits, interesting places visited, and exciting activities, as well as concealing undesirable facial imperfections as part of impression management and attention seeking. The findings recognised three types of selfies as frontstage selfies: flower crown filtered selfies, butterfly selfies, and black and white filtered selfies. I argue that participants share selfies with beautifying filters because they like this 'upgraded version' of the self in addition to sharing their beauty with others in order to receive viewers' affirmation and positive feedback.



Photo 5.3



Photo 5.4



Photo 5.5

The flower crown filter is a very popular face filter among Saudi selfie takers. It comes in multi-coloured flowers as shown in Photos 5.3–5.5, pink flowers as in Photo 5.7, and blue flowers as in Photo 5.8. The multi-coloured flower crown filter was one of the most used filters among participants (Photos 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5). When participants were asked what their favourite filter was and why, Neyar, a 19-year-old student, explained:

The flower crown filter, because it makes the skin looks prettier and the face more clear and glowing...I mean the look is more desirable for everyone who uses this filter because most people will look pretty in it without having to put on any makeup. Neyar's rationale exemplifies the application of Goffman's dramaturgical analysis to posting filtered selfies. In Goffman's view, in the frontstage performance, people communicate their favourable self to others.

Not only does the flower crown filter make a face prettier, but it also covers undesired facial features. For instance, when participants were asked to explain their preference for using the flower crown filter, Arwa, a 25-year-old unemployed woman, said: 'I like the crown flower filter because it covers up my forehead, an area where I have skin problems.' This notion of enhancing the appearance confirms Goffman's (1959) idea of using surroundings when staging a performance. Similarly, Maha, a 22-year-old student, revealed:

The flower crown filter and the pink flower filter...both add pretty lighting to the face and cover acne and adds a nice effect to the eyes because it emphasises the reflection and light on them...So those filters don't change who you are but they upgrade who you are.

Maha is a makeup artist who would not share a selfie unless she put on professional makeup to cover up all blemishes, or she uses the flower crown filter. To her, appearance is important even if the selfie is only shared with her close network of friends on Snapchat. Thus, taking a selfie with the flower crown filter satisfies her need to impress others and to enjoy her beauty.

This also points to platform affordances because these flower crown face filters are exclusive to Snapchat, which makes applying and sharing them a dominant platform vernacular.

With the exception of two participants, all participants indicated they use the flower crown filter when producing selfies. Participants' reflections revolved around the idea that this filter allows them to present a more desirable self. When talking about this selfie face filter, they used phrases like 'it makes the eyes looks prettier and it make the nose look smaller', 'it makes my eye colour different and always shows me in a good light', 'it enhances how one looks and makes the skin looks clearer and adds a grey colour to the eyes, 'it makes the face look fair and clear and it enhances the eyes...it adds a kind of glow'.

Comparing the frequency of using different types of flower crown filters among selfie producers in this study showed that selfie producers tend to use the face filter that upgrades their image more than other filters. Accordingly, the classic multi-coloured flower filter was the most popular, followed by the pink flower crown filter. The flower crown filter adds a grey glow to the eye and clears up the skin. Photo 5.6 shows the facial features with and without the filter. Because of its popularity, this was one of the few filters that was not removed by Snapchat.¹⁶ Participants liked pink flower crown filter because of the enhancing glow it adds to the face as in photo 5.7.

¹⁶ The flower crown filter was widely used among selfie producers in my study as well as by selfie takers worldwide.



Photo 5.6

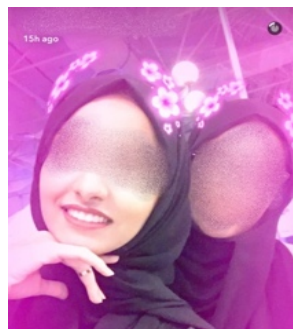


Photo 5.7



Photo 5.8

On the other hand, the blue flower filter illustrated in Photo 5.8 was the least used flower crown filter. This may be because the blue flower crown filter does not include any aesthetic facial effects when applied. This distinction between the popularity of filters with aesthetic elements and filters that do not include aesthetic elements confirms Goffman's concept of theatrical performance. Selfie producers process their presentations in a similar manner to actors who are about to perform on stage and prepare by applying makeup. This is not to say that all selfie producers are actors. In fact, a few participants did not like using enhancing filters and prefer taking selfies without any editing. Still, the majority of female selfie takers between the age of 18–43 in my study preferred to present a desirable self, 'a more upgraded version', when sharing their selfies online. The preference for using flower filters providing the best enhancing effects implies that it is not only performance, but it is also about presenting an upgraded version of the self, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The butterfly filter illustrated in Photo 5.9 is another feminine filter that adds orange butterflies around the forehead of a selfie producer. Similar to the flower crown filter, the butterfly filter applies a glow and light makeup to the faces of selfie producers. The following selfie, taken in a car, reflected the participant's good mood on a weekend.



Photo 5.9

Participants liked the butterfly filter because of its aesthetic touch and the desire to share a more perfect version of the self. Most participants who applied this filter posted their selfies to Instagram accounts in addition to Snapchat. Sharing the beautiful filtered selfie on Instagram to a broader audience is influenced by impression management. Another reason could be that this filter is an occasional filter that was only available for a short time and thus, because participants liked how they looked, they wanted to archive the image. This shows the intersection of face experimenting motives and archiving motives.

Chae (2017) confirmed the desire to present a more idealised online presentation through selfie editing. The illustrated use of the flower crown and butterflies filters suggests that the selfies posted are motivated by attention-seeking motives in addition to communicating-the-self and experimenting motives. In other words, if a selfie producer only liked how she looked with a filter, she could simply save the image in the photos or on a hard drive. The action of archiving the perfected image on an online account to be viewed by others signals 'I like how I look, and I want you to see how pretty my selfie is'.

In addition to the crown flower filtered selfie and the butterfly filtered selfie, the black and white filtered selfie was the third type identified as a frontstage selfie. Black and white filters were launched by Instagram before Snapchat introduced them. The selfie behaviours displayed indicated that conventions developed among Instagram selfie producers of using a

black and white filter when they do not feel confident about their 'natural' appearance. The black and white filter effectively changes a selfie from a colour image to a black and white image. The majority of participants who produced black and white selfies posted them on their Instagram profiles. It was not unusual to observe selfies produced using a black and white filter since a black and white effect was available in most smart phone cameras before the launch of Instagram and Snapchat applications. However, what was really surprising was participants' conceptualisation of the application and use of this filter in a way that is linked to backstage/frontstage performance without specifying Goffman's terms.

During the photo-elicitation interviews, participants were asked what motivated them to apply a black and white filter. Interestingly, selfie producers used the black and white filter as a concealing tool to cover up undesired facial imperfections or objects in the background. When discussing the rationale behind applying this filter, Afaf, who is a 32-year-old single lady, explained:

After looking back at my black and white selfies, I noticed two things: I apply a black and white filter to hide some flaws or imperfections. For instance, sometimes I would not have any makeup on or the place is messy so I apply the black and white filter to hide undesired things in my face or place. Secondly, it is a break with routine and it keeps me up to date with the....I would call it the new modern picture. I mean a black and white image has its special beauty.

Thus, the selfie producer applies the black and white filter in the same way that a performer applies makeup before going on stage. After all imperfections are eliminated, the desired 'frontstage self' will be shared online with others. Merna, who is a 22-year-old student who always attends girls' parties, described cases in which they prefer to use this filter:

Well, when I take selfies without having any makeup on or the lighting is not good, the white and black hides all these imperfections or erases them...unlike coloured

selfies in which everything is displayed, the black and white filter is more like a concealer...so the eyeliner and eyelashes will appear...so I mainly apply a black and white filter when I want to cover up things or my face is not looking clear or fresh. Here Merna illustrates how Instagram's affordances of black and white filters shaped selfie production and sharing practices. In addition to the concealing effects of black and white filters, selfie producers liked how viewers interacted with these filtered selfies. As an illustration, a 32-year-old participant stated that she was surprised by the number of comments and likes she received on a selfie she posted using a black and white Snapchat filter, which added black sunglasses and reflected 1960s fashions. Her viewers thought it was a chic selfie because of the filter's effects, and family members took screenshots of the selfie. Therefore, black and white filters can somehow reflect a sense of the past and the present at the same time. The image is captured with a modern technological application, but the effects applied reflect the styles of past decades.



Photo 5.10



Photo 5.11



Photo 5.12

The selfies in photos 5.10- 5.12 were produced using black and white filters. In Photo 5.10, the participant was relaxing in her bedroom after a tedious day in medical school. She was playing around with filters, and liked how she looked using a black and white filter. In Photos 5.11 and 5.12, the black and white filters were applied after applying other flower crown and dog filters. Both Photos 5.11 and 5.12 included captions expressing the participants' state of mind. Photo 5.11 asked, 'why do we always look prettier in this?' in reference to the flower crown filter, The caption for Photo 5.12 said 'I think I'll kill Farah'. This was meant to tease the participant's friend because of a joke between the girls.



Photo 5.13



Photo 5.14

The participant in Photo 5.13 included this caption under her selfie 'When you photograph people in color, you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in Black and white, you photograph their soul'. Although colour images seem more authentic and real (Hall & Gay, 1996, p. 176), Lamar argues that colour images reflect appearances, but black and white images communicate the core of the self, which is a deeper level compared to the clothes or background of an image. Lamar expressed that the view that the soul and personality of a selfie producer are important aspects, even though she was dressed up and this selfie was taken at a ladies' social event.

Lamar's case (photo 5.13) exemplifies how the communicating-the-self motive can intersect with the attention-seeking motive. While the caption focuses on communicating the soul, the context and appearance communicate the underlying motive of attention-seeking. Indeed, there is a tendency to present a desired frontstage self even if the selfie producer wanted to express that it is the personality that matters the most. This caption was not posted with a selfie in which the producer had just woken up and was wearing pyjamas. Instead, it was included with a selfie in which Lamar was wearing makeup, an evening gown and jewellery, and her hair was styled.

In Photo 5.14, the participant took a selfie with her girlfriend in a restaurant and decided to produce a black and white filtered selfie from the colour selfie, combine both selfies using Instagram's combine photos feature, and finally post both selfies. This was interesting because it allowed viewers to see both versions. The ability to view both filtered and non-filtered selfies in the same layout shows how Instagram's architecture informs selfie practices, decisions to use the platform (stage six), and decisions to reproduce the selfie (stage seven) using Instagram double layout option. In addition, it illustrated how technological affordances allow users to produce selfies with so many options. In the past, only black and white images were available, but now one can share coloured and black and white image in the same photo with a click of a button. It seems as if the selfie producers are not only communicating the self but also signalling selfie producing skills.

The previous black and white filtered selfies (Photos 5.10-5.14) relate to Sara's comparison between black and white filtered images and coloured selfies:

Nowadays, black and white filtered selfies are positively perceived and reflect an aesthetic element, unlike the old times when they were the only option...black and white selfies are pretty and elegant...also when you go to some places, you feel that the style calls for a black and white selfie.

Unlike previous participants who focused on concealing effects, Sara draws attention to how the location where the selfie is taken might inform using a black and white filter. In short, black and white filters are used in frontstage performance because the filter conceals facial imperfections. It was also found that the filter is used to give the selfie an old fashioned style.

It is essential to point out that while Snapchat's beautifying filters were applied to add enhancing effects to the face, Instagram's black and white filters were used to hide imperfections. Although both filters were used for opposing reasons, they both served the same purpose, which is seeking a digitally upgraded version of the self. This also means that selfie producers use all available tools in a platform that present the desirable self to the online audience.

All in all, the black and white filters were used to cover up facial imperfections. My findings confirmed previous research (Chae, 2017) stating that selfie editing is guided by the desire for a more ideal online self-presentation and does not arise from dissatisfaction with one's appearance. The use of varying face filter platforms and the selection of the platform used are manifestations of Goffman's claim that people adopt multiple roles and identities to suit different audiences.

To summarise, the findings show that different aspects of selfie producers' identities are distributed among several face filters of equal significance as frontstage and backstage acts. For instance, beautifying filters like the flower crown and the butterfly face filters are applied to fulfil attention-seeking motives and to present a more desirable self by brightening and adding glow to the face. Black and white filters were used to make the producer appear more desirable through concealing imperfections or tired facial expressions.

5.1.3. *Backstage Selfies*

In backstage selfies, which are shared with close family members and girlfriends on Snapchat, the producer displays the ‘authentic’ version of the self, applying funny face filters and using jokes to mock herself as a form of entertainment, experimenting with filters and connecting with close friends. Conversely, a frontstage selfie was motivated by the desire to seek the attention of others, and it targeted a social network, usually Instagram followers, rather than a small group of friends. The findings identified ‘animal face’ filtered selfies, rarely used filtered selfies, and ‘fat face’ filtered selfies as three types of backstage selfies.

Animal filters are applied as a form of role playing, especially those that change the producer’s voice. Animal filters in particular could be conceptualised in relation to Baker’s (2009) concept of ‘blended identity’. He contends that the offline self informs the creation of a new online self. The selfie using animal faces and voices allows the performer to act out a new role that she would not usually assume in offline spaces. Animal filters provide various animal faces including dogs, cats, pigs, rabbits, deer, and tigers. Some include special effects like transforming a user’s voice to a funny voice¹⁷ as is the case of the deer face, the rabbit, or the bee face filters. Animal filters can be applied to one or two users depending on the filter. Research has pointed out that funny faces are used when taking selfies to gain attention and to be funny (Shipley, 2015, p. 407). Photos 5.15 to 5.18 are examples of animal filtered selfies collected during the observation phase of the study.

¹⁷ These are known as voice changers. When a selfie taker applies the filter to her face and starts speaking, her voice is transformed into a funny voice.



Photo 5.15



Photo 5.16

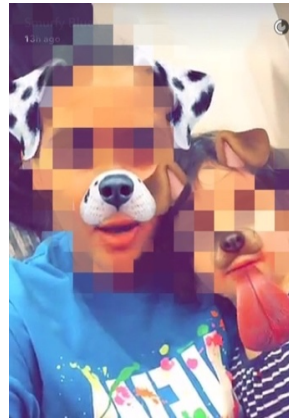


Photo 5.17



Photo 5.18

These animal filtered selfies were all posted on Snapchat. In Photo 5.15, the participant was bored while waiting for a food order in a restaurant and so she took a selfie using a dog filter to occupy her time. Photo 5.16 shows a graduate student taking a selfie with a mouse filter to relax from her stressful workload. Photos 5.17 and 5.18 show animal filtered selfies taken with younger family members to entertain them and to capture the moment. The cat filtered selfie illustrated in Photo 5.19 included a caption in which the producer express how cat filters give her useful makeup ideas that she might try with real eyeliner and mascara. Those filters were applied for experimentation reasons, which allow the actor, that is the selfie producer, to perform a backstage role to a personal audience using a digital costume instead of the physical objects proposed by Goffman (1959). Moreover, the animal filters in Photos 5.20, 5.21 and 5.22 are funny animal filters that all include voice changers so the selfie producer could live the moment and add a funny voice to the character



Photo 5.19



Photo 5.20



Photo 5.21



Photo 5.22

The pig filtered selfie in Photo 5.20 was negatively perceived by older family members. Ruba remarked, 'I once received a negative comments when I used the pig filter, someone said to me “why would you portray yourself as an animal?”’ When animal filters started to emerge, there were many controversial opinions about using them. Some religious scholars indicated that it is not permissible to use them because the human figure is a form given by God that should not be distorted into the image of an animal. Also, there is cultural sensitivity towards pigs in particular since religious teaching bans Muslims from eating pig meat. It is possible that there were social judgements by viewers when they saw the participant using this particular animal filter. Most importantly, the pig selfie (Photo 5.20) indicates that the cultural context provides a sense of how images might be negatively viewed, but people still took them as a consequence of Snapchat’s affordances. Selfie producers view Snapchat as a secure online zone on which images can easily be shared with selected snappers in addition to viewing the image for seconds and totally removing the image 24 hours after it is posted. The pig selfie was one of the non-dominant platform vernaculars, yet the affordances of Snapchat allowed the producer to post it for a short time without leaving a trace on the account, unlike the archived images on an Instagram account.

The option of applying an animal filter to two users¹⁸ as in Photos 5.17 and 5.18 made it more enjoyable. As noticed in the dually presented selfie, users were applying animal filters with younger family members ranging between 3–5 years old who were aware of the process required, like opening their mouths to show their tongues. Future research should examine children’s filtered selfies and investigate the benefits, if any, and consequences of this digital practice.

¹⁸ When clicking on such filters, the following message appears: 'Try it with a friend'.

The flower crown filters were used in frontstage performance and shared with others on both Instagram and Snapchat. In contrast, the animal filters were used in backstage performance. This means that participants posted selfies that applied animal filters on Snapchat so they would disappear within 24 hours. They also controlled the viewing time of the selfie to last 10 seconds or less.

The variations in these selfie practices are guided by the motivation to use the selfie filter and the proximity of the audience. In other words, the selfies applying flower crown filters present the user as a pretty desirable self, which motivates the selfie taker to share the image with all audiences, including a close network on Snapchat and a wider audience on Instagram. But animal filters are mainly applied to experiment, to try new experience. Handai explained the reason behind applying animal filter shared on Snapchat only:

I like to play around with face filters that allow me to transform voices...but I know that those animal filtered selfies will eventually be erased on Snapchat, so if I liked one of them, I would save it to the phone photos.

Therefore, funny images of the self that include rabbit ears or dogs' tongues are exclusively shared with intimate and personal users on the Snapchat platform (backstage self). Indeed, selfie producers make decisions about the shared filtered selfie based on theatrical performance theory. When questioning 22-year-old Merna about her reason for not sharing an animal filtered selfie on Instagram, or with a public audience, her rationale was:

Well, first, because many of the selfies with those animal filters and wide-eye filters are silly, funny, and don't make us look pretty. Actually, they make someone look ugly. Secondly, after I have posted pretty selfies of myself all the time for the public, I would not want to appear silly or ugly. Instead, I would like to maintain that pretty image in front of the public.

Merna here confirms the notion of using Snapchat as a digital backstage area to share personal images with close friends. In contrast, Instagram is used as a digital front stage where photos will be archived in front of a public audience. This calls for more caution and selectivity when posting selfies on the platform. Merna illustrated here how Goffman's (1959) conceptualisation of the face can be extended to online space. While she presents good-looking selfies to the public online audience to maintain the impression she has already made, she shared funny and silly selfies with a familiar personal audience. This practice of audience segregation is a way of shifting between frontstage and backstage performances to suit the audience.

Fat face filters were also used for entertainment and experimentation reasons to explore backstage performance. The fat face filters¹⁹ made a selfie producer's face very fat in addition to making the eye looks wider (Photos 5.23 and 5.24). The digital effects of this filter were not beautifying, so this filter is not popular among participants in this study. Participants who applied the fat face filter posted on Snapchat for a couple of seconds. An interesting observation was that the digital effects of these filters made all the selfie producers' faces look similar. Photos 5.23 and 5.24 were taken by two participants who did not resemble one another when I met them for the face-to-face interview. However, this filter made them look as if they were related.

¹⁹ This is my own term to refer to the face filter, which has no specific name.

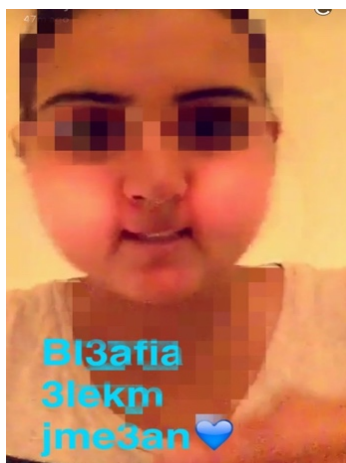


Photo 5.23



Photo 5.24

The findings conveyed that selfie producers used a fat face filter to express a current state of mind or mood. Photo 5.23 was taken during the month of Ramadan after people break their fasts. Donia included a series of selfies to express that she ate a lot of lugaimat.²⁰ She was making fun of how this filter made her cheeks look as if they were two balls of the pastry. The application of the filter and the funny comments made about herself were informed by Donia's personality. Unlike Afaf or Lamar, who would only post selfies if everything looked perfect, Donia is a funny character who cares less about appearance and dislikes beautifying filters. Her selfies posted and filters used are usually motivated by comedy. This suggest that the personality of selfie producers determines the context of the selfie. The platform affordances also played a significant role because these fat face filters were exclusively provided by Snapchat.

Selfie 5.24 shows Arwa, who is an unemployed 25-year-old lady, sitting in a restaurant drinking Pepsi to signal to viewers 'I am going to drink and eat whatever I like'. Arwa has recently broken up with her fiancé because of issues related to her body and

²⁰ Lugaimat is an Indian pastry made of deep fried dough soaked in syrup. It looks like small balls. It is called gulab jamun in Indian shops.

weight. She used to be overweight and underwent a lot of surgeries. Her use of a fat face filter is a way of saying, 'I don't mind being fat'. She uses the filter to communicate her frustration and pain to close members in her Snapchat account. Arwa applied this filter to her selfie to make a joke of how she used to look in addition to signalling a message of 'whether I look fat or thin, I have confidence and I do not need a man's approval for how I look'. The two cases exemplified how fat face filters could be used to communicate feelings. Still, such personal details about oneself are only disclosed at a backstage level for a short viewing time, and so the selfies were posted on Snapchat accounts.

Rarely used face filters and masked filters are another type of backstage selfie motivated by experimenting motives. These alternative digital personas are a form of backstage performance. All face filters that do not focus on enhancing the images, which I classified as rarely used filters, masked filters, fat face filters, and funny filters, were only shared on Snapchat with a small network of girlfriends. Sharing such selfies with a selected audience, which is done in the fifth stage, manifests Goffman's use of the term 'face', which implies that people are expected to maintain face by living up to the initial impressions they have made.

Goffman's (1959) notion of the face implies that individuals wear masks when dealing with others in offline settings. With that in mind, selfie producers were found to wear masks when communicating selfies to a public audience or a personal audience that included judgemental individuals. However, selfies shared with friends reflect a backstage performance in which the 'relaxed authentic' self is displayed. Filters 5.25- 5.32 are not beautifying filters. Instead, they make the selfie producer look awkward, funny, ugly, funky, and sometimes scary. Participants mainly apply these selfies as a form of experimentation: 'How would I look with this new filter?'



Photo 5.25



Photo 5.26

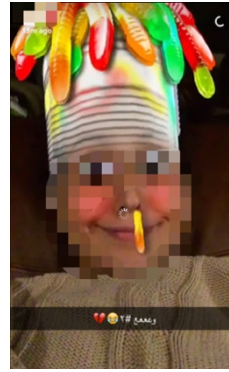


Photo 5.27

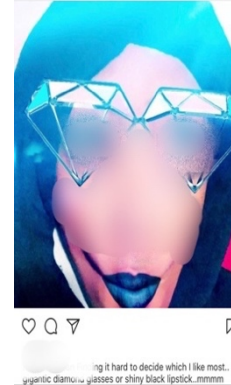


Photo 5.28

In Photo 5.25, participant Maha aged 22 is lying on the bed. She applied the skeleton face filter with a caption, ‘my hair is a mess!!’. A few seconds later, she posted the second selfie (Photo 5.26), in which she applied the burning face filter with a caption, ‘I feel like putting on makeup so badly’. It was so surprising to view those filtered selfies in Maha’s account because she indicated that she usually does a lot of preparation before sharing a selfie with others, like applying professional contoured makeup for three hours and arranging the background. She described her motivation for sharing selfies: ‘I post selfies after I apply makeup to enjoy the piece of art...it is about admiration...about self-love.’

Considering all that, posting those distorted looking selfies was surprising, but again, they are shared with a close audience and were viewed only once. The sharing of these unbeautified selfies with a selected audience on Snapchat, which is done in the fifth stage of selfie production, means that selfie producers are motivated by filter experimentation motives and feel comfortable that this particular audience may view these ugly or awkward dimensions of identity.

The circulation of varying face filters is dominant on Snapchat. While many participants used the previously explored animal filters to communicate humour and funny aspects, the worm filter was used for the same reason, but it was rarely used among participants in this study. In Photo 5.27, Shorog, an 18-year-old freshman, posted this filtered

selfie in which worms are above her head and near her nose with a caption: ‘yuk’. Although viewers are aware that the selfie has been edited with digital effects and is not real, the selfie communicated unpleasant feelings. To Shorog, making her audience laugh was one of the major reasons for sharing selfies. She occasionally posts image and video selfies that her audiences praise.

In Photo 5.28, Handai wrote a caption with the diamond face filter saying, ‘finding it hard to decide which I like the most...gigantic diamond glasses or shiny black lipstick...mm’. Hanadi was being sarcastic about the two choices and was experimenting with the filters, which had not been applied by other participants.



Photo 5.29



Photo 5.30



Photo 5.31



Photo 5.32

In addition, the pirate filter and the mermaid filter selfies in Photos 5.29 and 5.30, are inspired by the ocean. The mermaid selfie was posted with a caption, ‘if mermaids really exist’, made while the selfie producer was bored and wanted to pass the time. Photos 5.30, 5.31 and 5.32 were among the least produced selfies because of cultural codes. For instance, both filters in Photos 5.30 and 5.31 add masculine facial features like moustaches, a pirate costume, and glasses.

According to religious principles, women should not dress or act like men, just as men should not dress or act in a feminine way. As these masculine features are digitally added, it is possible that selfie producers perceive them as permissible compared to actual costumes or makeup. Yet, considering the stages of taking and posting a selfie, the participant

chooses to share the selfie with her private audience on Snapchat and did not repost it on an archiving type platform like Instagram to avoid receiving negative comments or judgements.

During the photo-elicitation interview, I asked the producer of Photo 5.31 why she took and shared the image. She said, ‘I took that because many people say that “It seems as if I were my brother Mohand but in a girly way”’. With this in mind, an underlying motive for these two masculine filters (Photos 5.30 and 5.31) could be that she wanted to experience for a moment what looking like a man feels like, especially in a male dominated society in which women are marginalised.²¹ Photo 5.30 included a caption saying, ‘mother says I look like a man with the filter’, while Photo 5.31 included a caption saying, ‘I look similar to my brother Moayed, I’ll send him this and see his comment’. While cross-gender performances are socially unacceptable in offline spaces, the selfie producer used a backstage performance to experience changing her facial features to male features. The filter in Photo 5.32 might be problematic because this headdress is part of a showgirl’s costume. Shipley (2015) highlighted that selfie producers use ironic and ugly faces to get attention.

Most importantly, Photos 5.30, 5.31, and 5.32 show how Snapchat affordances, which enable the application of gendered filters to males and females in addition to limited viewing time, allow transgressions of cultural norms. Participants who post selfies on multiple social media platforms post selfies on Snapchat, which can be viewed by a limited number of close girlfriends for less than 10 seconds within 24 hours of being posted, thus indicating they are aware that sharing the selfie with a broader audience is likely to produce negative reactions. Although participants did not explicitly note that their selfies could be perceived as transgressions of cultural norms, their decisions about the platform and the audience

²¹ At the present time, new social reforms in Saudi that started in 2018 like the legalisation of women driving and allowing women to attend sports events are empowering Saudi women.

accessing the selfie pointed to their awareness of cultural taboos and efforts to maintain positive impressions by only sharing the images with trusted selected viewers.

All in all, this subsection explained how Snapchat's affordances shaped Saudi women's selfie production. The limited viewing time, the ability to share photos easily with single and multiple viewers, the notification of screen captures and the various face filters provided by Snapchat allowed selfie producers to construct their selfies for three reasons. First, selfie producers used beautifying face filters for creating an upgraded version of the self. Second, they used funny filters like the animal face filters, the fat face filter, and rarely used face filters to experiment with backstage performances. Cultural norms were found to shape selfie production, as in the cases of the pig face filter and the gender swapping filter. Sharing these selfies on Snapchat for only a few seconds with a close audience exemplified how cultural norms inform selfie sharing practices.

5.2. Impression Management and Layers of Filtering Selfie

Applying multiple filters to a selfie is one of the patterns noticed among selfie takers in this study. The attachment of multiple layers of filters to a selfie is understood as a form of impression management. Goffman noted 'the very structure of the self can be seen in terms of how we arrange for such performances'. In the context of selfie behaviours, selfie producers use favourable visual cues like beautifying face filters, upper class neighbourhood geofilters, and travelling geofilters so that the audience reacts favourably to them. Jones and Pittman (1982) identified self-promotion as an impression management strategy. They posit that the actor who uses self-promotion strategies tries to convince others of his/her general ability level or specific skill. In the case of selfie producers, the self-promotion strategy was used to signal aesthetic aspects, selfie producing skills, and the ability to travel, which all leads to portraying an idealised version of the self.

It was observed that most participants in the 18–35 age range used multiple filters at the same time. For instance, they used a flower crown filter and a geofilter in the same selfie. This indicated that they are aware of the technical features when processing a selfie. By contrast, Samar, who is 43 years old, and Halah, who is 57 years, did not know how to apply those filters. Halah mentioned that her daughter added the flower crown filter to her face when they were taking a selfie together. Samar said that she saw her children’s filtered selfie. This age differences in selfie practices means that it is would be desirable for future research examining selfie filters and technical elements to consider a sample of users aged under 45 since it is possible that older groups may be more accustomed to taking selfies without adding digital effects.



Photo 5.33

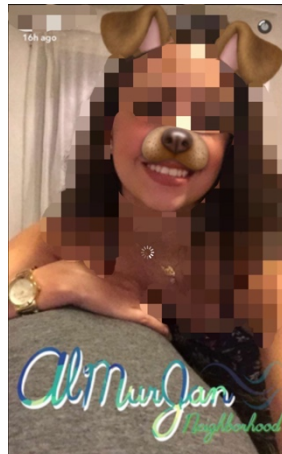


Photo 5.34

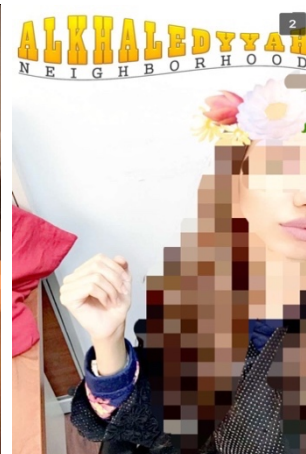


Photo 5.35



Photo 5. 36

In Photo 5.33, the participant applied a tiger face filter, which originally came in colour, and then applied a black and white filter to send a message about hypocrisy and how people change their faces. Merna added a dog face filter in Photo 5.34 and a geofilter, ‘Almurjan neighbourhood’ to signal that she is having fun in this classy area of the city while she lives in a middle-class neighbourhood. In Photo 5.35, Basma placed the flower crown filter on her head and added a popular geofilter to her selfie. Shaza in Photo 5.36 took a flower crown filtered selfie with her sister and added a Reston geofilter to show that she is on vacation in the United States.

Using multiple filters confirms the idea that selfie producers are highly conscious of what they want to share with others. Thus, selfie producers apply these digital effects in the second stage of the proposed selfie model and control their performance. Some selfies say, ‘Look at me looking pretty and on holidays’, ‘See my beautiful face dining at this place’, or ‘I look beautiful in the company of my girlfriends in this area’. Thus, the multi-filtered selfie is used to convey more than one message. This was a common theme among participants. Some of them added a caption expressing their thoughts on top of two filters in a selfie. Therefore, the use of multiple layers of filters illustrates how selfie producers arrange their performance to signal positive cues to viewers.



Photo 5.37



Photo 5.38

Geofilters²² and occasion filters were a form of visual cue used by selfie producers to create positive impressions. Geofilters are filters that selfie producers can use based on location. A geofilter includes a tag in the image signalling the city, neighbourhood, or campus name, as in Photos 5.37 and 5.38. Participants add geofilters²³ to their selfie,

²² To use a geofilter, a Snapchat user has to turn on location services so that Snapchat can detect the location and provide the available filters.

²³ These included local destinations like Jeddah, Taiba, and Taif in addition to international geofilters including: Dublin, Dubai, Cairo, Chicago, London, New York, Orlando, Washington, DC, Morocco, Bursa (Turkey).

especially when travelling. Stepchenkova and Zhan (2013), who studied visual destination images, highlighted that photographs are a means of capturing reality. However, I argue that the visual inclusion of a location by selfie producers is part of staging and preforming a frontstage self for two reasons. First, in addition to the geofilter, there are other elements like the beautifying face filter, the optimistic caption, or the happy facial expression, which all suggest presenting a desirable self. Second, the selfie model highlighted how selfie takers process the image and carefully consider the content, the platform, and the cultural norms, which means that they do not just take a travelling selfie and post it to reflect reality.

The amount of selfies posted increased when selfie takers were visiting new places or travelling, as Photos 5.37–5.42 indicate. Selfie producers notify their location to others in a visual way through a selfie including a geofilter. According to Goffman (1959), the performer has a certain level of control over the performance. With that in mind, including a geofilter allows selfie producers to highlight their experiences as travellers to their audiences who are not sharing the same experiences.



Photo 5.39



Photo 5.40



Photo 5.41



Photo 5.42

These travelling selfies send a message: ‘Look at where I am, and enjoy the moment with me’. The Disneyland geofilter in Photo 5.39 suggests sharing the enjoyment of the experience with others. In Photo 5.40, a Dubai geofilter was taken on a holiday trip to let

everyone know that the woman had travelled safely and arrived at her destination. The Manhattan selfie in Photo 5.42 was taken when Afaf and members of her family were visiting New York. They chose to stand to the side so the geofilter appears clearly. Selfie producers choose to use particular geofilters²⁴ while avoiding including less popular locations or low class areas because of impression management. An additional factor would be the middle and high economic status of the participants.

Occasion filters use the same concept as geofilters except that they include the name of an occasion instead of a location. Snapchat provides filters for some occasions like Easter and New Year. In addition, users can create their personalised occasion filters as illustrated (photo 5.44). According to Kuznekoff (2012), Goffman's frontstage performance consists of two main parts: the personal character and setting, which is made up of background elements that allow the audience to understand the context. Occasion filters work as visual digital symbols that create the setting of the selfie.

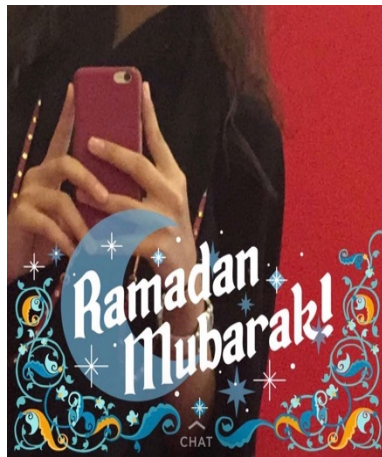


Photo 5.43



Photo 5.44

²⁴ For instance, the local geofilters included King Abdulaziz Road, AlKhaldia neighbourhood, Almurgan neighbourhood, Almohamdia neighbourhood, Prince Sultan Road, and Obhur. All these areas are generally areas where high status citizens live, and fancy restaurants and stores are located

For instance, Photo 5.43 evokes the atmosphere of Ramadan season by using the moon symbol, ornaments, and text, are of which are part of the occasion filter. In Photo 5.44, the participant created an occasion filter that included her name, year of graduation, and a congratulations message. She then used the graduation party filter in the ballroom. It is interesting how some selfie users can display so many details in one image. Occasion filters make the experience of selfie taking and sharing exciting. Additionally, they enable selfie producers to archive memorable moments and reproduce the selfies. Selfie (5.44) was taken with Snapchat. Three filters were applied: a pink flower crown filter, a black and white filter, and an occasion filter. Then the image was shared on Snapchat and reproduced on Instagram so it could be easily located and admired. The integration of three filters in the same selfie suggests the producer is skilful at producing selfies and can impress others by using all the available digital tools

Overall, the application of multiple filters to selfies was a self-promoting self-presentation strategy used by Saudi selfie producers. Geofilters and occasion filters form visual symbols that create the setting of a selfie. Selfie producers were engaged in applying many filters in one image, including face filters, geofilters, occasion filters, and black and white filters, all with the intention of managing the impression of viewers.

5.3. Platform Affordances and Stages of the Selfie Production Model

In Section 4.6, I introduced the selfie model consisting of seven stages: decisions to take a selfie, offline preparations, online image editing, decisions about the platform, decisions to share selectively, decisions to post or not to post, and reposting the selfie. Here I explain how participants' choices are shaped by the technological affordances of Snapchat and Instagram as proposed in stage six of the model.

The findings showed that participants' choices are informed by a number of key features related to the selected platform: the closeness with the audience viewing the

platform, the gender of the audience viewing the account, the viewing time of the image on the platform, and the available face filters and photographic tools. Taking all of these factors into account, producers decide to create and post different selfie content on Instagram and Snapchat. Table 5.1 addresses some of the major differences between selfie presentation on Snapchat and Instagram.

Table 5.1 Major differences between Snapchat selfies and Instagram selfies as described by participants.

	Snapchat	Instagram
Audience	‘I don’t control my selfies, it is the other way around so I am selective when it comes to adding people to my Snapchat account, because I would only add people with whom I would be comfortable sharing certain things.’	‘Because of the audience, there are people viewing my Instagram account that I don’t know, whereas I have personal relationships with those viewing my Snapchat account.’
Online proximity	‘Snapchat is personal and I only add my family members, cousins, and girlfriends I have known for over 10 years. So, I wouldn’t add someone who I just met or someone who knows me on a superficial level.’	‘Instagram selfies are always veiled because there are male relatives and male colleagues who are in my network and are able to view my selfies. But my Snapchat account includes only girls.’
Veiling practice	‘My Snapchat account includes girls only, and so I post unveiled selfies in any situation.’	‘On Instagram and Path, I share only veiled images.’
Perceiving the viewing time	‘It is a reassuring feeling knowing that the images will be gone within 24 hours.’	‘Instagram is more of a record of you, which means viewers may view the selfie so many times.’
Photographic features	‘I take selfies depending on the available filters on Snapchat. Sometimes, I can’t wait to try them out.’	‘For Instagram selfies, you would choose the best position of a selfie because the selfie is a record that will always be there.’

Reproducing the selfie	‘The photographic features on Snapchat are amazing...the selfies taken on Snapchat are the ones we transfer to other social platforms like Instagram or WhatsApp.’	‘When I post a selfie on Instagram, I instantly post it again on Twitter and Facebook.’
Context of selfie	‘I am more relaxed when it comes to selfies posted on Snapchat and I generally post things from my personal life’. ‘Yes, knowing that a Snapchat selfie will only last for a while encourages me to post it, so for instance, I would never post a selfie with an animal filter on an Instagram account. I would post it on Snapchat.’	‘Instagram images must be glamorous and, mmm, look very fancy. Or the images should include quotes. Also, the selfie will stay in the account unless I delete it’. ‘Instagram is more of document’.
Cultural norms	‘I am also aware that older women, like my aunts to whom I need to show respect, will be viewing my Snapchat account and so I avoid posting selfies including cigarettes or anything that may be inappropriate.’	‘If I take a selfie with my husband that looks intimate, I don’t post it on Instagram because you know that some people might judge me or they won’t believe that he is my husband. So, I would rather not post those selfies on Instagram and if I do, I have to write in the caption that this man seated next to me is my husband’.

As highlighted in Table 5.1, selfie producers weigh the advantages and limitations of the platform before taking a selfie, which consequently creates a dominant or non-dominant platform vernacular. For instance, trendy face filters, occasion filters, and geofilters were only provided by Snapchat. The affordances of Snapchat lead to the dominance of this platform. Snapchat is three times more popular than Instagram for creating and sharing selfies.

The findings confirmed that the platform's affordances are associated with the activity of reproducing the selfie on other platforms. As the quote in Table 5.1 about reproducing the selfie indicates, selfie producers tend to use the platform that provides better beautifying tools and better photographic features to create the selfie, as is the case with Snapchat, and then they repost the selfie on other social media accounts. The action of reposting the selfie forms the final stage in the selfie production model.

While some media scholars focused on the role of the platform design in shaping usage (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012; Wesch, 2008), others (Costa, 2018) indicated that social media users inform the platform design. This thesis argues that both the platform architecture and the social contexts shape the online presentation of selfies, as the comments of the participants in Table 5.1 show. Sections 5.1-5.3 discussed the role of platform affordances in shaping frontstage and backstage selfies. Next, sections 5.4 and 5.5 emphasise the role of cultural norms that will be exhibited through selfie sharing practices based on particular online proxemics.

The Management of Social Spaces and Selfie Sharing

This section focuses on the management of social spaces applied to selfie posting and sharing. Villi and Stocchetti (2011) reported the notion of social proxemics applied to mobile communications. Their study suggested using 'social space' instead of 'physical space' since it is not possible to measure actual proximity in mobile communications. Hall's (1966) original theory was based on actual proximity in offline communication settings. Unlike Villi and Stocchetti (2011), I prefer to use the term 'interpersonal space' instead of 'social space' to refer to the psychological distance between selfie producers and viewers. The findings focus on how selfie sharing is influenced by the interpersonal space shared with the viewers.

5.4. Online Spaces and Selfie Sharing

I argue that the management of interpersonal space when sharing selfies online is defined by cultural rules and social expectations. The distinction stems from Hall's view of spatial zones. In his view, four types of spatial zones are associated with the types of interpersonal relationships: the intimate zone, the personal zone, the social zone, and the public zone. Drawing on Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, the upcoming sub-sections discuss selfie practices in relation to these four spaces. In particular, the findings describe how selfie producers mark their online spaces and control accessibility to their digital self-portraiture in relation to the four interpersonal spaces.

5.4.1. Selfie Producers and the Intimate Space (family members)

According to Hall's proxemics, the intimate zone ranges from 0–18 inches and includes spouses and family members (Hall, 1966). Relational closeness between girls and their parents and being familiar with using social media platforms were observed as the two major factors that determined including parents as friends who viewed posted selfies. Some participants indicated that one of their parents, usually the mother, has a Snapchat or Instagram account, so the girl would accept the mother's friend request. Others indicated that parents do not have social media accounts so they are not aware of the daughter's selfie activities.

When parents were not using social media, older siblings who share close relationships with the selfie producers were allowed to view posted selfies. There are social role exchanges in virtual spaces. For instance, an older sister viewing selfies of a younger sister would play the role of the mother by providing advice and support. Nehal is a 32-year-old married employee who shares her selfies with her two teenage sisters, who also exchange selfies with Nehal. The relational closeness between the sisters resulted in them being included in each other's network, in which selfies reflect daily events.

Several interviewees illustrate how selfie practices are related to intimate spaces in online settings. Hanadi's experiences exemplify the application of the 'intimate zone' when posting selfies. Hanadi is a 32-year-old single woman who is studying for her doctoral degree in the United States. Hanadi has a very close relationship with her mother, a relationship that became stronger after the death of her father a few months ago. When asked, 'Do you think selfies are a credible way to communicate who you are to others? Why?', she explained:

To be honest, I created my Snapchat account two years ago, and I only started to share my selfies on Snapchat when I knew that my mom had created a Snapchat account. I mean, my mom comments on each selfie and picture that I post. And those memories become so precious to me, ... you know ... my mom is my main audience. Thus, sharing and commenting on selfies have created a virtual space to share mutual caring and companionship because Hanadi is located in the US, whereas her mother lives in Saudi. As a result, when her mother comments on the selfies Hanadi posts during her daily life, feelings of virtual companionship and of sharing the moments are created. The places Hanadi visits are not of significance to her mother. It is her daughter's presence in those places that adds value to them. In this case, seeing Hanadi's face is reassuring and reduces the loneliness in both of their lives, especially after their loss. In other words, the selfie is being used as a tool for maintaining a presence in a long-distance relationship.

In contrast, not all family members share an intimate relationship. Indeed, Batool's relationship with her mother led her to control her selfie posts so as not to upset her mother. I asked Batool, who is a 22-year-old married woman, if the inclusion of certain individuals in her network influences her self-expression through selfies. She said, 'Yes, because I added my mom, I could never post a selfie while smoking a hookah because she doesn't approve of that'.

In the cases of Hanadi and Batool, the age of the selfie producers influences the context of selfies and the relational closeness with the mother. Batool wants to have her own space with her girlfriends away from parental guidance. On the other hand, when Hanadi, who is 32, was asked about the types of selfies that she avoids sharing with her mother, she indicated that she does not act in a way that might annoy her mother, so there is no selfie that she would not share. It seems that the nature of the relationship with the viewers is central to the choice of sharing the selfie selectively, as suggested in the fifth stage of the selfie model.

As in Batool's case, viewing selfies by certain family members could limit the selfie content. Thus, users would either permanently block the viewer or keep him or her as a Snapchat friend while choosing to differentiate between selfies that are posted to the public and selfies that are shared with close members through a private snap. Another strategy for controlling who can have access to selfies without having to block the person is by choosing to prevent a particular user from viewing the posted content on Snapchat temporarily. Arwa, who is a 26-year-old engaged woman, referred to this option when talking about her fiancé's request to follow her on Snapchat:

My fiancé does not view my account. He asked me to accept him on Snapchat, but I refused because I always take and share selfies with my girlfriends and he shouldn't see them. So, because I didn't want to accept him then customised the settings so that he wouldn't be able to view my stories, I decided not add him in the first place.

Arwa's case exemplifies how selfie practices are shaped by technological affordances and settings. Because her relationship with her fiancé is fairly new and because her veiled girlfriends have access to her Snapchat account, those factors prevent her fiancé from seeing her personal and group selfies. In another conversation with Arwa, she revealed that she is the kind of person who might take and share casual selfies, like a selfie taken when she

wakes up in bed wearing her pyjamas.²⁵ She feels it is too soon to share those selfies with her fiancé because she wants to maintain a more desirable appearance in this early stage of their relationship. Thus, notions of appropriate boundaries of proximity and intimacy underpin selfie production and intersect with the technological affordances. These two factors were implied in the stages of the selfie production model.

Accepting parents as friends on Snapchat or Instagram depended on the relational closeness with the parent. In terms of adding parents to Snapchat and Instagram accounts to view participant's selfies, there were five groups.

1. Participants in the first group decided not add their parents and to keep a private community with their girlfriends. Participants in this group explained that their selfies may include things that might upset their parents, like smoking a hookah. A participant mentioned that her mother could be judgemental when it comes to her friend's daughter. For example, when the participant posted a group selfie with her girlfriends captured in a public place, the mother asked 'Why aren't most of your friends putting on their headscarves? Aren't you girls in a restaurant and there are men all over the place?' The participant then decided to remove her mother from her account because she can be responsible for her personal actions, but not for the actions of others.
2. The second group added one or both of their parents to their accounts but allowed them to view selected items. Participants in this group allowed parents to view selfies that are posted in the public story on Snapchat while sharing other selfies with girlfriends as a private snap (private message). Participant Ghaida, who is a 19-year-old, explained that

²⁵ In Saudi, girls live in their parents' houses even when engaged. After the wedding, a girl would move in with the spouse. Thus, the engagement period is the phase when couple gets to know each other and the woman would aim for desirable self-presentation in both offline and online settings.

she has a close relationship with her mother and her mother is aware that she smokes a hookah, but at the same time, the mother would not be happy to see her daughter's selfie with her smoking a hookah as a public story because relatives in the family could also view it. The mother does not want others to judge her daughter, and Ghaida cares about her mother's feelings, so some selfies are shared with girlfriends while other are posted in the public story. Such control of selfie posts is understandable, because even if the mother is aware that her daughter smokes a hookah, if the girl posts the selfie in the public story, that signals to everyone in the parents' network, 'We know that our daughter smokes and we approve of that as parents'.

3. The third group added one or both of their parents to their account and allowed them to view all selfies without limitations. As an illustration, participant Arwa was asked if she had added her mother and older sister on Snapchat so they can view her posted selfies. She said: 'Yes, and I don't hide anything from them'.
4. In the case of the fourth group, the parents did not have Snapchat or Instagram accounts, but the daughter showed them the selfies on her phone. For instance, a participant who was asked if her parents followed her on Snapchat said: 'No, and that's because they are old and don't use social media. But after I post selfies, I usually show them to my father and chat with him about what I've been doing and saying in social media'.
5. In this group, parents did not use social media and daughters did not share their posted selfies with them. Benan, who is a 26-year-old single woman who works at a call centre, said, 'My parents do not know how to use social media platforms and I usually only share selfies with my girlfriends, sisters, and some female relatives'.

The key underlying factor across this range of behaviours can be identified as attitudes relating to interpersonal distance. Although there was a range of different views regarding

different family relationships, a greater consensus emerged around sharing selfies with female friends. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.4.2. Selfie Producers and the Personal Space (girlfriends)

According to Hall's (1966) study of the human use of space, the area from 18 inches to 4 feet around a person is the personal zone, which is reserved for relatives and close friends. With that in mind, this section will expand on how selfie sharing is informed by the personal space consisting of female friends. These cases outline the three strategies used by Saudi women to protect the privacy of their girlfriends: creating multiple accounts, temporary blocking, and setting the account as a private account which I discussed in sub-section 4.4.4 titled privacy concerns.

To illustrate how personal space occurs when posting selfies, I asked Shaza, who is a 21-year-old advertising student, 'Do you think selfies are a credible way to communicate who you are to others? Why?' She said, 'It depends on who is the viewer. So, my selfie is a credible way to communicate who I am to my girlfriends, but I don't fully express who I am to general snappers [the public]'. When I asked her why there are distinctions between expressing herself to girlfriends and others, she said, 'Because there are people who I don't allow to see all of my actions '. Thus, selfie producers think about their relational closeness with viewers to determine the virtual space in which the image is posted. This separation of online audiences viewing selfies is part of selfie processing, as the selfie model implies.

The findings indicated that most participants' selfie practices are related to personal space. In other words, participants either share a selfie with their girlfriends on SNS or post a group selfie taken with their girlfriends. While selfies with girlfriends were the most popular type of selfie, selfies with family members ranked the second most popular among participants in this study. This ranking is influenced by the technological affordances and interpersonal proxemics. While selfie sharing and posting are trending practices among

young people, it is more common for females to take selfies and share them with friends compared to family members. In addition, this study found that some parents are not familiar with taking selfies and using Snapchat or Instagram. Thus, selfie posting practices are more common among girls as the selfie sharing and exchanging activities with their networks of girlfriends is motivated by social interaction, leisure, belonging motives, trying new face filters, documenting memories, and sharing daily events.

Moreover, participants pay special consideration to their girlfriends' privacy when sharing group selfies. Respecting the privacy of girlfriends was common among participants. Because women's photographs are associated with their reputations and family name, participants highlighted the importance of making sure that when taking a group selfie including female friends, such selfies will not be viewed by males who should not see them. Therefore, participants negotiated such cultural restraints by having two accounts, temporary blocking male viewers, and setting the account as a private account to ensure the privacy girlfriends appearing in group selfies.

5.4.3. Selfie Posting and the Social Space

The third social zone (4–12 feet) is used for interactions between acquaintances. To understand if selfie producers distinguish between selfies shared with close friends and acquaintances, I asked Sara, who is a 31-year-old married dentist, 'Do you become more careful or aware of your selfie posts after accepting follower requests? Which audience?' She stated, 'I try to avoid having personal contact with colleagues or allow them to see my family and my funny side. So now that I have some of my students and colleagues following me on Instagram, I consider some things before posting selfies'. I then asked her what kind of selfies she might avoid posting to formal users. She replied:

Ummm, so if I wanted to post a selfie or a photo including myself and my husband there has to be space or the right degree of proximity and we wouldn't be sitting so

close to one another...I mean I sometimes think that not all couples have good relationships with one another, so I try to consider their feelings.

This shows how selfie production is informed by cultural norms. It is considered inappropriate to share intimate photos of females and males to a public audience in Saudi. Knowing that, selfie producers assess the appropriateness of the selfie content that is to be posted, as in the fourth stage of the selfie model proposed.

Because Sara uses Instagram to post selfies and her account includes her students and co-workers, she only posts appropriate selfies on the platform, whereas she shares personal selfies with family members using WhatsApp²⁶ because those members do not use Snapchat or Instagram. Unlike other participants, Sara prefers to use Instagram to post selfies to users from her workplace, whereas she uses WhatsApp to share personal selfies with her family group. Future selfie research might interrogate people's use of multiple platforms.

5.4.4. The Public Space and Selfie Practices

The final zone is the public zone, which establishes distance between individuals similar to the distance between performers and the audience (Hall, 1966). Basma, who is a 26-year-old single employee, was asked, 'How does setting your Snapchat/Instagram account to public or private influence your selfie behaviours?' She explained, 'The privacy setting of the account influences my selfie behaviours to a great extent. If my account were set as a public account, I would not post any personal photos in it'. This demonstrates that selfie producers share their image in multiple virtual zones depending on the audience viewing the selfie.

²⁶ WhatsApp is an application that allow users to send instant audio, video, and text messages.

5.4.5. Transitioning between Online Spaces

The findings revealed that Saudi females develop a range of strategies to engage with and manage audiences based on relational proxemics, cultural norms, and platform affordances. In other words, selfie producers use a range of tactics to manage those spaces and control who can view their posted content, including blocking viewers, setting up multiple accounts, using different platforms, and building virtual walls.

Interestingly, the synchronicity and mobility of Snapchat allow users to shift flexibly between those spaces: intimate, personal, social, and public. This can be done easily by customising the friends list in Snapchat or by sending the selfie to a selected group or individual on the platform. Indeed, Amal, who is a 32-year-old married employee, indicated that she frequently filters²⁷ her Snapchat and removes snappers. When I asked why, she said, ‘I remove people who are not that close to me and I keep close snappers’. Shihana, who is a 23-year-old single student, added, ‘Sometimes I would add people because they insist that I add them on Snapchat. After a while, if I no longer like the person’s postings, I simply remove them from my friends list.’

These examples show how selfie producers include users within the social and personal space and later limit them to public space as if they were strangers. Hence, transitioning between proxemics can occur flexibly and selectively because of technical affordances. Thus, participants noted that they share selfies with close users. Later, the selfie producers exclude certain users from viewing the selfies in cases when the viewer commented in an aggressive way, if the user tends to only view others’ selfies without sharing their own, if the viewer is passive and consistently views selfies without commenting

²⁷ The process of filtering the list means excluding certain users from viewing the account by clicking X next to their username in the Snapchat application.

on them,²⁸ if the user added a person who does not share an intimate relationship, or if the viewer was added under social pressure in an offline setting.

In some cases, girls indicated that they used to add close family members like spouses or mothers, but later decided to exclude them from viewing their posted selfies in order to build a female online sphere for girls in a similar age range to them. In sum, categorising users under virtual spaces is mainly determined by the interpersonal spaces shared with the selfie viewers. Additionally, the cultural norms and the platform's affordances were key factors in shaping individuals' choices in relation to interpersonal zones.

In sum, Saudi women's selfie presentation varies depending on the viewer of the selfie. This finding confirmed Alsaggaf's (2015) study, which examined Saudi women's Facebook interactions and found that online performances are informed by the audience viewing the profile (p. 82). In particular, my study extends Hall's (1966) proxemics theory to selfie sharing practices. Viewers who fall within the intimate and personal spaces are permitted to see casual selfies, selfies with spouses, and unveiled selfies, as in Snapchat selfies. On the other hand, social and public space viewers are generally allowed to see veiled selfies and selfies that do not include personal elements like family members and girlfriends, as in Instagram selfies. However, I argue that Hall's (1966) proxemics theory falls short of explaining the management of audience in online spaces. Accordingly, I reconstructed Hall's (1966) proxemics theory and developed a new selfie online proxemics model describing how selfie producing photo sharing practices on Instagram and Snapchat are informed by three online proxemics.

²⁸ Snapchat allows the user to see who viewed the posted image and who took a screenshot of the image.

5.5. Virtual Intimacy and Online Spaces

Previously, I addressed how selfie practices are related to online proxemics. Here, I argue that Hall's (1966) proxemic theory, which originally focused on offline interactions, may not be the best way to understand audience segregation in online spaces. This section explores my selfie online proxemics framework, which consists of three online proxemics: private, personal, and social (see Figure 5.1). The framework argues that selfie sharing practices are determined by virtual intimacy. Although my framework consisted of three online proxemics, I will focus on private online proxemics in Subsection (5.5.2) because I found it a significant area for selfie backstage self-expression and an area in which Saudi women reproduce offline environments in online spaces.

5.5.1. *Goffman, Hall, and Selfie Online Spaces*

The conceptual framework of this study proposed that selfie producers will segregate online audiences based on Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, which defined four offline spaces based on physical distance: intimate, personal, social, and public. The framework also proposed that people use frontstage and backstage performances to meet audiences' expectations (Goffman, 1959). In this subsection, I present findings developing Hall's (1966) theory in the dialogue of selfie communication, and I exhibit how the theories of Goffman and Hall are interrelated.

As noted, Hall's spaces were reproduced in selfie online communication. Yet, this study observed that proxemics in online spaces are determined by virtual intimacy. Virtual intimacy means feeling more comfortable in online communication than in face-to-face communications (Powell, 2006). Cerulo (1997) described intimacy in online spaces as the intimate tie exhibiting the deep level of involvement of a long-term relationships (p. 53). With that in mind, stage five of the selfie model investigated how selfie producers shared their selfies selectively and how they decided to segregate and group audiences.

Examining all phases of this study, I identified three different levels of online proxemics in which selfie producers interact with viewers that apply to the Saudi context in particular (see Figure 5.1). Selfie producers make decisions about selfie sharing based on three online networks: first, the broad social audience that includes personal friends, professional contacts, and relatives, that comprises the Instagram network. This social audience usually viewed selfies posted on Instagram accounts. In some cases, those within the social space such as co-workers may be included in the personal space of Snapchat as the dashed line in Figure 5.1 demonstrates, but they would only have access to view selfies posted on the public story and would be excluded from viewing private selfies shared as private and group snaps. In the social space, participants performed on the frontstage level, posting veiled selfies and applying beautifying filters to meet the audience's expectations. This network includes viewers' extended family members and girlfriends.

As noted, Hall's (1966) public space was excluded from my model because Saudi women in general set their accounts as private and did not accept requests to be followed by strangers or random users.

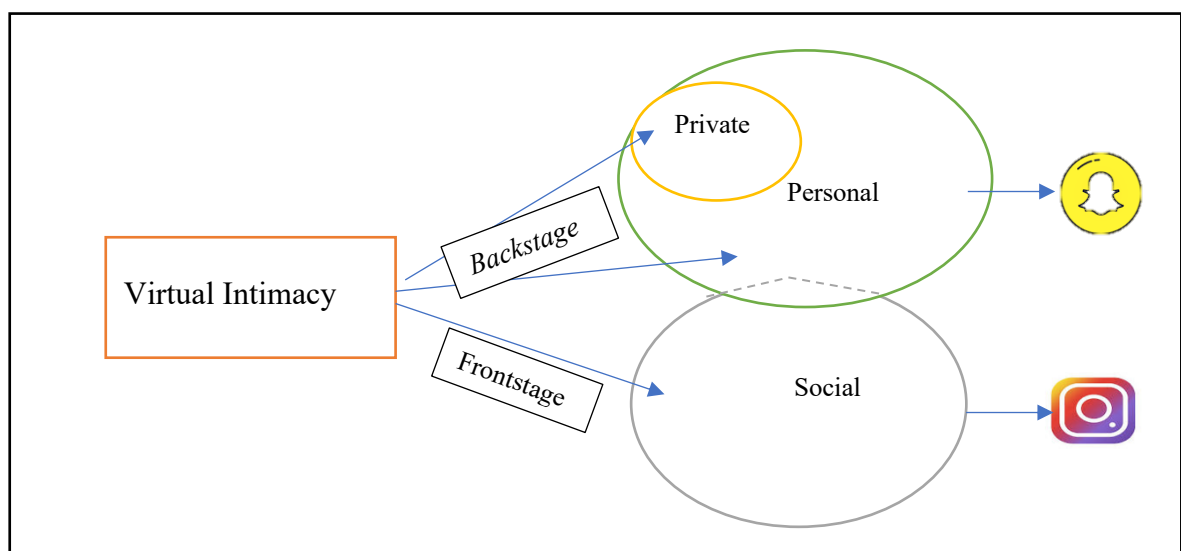


Figure 5.1: A framework of selfie sharing based on online proxemics

The second space is a personal Snapchat audience that includes male and female family members and girlfriends, as in the case of Maha, who is a 22-year-old and includes her male relatives and female friends on Snapchat. In this personal space, selfie producers know all the individuals in the audience, but they do not feel comfortable sharing all of their selfies with them. For instance, while discussing comments on selfies, Maha said: 'For example, I feel that one of my relatives is exercising surveillance over my account. She rarely leaves comments, so I perceive her comments as possible compliments, but they don't make me feel happy or delighted'. This psychological distance between selfie takers and familiar viewers resulted in creating a private smaller network of female peers. Vaterlaus et al. (2016) addressed using Snapchat to interact with personal users, but the separation of a private area from the wider personal area is addressed for the first time by this study. The viewer's age and tendency to judge are what differentiate this personal space from the third private space.

While the personal space consists of viewers seeing the selfie on the public story of Snapchat, the private space consists of snappers viewing the selfie through private snap or group snap. The third space is a private non-judgemental network of females, usually girlfriends and sisters, who view selfies through private snap or group snap. As Rema observed:

So a selfie that will be shared in a Snapchat public story should be elegant since everybody will see it and not everything will be posted, but the direct selfie (sent via private snap) is more authentic. I could send a video selfie to my friends while screaming or even cursing my friends and because you are sharing your selfie with your close friends (specific audience); it is ok for them to see you in whatever condition.

The sixth stage in the selfie model suggested that selfie producers think about the platform being used before posting selfies. Yet, as Rema indicated, the private and personal proxemics

model suggest that selfie producers carefully consider the location of posting the selfie within a platform to meet the audience's expectations. The private space consists of a network of females ranging from one to seven snappers. Within this network of close girlfriends, selfie producers share selfies that are silly and funny in addition to beautified selfies. Also, selfies that might be judged by an older audience, for example a selfie with a male celebrity, a selfie with a related male in close proximity, a selfie while smoking a hookah, a selfie in which one wears extremely revealing clothes, or a group selfie with unveiled girlfriends would be shared within this backstage area. These are usually shared either through a Snapchat group or as a private snap to meet cultural expectations and family traditions that constrain sharing such selfies in online spaces. In other words, selfie producers presented backstage selfies to a private and personal networks of viewers.

Participants' selfie activities and the framework developed (Figure 5.1) showed that Hall's (1966) proxemics theory explained which 'audience' can access selfies, while Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis framed how selfie producers' performances are shaped and informed by the audience. Therefore, selfie performing is a complex process in which the selfie producers play multiple roles depending on the context of the selfie and those viewing the performance.

5.5.2. Snapchat as a Private Female Sphere

'But my Snapchat account includes girls only, and so I post unveiled selfies in any situation.' This is how Basma described her selfie interactions on Snapchat. The framework of online proxemics discussed in the previous section (Figure 5.1) highlighted that the private space is a close network of people who can view particular selfies discreetly through Snapchat private messaging.

There is general consent that Snapchat is being used as a personal space among Saudi selfie producers. Ninety percent of the participants indicated that they use Snapchat to share

selfies with close girlfriends and family members. This finding confirms the study by Vaterlaus et al. (2016), which reported that Snapchat is used for personal reasons when users prefer to connect with a close network.

Participants in this study indicated that they preferred using Snapchat to sharing personal selfies, including unveiled selfies and selfies taken on women's social occasions. For instance, Arwa, who is a 25-year-old unemployed woman, was asked, 'How does your selfie's appearance on Instagram differ when using other social networking platforms like Snapchat or Path?' She stated, 'There are people viewing my Instagram account that I don't know, whereas I share personal relationships with those viewing my Snapchat account'. This indicates that the network viewing the platform determines the kind of selfies that are posted. In other words, personal selfies are posted on Snapchat, whereas formal selfies are shared through Instagram because those followers fall within the social space.

Most interviewees indicated that Snapchat is preferable for sharing selfies because of the application's privacy features and because it is a trendy platform, which highlights the importance of considering views from critical technology studies to investigate online behaviours. For example, Hanadi, who has a private Snapchat account viewed by 30–35 viewers, was asked, 'What does the number of people viewing your Snapchat selfie mean to you?' She replied, 'It means that they are very close to me, since I only add those who I know and trust'. Because veiling habits and the privacy of others are part of cultural norms and religious codes, the inclusion of others in one's personal space must be based on mutual trust.

Not only does relational proximity determine the platform used, but also the context and the appearance of the selfies are key factors. When Shehana, who is a 23-year-old single college student, was asked, 'Share with me how cultural norms might relate to your selfie behaviours', she observed:

Yes, there are photos that may not be appropriate to share, so if I went to a private beach with my family, I would post such selfies on Snapchat but not on Instagram because I post more formal selfies on Instagram. Some selfies are personal and should only be circulated among family members, so they should not be posted on Snapchat.

This illustrates that both the relational proxemics and the context of the selfie guide the platform used and specify the audience viewing the selfie. In her remarks, Shehana also exemplified how stages four, five, and six apply to my selfie model focused on selfie production. She mentioned assessing the appropriateness of sharing the selfie (stage four), the platform used to share the selfie (stage six), and the viewers who may have access to the image (stage five). Thus, selfie producers attempt to meet social expectations when sharing selfies with others.

Seeing that Snapchat is used as a personal space for posting selfies, users become selective when adding snappers to this platform compared to others like Instagram. Reham, who is a 31-year-old married working mother and a student, addressed the issue of allowing others to view her personal details, including selfies, according to the proxemics with the viewer:

In Instagram, I may accept anyone but not in Snapchat...I mean, some people ask to follow you when they barely know you, and that is not how things work with Snapchat. So, after getting to know my neighbour very well, I shared my Snapchat account with her, although she has asked me indirectly many times for it. However, I need to know the person first and know how she thinks. Then I will accept her on Snapchat. In some people's minds, because it is social media, you can just know everything about me and they don't realise that I can still control what I share and with whom.

Reham's case emphasised how self-disclosure is linked to sharing selfies with others. Self-disclosure, which is the feelings and information we share willingly with others, plays a key role in the gradual development of relationships. Therefore, users tend to share personal selfies and images after gaining the trust of others and getting to know them. Indeed, this confirms the conceptual framework of this study, which proposed that what is disclosed in a selfie is determined by the relational proxemics with the viewers and the technological affordances of the platform.

Although most participants revealed that Snapchat is a preferred application for sharing selfies due to its privacy features, some participants argued that sharing selfies on Snapchat is not always as private as people assume. Arwa explained:

I wouldn't agree with that, my friend has a jailbreak²⁹ program on her phone and she is able to take screenshots of as many images as she likes from other's Snapchat accounts without notifying them that she took a copy of their image. So, it is really about knowing who to trust and who to add to your Snapchat account.

This personal experience indicates that including selfie viewers in online personal spaces should be based on trust rather than depending on the technological privacy features of the application.

Intruding on others' accounts through added snappers is another reason for doubting the personal space of Snapchat. Merna, a 22-year-old advertising student, remarked, 'But you know, I don't feel that Snapchat is that personal, so for instance, I saw the selfies of a girl in my friend's Snapchat account'. Thus, while it seems to many that Snapchat is personal, the strategy of allowing unadded users to view the account is applicable. This could simply be

²⁹ Jailbreaking is a way of removing software restrictions on IOS devices.

done by viewing a person's account while sitting next to an added snapper. Shaza, who is a 21-year-old student, has personal experience of this: 'Suddenly, I become known by everyone on campus, so when I am walking, a girl would suddenly stop me and say, "Shaza, I know you, you are the friend of so and so"'.

Moreover, previous studies (Vaterlaus et al., 2016) confirmed that Snapchat is used for personal reasons, but the privacy and security of the application have been questioned by the participants in this study. For instance, Lamar was asked if she had rejected a friend request sent to her Snapchat account. She replied 'Yes, especially people who you would expect to show your photographs and selfies to other people'. This shows that young users are highly aware of how other users might get around the privacy settings of social media applications. Lamar is a 19-year-old medical student who decided to become selective about adding users on Snapchat to prevent undesired snappers from accessing her selfies.

In summary, this section explored selfie producers' photo sharing practices in relation to audience management. I first explained how selfie sharing is informed by Hall's (1966) proxemics theory, which identified four audiences: intimate, personal, social, and public. I then reconstructed Hall's (1966) theory proposing an online proxemic framework that explains selfie producers' photo sharing in social, personal, and private proxemics using Instagram and Snapchat platforms. Finally, I analysed the private space because it is the most significant in the Saudi context. While this part focused on selfie sharing behaviours, next sections expands on selfie blocking behaviours.

Virtual Walls and Blocking Selfie Viewers

Although sharing selfies is one of the main reasons for capturing and editing the image as revealed by the attention-seeking motives addressed in Chapter Four, examining selfie blocking practices is as significant as investigating sharing selfies in providing an

understanding of the selfie phenomenon. With that in mind, this section investigates how selfie producers reject new friend requests and block current friends temporarily and their reasons for blocking users from viewing selfies.

5.6. Building ‘Virtual Walls’

Hall argued that humans are territorial and use fences, walls, furniture, and gardens to mark their spaces (Hall, 1966). The findings of this study indicate that Saudi women use what I call ‘virtual walls’ to mark their spaces when posting selfies on Snapchat. For instance, Amal, who is a 32-year-old working mother, was asked if the inclusion of certain individuals in her network influences her produced selfies. She replied,

Yes, so I don’t add strangers or people like male relatives in front of whom I practise veiling...because it is simply inappropriate that they view my daily events and personal details of my life like selfies posted at girlfriends’ gatherings and so on.

Also, because my girlfriends are practising hijab, and, in the city of Taif, it is inappropriate to expose their privacy to others.

This establishes two key points. First, most Saudi selfie producers do not engage at all with the public audience. Indeed, the two participants who shared selfies with the public audience were very cautious when producing their selfies. More importantly, this shows that some of the virtual walls are more socially and culturally than individually determined. For instance, male relatives are excluded from viewing unveiled selfies, and girlfriends are included in those intimate spaces. Amal also pointed out that the selfies posted daily that include personal details are only to be shared with close contacts like her girlfriends.

5.6.1. Virtual Walls for Blocking Purposes

The in-depth interviews and focus group data conveyed that participants in this study blocked current viewers or rejected new viewers from accessing their selfies when their personal space had been violated. Expectancy violation theory, developed by Burgoon

(1976), is linked to proxemics. Breaking the rules of proxemics such as standing within 0–18 inches when talking to a stranger violates the other person's expectations (Burgoon, 1976). Hence, this violation of space may lead to negative consequences. When a selfie producer receives a friend request from a stranger or a user who shares a superficial relationship, this request to gain access to personal photos is perceived as a violation of online space. This stems from the idea that Snapchat is a personal space, and selfie posting is popular on Snapchat (Vaterlaus et al., 2016). All in all, the relational proxemics and the platform used were key factors in determining who can access a participant's selfies and who is excluded. This section examines the forms and cases of proxemics violation related to gender and cultural codes.

Violating online proxemics causes selfie producers to reject a friend request, block a user, and/or customise the friend list. I will discuss each strategy in relation to proxemics theory in the following sections (5.6 and 5.7). Then, I will address reasons for blocking selfie viewers including: the evil eye and selfies, passive selfie viewers, power relations and selfie sharing, and other blocking motives and selfies (section 5.8).

5.7. Rejecting New Friend Requests

Participants mainly reject friend requests from strangers, which in this case falls under public proxemics. A conversation in the focus group illustrates how Saudi women perceive friend requests on Snapchat accounts on which they post selfies.

Researcher: Do you tend to reject follow requests? When and from whom?

Amal: Yes, always.

Zenab: Of course, if I don't know the person, I will definitely reject the request.

Researcher: What reasons might be behind rejecting requests?

Amal: Mostly if the requests are from males. I mean I tried once (I wasn't sure of the

gender of the person requesting to follow me), but then he started bugging me with flirtatious messages using private snap, and I blocked him.

Researcher: Would you also reject a request from a female?

Zenab: Yes, if she did not introduce herself.

Lana: Yes, if she was a complete stranger.

The conversation revealed that interpersonal proxemics and gender determine if the selfie producers are going to accept or reject the request. Because participants are referring to requests sent to their private Snapchat account, they noted the importance of knowing the identity of the person requesting access to the account. Participants posted unveiled selfies and personal photos on their Snapchat account, so they reject users who do not fall within the intimate or personal proxemics.

Although Saudi society has a conservative nature and it was expected that rejecting practices are unique to Saudi selfie producers, Dhir et al. (2017) indicated that females in general have greater privacy concerns compared to males. This was found to be related to lower engagement in selfie behaviours. Knowing that both Saudi and Norwegian female selfie producers have privacy concerns when taking and posting selfies, this means that rejecting selfie viewers could be a general practice among female selfie producers. My study participants were all females, but Dhir et al. (2016) showed that privacy concerns did not influence the selfie behaviours of men. The similarity between the female Norwegian and female Saudi samples in terms of having privacy concerns about their selfies might be because women fear that sharing personal photos and details online may result in being stalked, being sent sexts, or making the wrong impression. With that in mind, future research should examine rejecting selfie viewers in relation to my online proxemics framework among a sample of females.

5.8. Blocking Existing Users and Customising the Friend List

This section presents cases and reasons for blocking users who were permitted to view the user's selfies in the past. The findings identified six reasons for blocking users from viewing one's selfies: the evil eye and envy, power relations, passive viewers, former violation of privacy, loss of interest in other's selfies and content, and violating online proxemics.

5.8.1. *The Evil Eye and Envy*

The evil eye or bad eye, *hasad* in Arabic and *hasodah* is the subject, is a popular concept in Saudi and most Middle Eastern cultures. Those believing in the evil eye think it is the result of the envy of others and it could cause accidents, illness, divorce, and damage to properties (Al-Jassem, 2010). Those who are handsome, wealthy, successful, and young are at a higher risk of being affected by the evil eye. With that in mind, I asked Ruba, who is a 32-year-old single PhD biology student in Ireland, if she sometimes decides to block others from viewing her selfies. She replied:

Let me think...I am selective sometimes. Sometimes, I don't want certain people to see what I am doing...I mean she could be *hasodah* and that is very possible. I personally know a woman who comments, 'What's that, you seem to go out to places every now and then', implying that I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing as an international doctoral student.

This exemplifies a sense of envy because Ruba has lived in the US and in Ireland for the last seven years and is enjoying a lifestyle that is not accessible to most Saudi girls who are viewing her account while living in Saudi.

For Halah, the evil eye was related to being energetic and starting a new professional path after retirement. Halah is a 57-year-old retired teacher who has five daughters and 15 grandchildren. Because she is an activist and a freelance self-development trainer, Halah's

selfies are mostly about empowering women and self-improvement. When I asked her to share with me occasions when she blocked other from viewing her selfies, she explained:

Yes, and I cancelled people who envy me and envy my success. When they saw that I have started a new career after my retirement, they started saying things like, ‘You are still working!!’, ‘You still have energy!!’ ‘Is it worth it?’ so I have deleted people with this mentality from my Snapchat account.

5.8.2. Passive Selfie Viewers

In other cases, participants decided to block their selfie viewers due to lack of interactivity. Selfie producers expect to get feedback or comments from those viewing their selfies, especially since Snapchat allows its users to see who viewed the image. Arwa is a 25-year-old woman who has 200 people viewing her Snapchat account. She raised the issue of interacting with selfies posted:

I usually post in the story and I rarely send images as personal snaps, yet I have customised the settings so that some users won’t be able to see my selfies and that is simply because they only view my postings and do not comment on them. Besides, they don’t post anything on their accounts, so I am not benefiting from them at all. So, I decided to prevent them from seeing my selfies. However, I haven’t totally blocked them.

In Shehana’s view, not only those who do not comment on her selfies need to be excluded, but also those who ignore her selfies. She explained customising her friend list thus:

I used to have my sister’s sons as friends but I deleted them along with others because every once in a while, I filter my friend list and delete people depending on their lack of interactivity, so people who do not comment on selfies and things that I post, or do not view what I post, do not need to have access to my account....I mean I post

personal things on my account, and so those who are not interacting should not view my personal posts.

This exemplifies an attitude around the reciprocity of viewers. In other words, selfie audiences are expected to do something to deserve access. Those who merely view the selfie without providing any feedback or ‘Likes’ or who do not occasionally view the producer’s selfies are likely to be blocked from accessing selfies.

5.8.3. Power Relations and Selfie Sharing

This study observed that selfie producers sometimes block male guardians like brothers or husbands because of power relations. Nehal is a 32-year-old married nurse. Although she is married and her husband does not judge her selfie posts, her younger brother expressed his disagreement about her public presentation, which led to her blocking him from viewing her selfies on Snapchat. When asked about blocking users from selfies, she said:

Well yes, I have one brother Abodi. I post things more confidently because he is not on my Snapchat. I mean, when I told him the other day that I did an audio interview on the radio, he replied, ‘Why don’t they add a musical background, why did you share your voice on public?’ So I told him, ‘My husband did not complain at all, why are you being so closed-minded? You know better, you are educated’. So yes, if I were to add him, I would be nervous when posting things and he might bother me.

Nehal’s case exemplifies how certain males can be judgemental and intrusive. She explained that he would annoy her and question her about the places she visited if he were to see her selfies on Snapchat.

Similarly, Ruba (32 years old) and Hutaf (30 years old) both live in Ireland with their brother Tariq (25 years old), who likes to stay home once he comes back from campus. The sisters like to visit new places and go to the movies on the weekends to reduce the stress of their PhD workloads. When I asked them which users they usually block and why, Ruba said:

‘Tariq has a Snapchat account but we intentionally did not add him’. I then asked why. Hutaf told me: ‘Because we don’t want him to see where we are going and the places that we go to’. Ruba and Hutaf clarified that all the places they visit and take selfies at are respectable public places like shopping centres, beaches, and cinemas, which they usually visit together or with their girlfriends. The cultural system in Saudi implies that girls are always asked the following series of questions when they are going out: ‘Where are you going to? Who’s going with you? Who’s dropping you off?’ Who’s bringing you back? and ‘What time are you coming back?’³⁰ That explains the girls’ desire to go around Dublin without being questioned by their brother.

All in all, power relations and relationships with male guardians could influence selfie posting and lead some Saudi girls to block their brothers from viewing their selfies to avoid being judged or questioned. For instance, when I asked Lana, who is a 30-year-old married woman, which audience might influence her selfie postings, she said:

Well, yes, my husband...he used to be a friend on my Snapchat in the past but not anymore...so he might not like the situation when I take a selfie. Also, because he used to view my account, I wasn’t able to post group selfies in the story because he shouldn’t see my girlfriends, just as I am not supposed to be seen by their husbands.

Lana’s case illustrates Saudi women’s tendency to form a small private ladies community on Snapchat as proposed in 5.5.2 earlier. It is common practice in Saudi that male guardians give their opinions and sometimes their approval for women to visit places. While there are times when this stems from being caring and responsible, in most cases, this is the result of being in

³⁰ This is very common in Saudi because girls are banned from driving and thus have to move around using private drivers or with male guardians. Additionally, parents pay more attention to girls’ reputations in terms of the places they visit and the people with whom they associate.

a controlling position and assuming that women are not cautious enough about the consequences of their actions. With that in mind, excluding controlling members in online spaces is an outlet for selfie producers. This explains why Saudi selfie producers select their audience and platform carefully to avoid being regulated in online spaces in addition to in the offline environment. Of course, while it is acceptable to block some males from access to selfies posted online, similar behaviours could be potentially troublesome with male familial power in offline contexts.

5.8.4. Other Blocking Motives

Other reasons for blocking former friends from viewing selfies include losing interest in the other's selfies, privacy violation of the selfie producer, and maintaining the privacy of others. Accepting a friend request on Snapchat and Instagram means allowing the friend to view what is posted on the app in addition to being able to view the posted content by the friend who send the request. Malak explained, 'So I block those snappers because I am no longer interested in seeing their selfies'. To her, their series of selfies are time-consuming and useless.

In the case of Mozn, who is a 32-year-old employee, blocking others was related to violating her privacy and trust. She described her experience of blocking one of her friends:

And if I blocked someone and she asked me about that, I would directly tell her about the reason without any sugar coating. For instance, someone told me that she is no longer viewing my selfies on Snapchat, and I told her that I blocked her because she showed my selfies to another woman who is not in my friend list. Therefore, she invaded my privacy.

Mozn usually posts daily selfies and respects others' privacy and preferences in terms of photo sharing. Thus, when she includes one of her friends in her personal space and allows

her to view her selfies, that does not give this friend the right to give access to people from social and public spaces to Mozn's personal space.

A final reason for blocking others is to maintain the privacy of females. In other words, girls who only have one Snapchat account and prefer to post selfies in the public story instead of private snap, permanently block brothers so that they can post group selfies taken with their girlfriends. Ghaida, who is a 20-year-old medical student, explained:

But my brothers are on my Snapchat so if I take a selfie with my girlfriends who practise hijab, I will be cautious about posting the selfie in the public story if my friends were unveiled in the selfie. In this case, I block my brothers from viewing such selfies and then I post the selfie.

This idea of permanent online male blocking is like an imitation of the physical use of space in the Saudi culture in an offline setting. For instance, when a woman invites her girlfriends over to her place, she would inform males in the house that her friends will be in a particular section of the house so the men will not enter that space.

This section explored the practices of blocking and rejecting selfie audiences. Selfie producers blocked audiences based on the interactivity of the selfie, familiarity with the viewer, and previous judgements. Age turned out to be a significant factor in using selfie lingo related to blocking practices. This section identified fear of the evil eye, previous violations, and power relations as reasons for blocking online audiences.

5.9. Audience Management and the Selfie Model

In the fifth stage, 'decisions to share selectively', in the selfie model (Section 4.6), the producers made decisions about which audience could have access to the selfie. Both Snapchat and Instagram allow users to share an image with viewers of the account, selected users, or a selected group of a small number of members. Accordingly, selfie producers made decisions about which audience may or may not view the selfie based on the interpersonal

proximity with viewers (5.4), the context of the selfie, and the affordances of the platform (5.1), especially the duration that the selfie will be appearing online. Not only did participants control who might view the selfie, but they also did routine filtering of the friend list in which non-interactive or annoying viewers are blocked from viewing selfies. Thus, in stage five, producers choose and segregate audiences so that close friends view backstage selfies while others who fall within social networks view frontstage selfies.

5.10. Conclusion

This chapter presented two key ideas. First, female Saudi selfie users construct ‘virtual walls’ in the ways in which they include and exclude people in relation to their selfies that correspond closely with interpersonal proximity as modelled in proxemics theory. Second, Saudi selfie producers also show the emergence of what could be called a female sphere in the intersection of the technological affordances of Snapchat in particular and the individual, familial, and socio-cultural structures that shape the attitudes and behaviours of Saudi women.

The chapter presented two significant theoretical contributions that developed Goffman’s (1959) theatrical performance theory and Hall’s (1966) proxemics theory in the context of online environments. Selfie producers’ application of beautifying face filters like the flower crown, the butterflies, and the black and white filter was observed as a frontstage performance (Goffman, 1959) in which the selfie producers stressed desirable self-presentation to the audience. On the other hand, face filters applied for experimentation motives like animal face filters were used to explore backstage performance with a small group of friends. Additionally, the mixed method design implied that Snapchat selfie postings are seen as a backstage performance when compared to permanent Instagram selfies. In other words, it would not be possible to notice that selfie producers perform differently without the

online observation phase and the confirmation of the observed data in the photo-elicitation interview.

In the context of platform vernacular, this is one of the first studies that explained how selfie producers share varying presentations on Instagram and Snapchat. The Snapchat platform was the preferred trending application for selfie exchange among Saudi women because of the flexibility of managing the viewers and the privacy settings. Instagram selfies were shared with a social audience to display a desirable presentation or an important event. Performing different roles on different platforms and the segregation of the audience are important contributions to social media studies because they point to key factors like virtual intimacy, platform design, and cultural norms that shape selfie practices.

The variation in selfie performances in different platforms and in different locations in the same platform suggested that selfie producers interact according to three online proxemics: social, personal, and private space. While Hall's (1966) proxemics theory identifies offline spaces based on physical distance, my study suggests that sharing selfies relies on online proxemics that are determined by the virtual intimacy with viewers. The online proxemics framework that I developed in this chapter is one of the theoretical contributions of the study which provides new insights on selfie sharing practices.

Not only does online proxemics guide selfie sharing behaviours, but it also affects selfie blocking behaviours. Selfie producers blocked viewers if they feared the evil eye, did not receive positive feedback from viewers, or were faced with power relations. Overall, the chapter exemplified how stage five and stage six of the selfie model apply to selfie producing by focusing on what contexts could be shared, who can access the selfie, and the platform used and the location of the platform. Next, Chapter Six expands on the concept of presenting an 'upgraded version' of the self and the notion of gazing at selfies.

Chapter Six: The Self

“The selfie is about the process of capturing and circulating the idea of an instant of self-production. It is an experience with the self at its center that is frozen for easy detachability.”

William Mazzarella

Chapter Five outlined how selfie production is informed by the platform affordances, cultural norms, and interpersonal proxemics. Here, I examine various frontstage practices in which selfie takers are engaged to present the best versions of themselves to others in order to gain attention, admiration, and positive feedback. Thus, the chapter explores two key ideas: (1) the offline and online preparation undertaken before capturing selfies, (2) the notion of gazing at a selfie by its producers and by online viewers. Goffman (1959) implied that humans use two theatrical stages and multiple personas as part of performing in everyday life. However, he argued that a true self does not exist. My objective here is not to discuss whether selfie portraiture reflects a realistic self or a fake self. Instead this analysis attempts to understand what selfie portraits are saying about the human subject.

In order to do this, I first explore the technological and non-technological practices used by selfie producers. While Chapter Five addressed some technological elements in the context of presenting frontstage and backstage selfies and controlling the audience, this chapter presents findings resulting from offline practices forming stage two in the selfie model and an overview of all online practices leading to stage three in the selfie production model. Then, I explain how selfie posting is being used as a form of visual diary instead of a written diary. Selfies used as a visual diary constitute a key practice which demonstrates contemporary self-expression in digital spaces. Here, I will expand on digital storytelling through the documentation of particular daily events. Using selfie photography as mirror replacement will be explained under the concept of digital mirror.

This chapter also expands the notion of gazing at the selfie. When producing a selfie, the producers tend to gaze at themselves and to document the action of gazing as in a mirror selfie taken in front of a mirror. One of the empirical contributions of my study is the identification of the reasons for this particular selfie type, known as a mirror selfie. I focused on the mirror selfie in particular as it was a common type of selfie among my participants, as evidenced through the online observation phase (Phase Three). Additionally, mirror selfies exemplify the selfie producer's focus on external appearance as she/he is gazing at the digitally enhanced self. Not only did the producers gaze at their images, but also they expected viewers to gaze and interact with the selfie or they would be excluded from viewing the images as explained in ways of blocking selfie viewers in Chapter Five. Drawing on Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory, I explained how Saudi women construct their online image to draw the gaze of other females. The notion of gazing at a selfie and the expectation of interacting with the image extend Mulvey's original cinematic theory to online spaces.

This chapter aims to explore RQ2 focusing on the modes of self-presentation emerging from selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram and Snapchat. Drawing on Goffman's theory of self-presentation and Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory, the question was addressed by exploring the techniques used by selfie takers to build a desirable presentation of the online self in addition to emphasising the role of gazing at selfie portraits.

Overall, the findings of this chapter relate to the proposed selfie model (see 4.6) by showing evidence forming the second stage "pre-taking offline preparations" in which producers adjust their appearance, setting, decoration, and posing. It also points to the third stage term "decisions over editing content" in which producers apply digital effects when producing the image.

Communicating the Self

As mentioned in Chapter Four, communicating the self was one of the identified motives for posting selfies. This section consists of three components: the desired self, the selfie as a digital mirror, the selfie as a visual diary. Participants indicated that taking selfies allows them to emphasise their beauty³¹ and ‘to see themselves.’ Out of 25 participants who were interviewed in the second phase, 12 participants indicated that they use selfies to display their beauty to those viewing their accounts. When questioned as to why and how often they take selfies, participants used phrases like ‘if I am pretty and I like how I look, I take selfies’; “I take a selfie when I am looking pretty”; “to feel that I am pretty”; “to show my family and people I know that I am looking prettier”; “I really want to emphasise my beauty by sharing my selfies”; “I post selfies because I know I look good in those selfies”. Applications like Snapchat and Instagram provide enhancing effects that can be applied to selfies as in the frontstage selfies discussed in Chapter Five, in which the filter clears the skin and adds a glow to the face (See 5.1.2). As a result, selfie producers are motivated to use selfies over other forms of self-portraiture to highlight dimensions related to beauty.

In addition, participants pointed out that the selfie producers are well-aware of which aspects of their body they want to highlight and which angles they can use to maximise their beauty. In particular, selfies give them control over photography ‘frames’ and allows them to maximise their beauty more effectively than others who might photograph them. As an illustration, participants explained: “So, I know the good-looking angles and I take pictures of myself”; “because I want to take an image of myself by myself”; “I take a selfie because I feel that the image comes out very pretty when captured as a selfie”. Producing a selfie

³¹ Displaying women’s beauty in public places in culturally restricted and women who do so are negatively perceived.

allows the producers to control the look, the angle, to add text or documentation to the image without having to ask someone to take the picture or to wait while another person looks on when posing or preparing for the photograph. So, essentially it is about control over self-presentation.

6.1. The “Upgraded Version” of the Self

The upgraded version of the self is term I developed to refer to selfie producers’ tendency to present a more desirable “frontstage” self in online spaces by using a combination of technological and non-technological dominant selfie practices that inform the stages of the selfie model that will be explored in this section. The findings of this study confirmed that Saudi selfie producers are similar to women in other parts of the world who want to share an enhanced version of the self. Likewise, other selfie studies (Dhir et al., 2016; Qiu et al., 2015; Souza et al., 2015; Sung et al., 2016) suggested that females, compared to males, share more selfies and want to appear more attractive.

This motivation to communicate a desirable self in online spaces is in accordance with Yang & Li’s (2014) study which conveyed that women tend to post positive images on SNS to meet their social needs and to receive responses from others. Indeed, in Saudi culture, digital spaces may be some of the only spaces in which women can share images of themselves publicly in relatively safe spaces. Thus, Saudi women may be willing to share pretty selfies and feminine looking selfies on Snapchat because of the security features provided by the platform. Next, I highlight the enhancing strategies used by selfie producers to present the best version of themselves to online audiences.

6.1.1. Offline non-technological Preparations (stage 2)

As mentioned in the proposed selfie model in Chapter Four, selfie producers become engaged in offline preparations that make their image, and the background area, likely to be perceived favourably by viewers. Now, I will explore those offline preparation strategies and

exemplify how selfie producers applied them. Participants referred to a range of offline practices including:

- Avoiding posting funny looking selfies, chubby face selfies and scary looking selfies in an archived account like Instagram. Instead, these are only posted on Snapchat.
- Taking the selfie from above to give the appearance of being thinner.
- Retaking the selfie many times until the most desirable one is captured.
- Being cautious about tiny facial defects which may not be obvious to others.
- Being aware of the best side of the face and taking the selfie accordingly.
- Applying face makeup just for the purpose of taking and sharing a selfie.
- Taking a selfie in front of the mirror to display a full image of the photographer.
- Arranging the background which will appear in the selfie.
- Making sure that other members in a group selfie are looking good before posting.

These observed strategies reveal that selfie producers place a lot of emphasis on the “frontstage” self or, in this case, the desirable digital self. During the focus group discussion, selfie producers agreed that taking a selfie from above makes the face looks thinner and covers up a chubby neck. The effect of the camera angle is a technological affordance, but the meaning of the resulting image is context- dependent.

In addition to the use of the above strategies, 80% of the participants stated that they do not post the first selfie taken. Instead, they take a few photos until they become satisfied with the one to be shared online. This action of selfie retaking is significant as it reveals that social media users usually build their online content while being conscious of the imagined audience who will be viewing and the posted image (Marwick & boyd, 2011). With this in mind, researchers focusing on online self-presentation are encouraged to conceptualise online behaviours by drawing on self-presentation theory in addition to internet environmental studies.

Furthermore, participants pointed out that they deleted selfies from Snapchat and Instagram accounts if they did not receive positive comments and Likes from viewers. It is possible that participants who seek compliments and reassurance from viewers have lower self-esteem compared to selfie producers who do not adjust their selfie posting depending on viewers' responses. When I asked Kholod, who is a 34-year-old executive manager, if she had removed less glamorous selfies from her account, she answered: 'No. I don't post a selfie that I don't like in the first place'. This exemplifies that selfie producers select certain selfies to be shared online. However, while most participants seek compliments on their selfies, others are satisfied to simply post their carefully selected selfies online.

Another enhancing strategy is to take a selfie according to best side of the face. Lamar, a 19-year-old-student was asked what interests her about selfie communication. She said: 'If I take a selfie of myself it is going to appear better than a photograph taken by someone else because I know the beautiful angles in my face.'

Furthermore, participants indicated that before taking selfies, which they intend to share with others, they have to make some preparations. This includes actual makeup and arranging the location, both of which, in Goffman's view, are part of staging a performance. The following discussion from the focus group demonstrates how selfie producers and viewers think about pre-selfie taking preparations:

Researcher: How might the appearance or style of selfies relate to the Saudi culture?

Abeer: I feel that selfies of western women are very different.

Researcher: Can you elaborate on that?

Abeer: The places they go to (selfie locations) like parties and their lifestyle in general.

Thelal: I that feel foreigners are more spontaneous when they take selfies.

Rana: I agree. Saudi women and girls pay too much attention to makeup and to their

appearance when they want to take a selfie.

Researcher: So, what is the process when Saudi women want to take selfies?

Thelal: First of all, she has to look good, be elegant (moratabah), wear makeup, have a nice outfit, be with attractive people...

(All agreed that the outfit is important.)

Abeer: She might also prepare what to say beforehand, if she is posting a video selfie.

Researcher: Would she arrange the background and the area that might be visible?

Thelal: Yes of course, in addition to the person who might appear with her

Researcher: How about you Layla?

Layla: I don't think there is a difference, I feel that neither Saudi nor non- Saudi women are spontaneous when they take selfies. I mean, all women care about their hair, their appearance, and how they look.

The above conversation highlighted the fact that selfie producers intend to present a desirable self; they care about how other members look in a group selfie and they chose the location of selfie producing with care. It is not certain if these pre-selfie preparations are exclusive to the Saudi context or are also common in other cultures. While most members in the discussion thought that Saudi women tend to make preparations before shooting a selfie, Layla, who is the youngest (19 years old) thought that selfie producing and sharing is the same worldwide. Future cross-cultural studies might examine if particular cultures tend to prepare the "stage" for their selfie performance.

The final enhancing strategy is to take a selfie in front of a mirror. This happened most often at female social events in which participants would be dressed up and would want to display the whole person and not just the face. Mirror selfies will be discussed in the upcoming sub-theme.

6.1.2. Online Editing and Enhancing Effects (stage 3)

In this study, and in other studies, not only did selfie producers apply non-technological enhancing effects, but they also used the technological enhancing effects provided by the platforms commonly used by selfie producers (Chao, 2017; Chua & Chang, 2016). However, my study, conducted on a female sample, identified six strategies used by selfie producers that allow them to present a desirable digital self including:

- Applying beautifying face filters like flower crown and butterflies.
- Applying digital makeup, as in the case of eyelashes and a lipstick filter, makeup filters, contouring filters, makeup and gems filter.
- Using a black and white filter to cover up undesired facial features.
- Adding geofilters of interesting locations to the selfie to impress others.
- Removing less glamorous selfies when posted by others (as in group selfies).
- Posting selfies on Snapchat while setting the phone on Airplane mode to see how the selfie or series of selfies would look to viewers without actually posting them, then deciding whether to post the selfie or not as in stage four of the selfie model.

The previous chapter presented visual examples of most of these strategies. Here, I relate using these practices to the notion of the “upgraded version of the self” and show how they work as building blocks in the selfie model.

In the context of presenting an “upgraded version of the self” using a selfie, the following cases exemplify how the technological and non-technological practices discussed fulfil psychological needs. In the case of Afaf, who is a 32-year-old woman conducting research in the USA, it was noticed that in all her selfies on both platforms she looked pretty. When asked why she usually posts pretty looking selfies, she clarified honestly: ‘Well ... because I love to read positive comments, I love hearing compliments, and I need those positive comments as a way of self-reinforcement.’ Afaf was married once at the age of

sixteen for two months because her parents wanted her to get married. In the face to face interview, I noticed that she is conventionally attractive. Yet, I was very surprised by her perception of self as she said:

In the past, I used to think that I was not beautiful, and I didn't like to take pictures, but after the editing features provided by editing Apps and software, I started to gain my sense of confidence and to think that I am pretty.

Her case became understandable considering her previous divorce, especially in a judgmental male dominated culture ruled by power relations where the woman is blamed for divorce. In her case, complements and 'Likes' for her selfies help her to see a more realistic image of who she is. Digital editing effects can sometimes result in an exaggerated image but, in her case, they help her to form a new self-perception since her past self-perception is distorted. Afaf's use of technological editing features to build self-confidence confirms the finding of Chua and Chang (2016) that selfie producers' editing needs are correlated with low self-esteem (p.193). Although editing effects do not produce a realistic image, their external enhancing aspect makes selfie producers feel better about how they look and increase their confidence about the upgraded version of the self that is shared online.



Photo 6.1

There were other cases in which participants talked about using editing effects to cover up tiny facial defects that are not obvious unless pointed out but selfie producers prefer to hide their facial imperfections as in photo 6.1. For instance, Merna indicated that she applied editing effects to hide acne which I did not noticed until she pointed to it in the interview. Arwa felt self-conscious that her forehead was too big and so she uses a flower crown filter because it covers a large area of her forehead. Maha indicated that there are freckles in some parts of her face, which she referred to in the interview, and therefore she never posts selfies unless she applies actual makeup or digital makeup. Digital makeup is a term I developed in reference to technological effects like makeup filters, contouring filters, and skin brightening filters which digitally blur facial imperfections in a manner similar to physical makeup. Thus, we can interpret that these selfie practices, such as applying “digital makeup”, signal staging on a frontstage level.

I included these cases here to argue that selfie producers use digital enhancing effects to modify facial details that might not be noticed by the viewer such as Arwa’s forehead and Maha’s freckles that were not obvious in an interviewing situation. In fact, viewers might think that the image looks good, and it is possible that these small imperfections are only in the consciousness of selfie producers. Whether the digital enhancing effects applied to selfies motivate selfie producers to undergo facial cosmetic surgeries needs to be carefully considered. In fact, this was discussed with two participants who indicated that using Snapchat filters allow them to see how much prettier they would look if their noses became smaller and their lips looked bigger. This made them consider the option of cosmetic surgery. Consistent with earlier research (Cohen et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2015; Meier & Gray, 2014), the finding of this study confirms that selfie activities are also associated with body concerns in young women in other parts of the world.

Digital Makeup

Selfie digital makeup is a term I developed to convey the digital effects applied to a woman's selfie to make it appear more desirable including: eyelashes and red lipstick filter, contouring filter, and skin clearing filter, all provided by the Snapchat application. Recent research used the term digital makeup (Khan, Ahmad, Guo, & Lui, 2018) to describe how a novel algorithm technique changes the makeup of internet images. In my study, the usage of the term is applied to selfie practices used to present an upgraded version of the self.

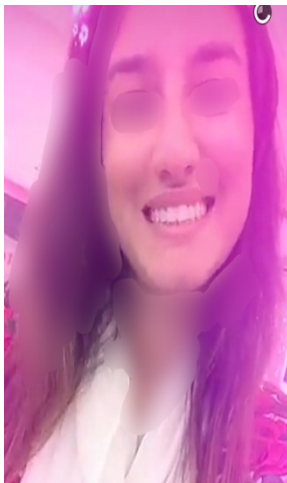


Photo 6.2

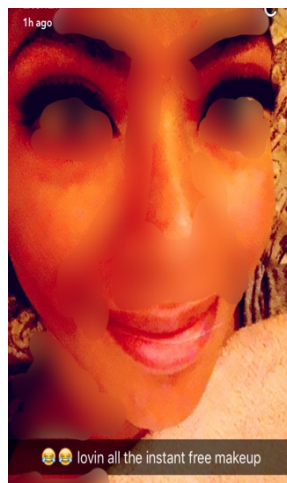


Photo 6.3



Photo 6.4



Photo 6.5

Similar to Goffman's (1959) idea on using objects and surroundings when staging a performance, digital makeup effects are used in online spaces to create a desirable impression. Thus, digital makeup is informed by the affordances of the Snapchat platform providing these features, which allow women to emphasise the aesthetic dimension and present an upgraded version of the self. As an illustration, the producer in selfie 6.2 used a filter which applies digital contouring so that the face appears more attractive and glowing. Bronze coloured contours, thick eyelashes, and pink lipstick were applied to the face of the participant in selfie 6.3 who expressed her fondness for digital makeup by adding the caption "loving all the instant free makeup". When asked about this particular caption and image, she explained: "I rarely put on makeup and both my mother and sister think that I should look more like a lady instead of looking casual and plain". This shows how platform affordances

are used to meet viewers' expectations. In selfies 6.4 and 6.5, the producer applied a filter that instantly adds eyelashes and lipstick to the face of the selfie taker.



Photo: 6.6

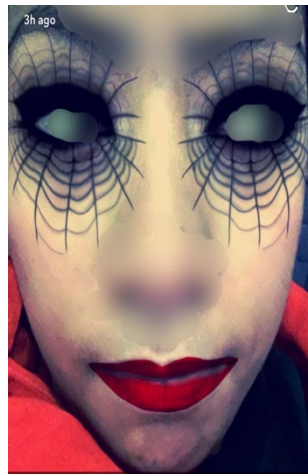


Photo: 6.7



Photo: 6.8

In addition to applying feminine digital makeup, there were cases in which selfie takers applied exaggerated digital makeup filters as in photos 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8. The digital makeup in photo 6.6 consists of multiple effects covering the area above the eye and eyebrow. In selfie 6.7, the digital makeup consists of eyelashes, red lipstick and a net covering the area all around the eyes similar to the coloured gems scattered around the eyes in photo 6.8. According to participants' narratives, the digital makeup was used to experiment with face filters, unlike photos 6.2–6.5 that were motivated by seeking the attention of viewers.

Considering the observed enhancing selfie strategies, future quantitative research examining selfie editing might consider these 15 strategies when developing a selfie editing questionnaire. While some of the strategies used have been noted earlier like using face filters (Chua and Chang, 2016; Shipley, 2015), other strategies, such as posting a selfie while setting the phone to Airplane mode, arranging the background, checking other members' appearance, and posting a selfie on Instagram while others are posted on Snapchat, are novel strategies identified by my study.

6.2. Selfie as a Digital Mirror

The invention of amalgam mirrors in Venice around 1507 allowed painters to see themselves while painting (Hadsund, 1993). The use of a mirror while producing the image meant that the producer could control her attempt to present a desirable self. The development of classic photo cameras in the 1830s allowed people to make self-photographs but the photographer could not see his depiction when taking the photo (Hirsh, 2000). Eventually, the development of front-view cameras in cell phones in the early 2000s (Wheen, 2011) made it possible for the photographer to view the image, control the posing, and instantly produce selfie photographs.

A result of these developments was the ease of viewing and adjusting one's image using a cell phone, which was a key factor in motivating women to focus on aesthetic elements and not to carry an actual mirror when going out. As proposed in the second and third stages of the selfie model, the interview and observation revealed that being able to view one's image and appearance on a device before sharing the image inform Saudi women's selfie practices. Indeed, seeing one's reflection on the camera phone determines what effects are required and what facial imperfections need to be covered up while producing the selfie.

In relation to this phenomenon, I developed the term digital mirror in reference to the ability to see one's reflection on the screen of the phone and to adjust the appearance before taking a selfie. Participants who think of the selfie as a digital mirror described the experience using phrases like: "it gives me the opportunity to see my image"; "I love to see myself ... I love to see my images"; "yes to see myself and to see if the pose and expression looks good, then capture the image"; "a selfie allows me to control how I look, allows me to see how I am looking". As exemplified, the option of editing and viewing one's image through a selfie could be a motivation for posting a selfie.

The idea of using the selfie as a digital mirror instead of an actual mirror was implied from participants' descriptions of taking and retaking the selfie, taking multiple selfies, adjusting facial objects, and posing while taking a selfie. Donia who is a 22-year old unmarried student, who usually posts impromptu selfies, critiqued this preparation for posting a selfie saying: 'Some girls use selfies as a mirror and just keep posting different poses when feeling bored'. Thus, selfie producers use the front facing camera as a digital mirror to control their image and to control the visual statements they wish to share online.

6.3. Selfie as Visual Diaries

There is a long and rich history of the ways human have documented their daily lives, first using pen and paper, and recently as blogs which emerged with the rise of digital technologies (Rettberg, 2014. p. 4–9). Selfies have moved diary keeping from the practice of written self-expression to the visual documentation of daily events.

Respondents indicated that they use selfies to share daily events with others. When asked about the stories narrated by selfies, eight participants indicated that their selfies are reflections of daily events including places visited, friends and family members they meet, activities like working on a project or hiking. In these selfies, participants capture a selfie of a momentary experience and share it with an intimate and personal network of friends and family on Instagram and Snapchat.

The significance of sharing selfies as a form of visual diary to document oneself in specific social contexts lies in understanding how selfies are being used to create a new form of narrative in digital spaces. Similar to the study by Dayter and Muhleisen (2016), my study noticed that selfie stories are ephemeral, have an open-ended nature, rely on the small story approach, incorporate sensory and semiotic channels, and aim to manage audience expectations. The following cases exemplify how selfies are used as a form of visual diary to construct digital storytelling about the self.

Although participants did not use the term ‘visual diary’ when describing their experience, the online observation indicated that participants use selfies as a visual diary to share things that are of daily interest to them like family gatherings, school work, going out to restaurants, applying makeup, communicating with others, and being entertained. As articulated by Nehal, who is a 32-year-old working mother, when asked about why she posts selfies: “to share what I am doing, for instance when I am with my kids, if I want others to get useful information like when I go to an event or read a book, I like to spread hope and positive energy.”

It could be implied that Nehal’s underlying motive is trying to show off by signalling cues of her social class, educational level, or marital status. However, understanding that selfies have become a creative way of self-definition and a powerful means of self-expression (Murray, 2015), I argue that her motivation here is to capture and to share reality. This finding matches a study reporting that posting selfies has become a typical way of communication and it is not necessarily correlated with narcissism (Barry et al., 2015).

With that in mind, sharing daily events with close contacts through selfies is a way of keeping in touch with others and keeping them updated in a visual way. Arwa, who is a 25-year-old unemployed female who recently broke up with her fiancé, said, when I asked her what her selfies narrates: “Everything, in the hospital, in the haram, at the house but for the past two months I wasn’t feeling like sharing selfies”. Donia responded to the same question saying: “it is a diverse content that depends on the daily events, so today I might attend a social gathering, tomorrow I might be sitting at home so I might make a scenario and post my video selfies”. Both cases suggest that selfie producers post selfies with the motivation of projecting reality and live moments on social media. As noticed, posting selfies, which has become a form of contemporary self-expression, is determined by the daily event and mood

of the selfie taker. For instance, Arwa stopped posting selfies for a while because she did not want to express her sadness to her close contacts.

Regardless of the fact that one third of the participants indicated posting selfies on a daily basis depending on their location and activity, the age of the selfie taker was found to be a key factor that influences the context of the selfie as a visual diary. Halah, who is 57 years old, also posted selfies as a means of visual diary. She explained:

My selfie narrates umm ... one time it narrates the story of a family, another story is the story of my personal success, the story of my retirement, the story of students and people I mingle with during self-development training sessions, the story of my daughters.

Unlike Arwa and Donia, Halah's selfie postings are not determined by daily events, locations visited, or mood. Instead, her selfie posting behaviour is directed by the goal of posting the selfie and the usefulness of the shared content. For instance, she clarified: 'I wouldn't post a selfie just for the fact of being in a place like a restaurant, if my selfie wouldn't communicate a meaningful message, I will not post it' as we were discussing expressing oneself through selfies. This means that her motivation to share her visual diary is entirely focused on the underlying outcomes of viewing her selfie rather than updating her peers on what she is doing as was the case of Arwa and Donia who are in their twenties.

As a result of the age difference, Halah's perceptions on selfie practices were in contrast to those younger participants. Earlier research noted that selfie practices in particular (Dhir et al., 2016), and social network behaviours in general (Carrier et al, 2009), change with age. Hence, Halah's selfie behaviour was useful in exploring how the age of the selfie producer is significant in terms of the motivation for selfie posting, the ability to use digital selfie effects, the terms used when referring to the selfie process or accessories, the

consideration of social norms influencing selfie practices, and the identity performed in selfie communication. Appendix B outlines the age gap between Halah and the other participants.

Documenting selfies while away on a trip, being dressed for a women's social event, or a gathering with friends or family were all found to be a novel way of visually holding on to momentary experiences. For instance, when asked what motivates her to take a selfie, participant Ghaida used the phrase "to share the moment" while Lamar said "for the memory". The two phrases implied that the documentation of the moment is for the purpose of letting others view the moment. In other words, the documentation, which is a component of communicating-the-self motive, is connected to the motive of attention seeking.

Halah, the 57 years old participant, described the notion of the selfie as a documentation tool saying:

It really reflects "the moment", so, for instance my family arranged a surprise retirement party for me, and I took a picture in my everyday clothes as the party started and posted it. I mean I wasn't dressed up or anything and I wanted to archive and share that exact moment.

Here, the selfie is seen as a medium for sharing live moments especially if the selfies are shared using Snapchat. Then it acts as a signal to others that the activity performed and the location visited are all within the last 24 hours.

It was observed that the underlying motive for sharing travel selfies was to show off. Past research revealed that travel selfies are motivated by picturing reality and reflecting real time (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013), or promoting tourism in particular cities (Fatani & Suydnya, 2015). Conversely, the analysis of selfies in this study outlined the fact that travel selfie postings were motivated by showing off drawing on three indicators: (1) the selectivity of the location, (2) the selectivity of the selfie in a trip, and (3) the variation between travel selfies posted on Instagram and Snapchat. Firstly, selfie producers highlighted particular

locations and cities, and they did not post less familiar locations. This could be seen through the use of the applied geofilters with the Snapchat selfie and the added location feature with the Instagram selfies. Secondly, selfie producers intentionally highlighted joyful moments in the travelling selfies while smiling, happy, relaxed, dining in a restaurant, and trying a new experience. However, less pleasant feelings like travel sickness, tiredness, exhaustion, or family conflicts did not appear. Thirdly, travel selfies posted on Instagram presented a beautified selfie with a positive caption. Snapchat selfies included some edited and impromptu selfies with no captions. These three indicators were part of “framing” the joy of travel to be viewed by others who are not having the same experience.

Selfie producers also indicated they post selfies to document special moments like taking selfies at a graduation party, a bridal shower party, Eid day, when there is a new baby in the family, at the wedding of a sister or friend, and at birthday parties.

All in all, this section focused on using 15 strategies to present a more desirable presentation. In addition, I highlighted common selfie practices like using selfies as a form of visual diary and as a replacement for mirrors. Most importantly, I presented empirical contributions by exploring the stages of preparations using technological and non-technological strategies used by selfie takers as suggested in the second and third stages of the selfie model. Also, the conceptualisation of the selfie as a form of visual diary for self-expression provides a new way of thinking about selfies. The following section continues to explore the perceptions of the selfie producer by exploring the notion of gazing at the selfie and the expectations of the viewers’ interactions with the image.

The Gaze

Drawing on Mulvey’s (1975) male gaze theory, this section explores why selfie takers gaze at their selfie when it is produced and how they expect other online viewers to gaze at

the selfies they post. It also describes how the option of gazing at oneself was a key reason for preferring selfie portraits as a way of online communication. I also explain how the context of taking selfies and the experience of taking selfies relate to the notion of gazing at selfies. Afterwards, I examine a particular type of selfie known as a mirror selfie in light of female gaze theory (Cohen, 2010).

This notion of being “looked at” is related to Mulvey’s (1975) idea of cinematic gaze indicating that Hollywood films display women as objects to be gazed at by men. Yet, the data in this study shows that the perfecting and enhancing process applied to selfies is with a view to them being “looked at” by other women rather than by men. The desire to have ones desirable self-presentation looked at online by other women was strongly linked to cultural norms. There is a cultural expectation that feminine dimensions are displayed only to other women in online spaces, not to men. The aim is to attract the attention of female matchmakers and to communicate with girlfriends. However, at the same time, promoting oneself online is constrained and determined by the cultural conventions of what is acceptable in terms of female appearance. Examples of breaches of these codes were discussed in Chapter Four (unposted selfies 4.3.1). Furthermore, the desire to be looked at and admired by people of the same gender was related to explicit motives like receiving positive feedback and implicit motives like attracting the attention of females who might be searching for a future wife for their son or brother.

The male gaze theory (Mulvey, 1975) indicated that representations of women serve as visual pleasure to the producers, the audience, and the male characters in the movie. Conversely, selfie participants in this study mostly targeted female audiences and sometimes target a potential male audience through the intervention of female matchmakers. According to participants’ narratives, two types of gaze were identified:

- a) Single selfie producers who deliberately invite the gaze of possible female matchmakers and thus try to look their best by posting frontstage beautified selfies.
- b) Single and married selfie producers who invite the gaze of other women for the purpose of receiving positive feedback or because they simply like sharing their “upgraded online self” with others.

The findings of the study indicate that during the process of taking and editing the selfie, producers tend to gaze at and to admire their image. Not only that, but it is also expected that viewers gaze at and appreciate the attractiveness of the posted selfie. The following conversation illustrated such expectations:

Researcher: Why do you sometimes upload pretty or attractive selfies?

Amal: I feel happy when I share my attractive selfies with others.

Renam: It is because I feel happy when others comment on my attractive selfies.

Researcher: So, it is that feedback from others motivates you?

Amal: Yes, I would be waiting for their comments and feedback.

Lana: To me it is both, I like my selfies and I feel joyful when I receive others’ comments on my selfies.

Suha: Basically, I like my beauty.

The transcript above suggests that some participant focus on their admiration of the selfie, while others focus on the idea of being looked at by others. For Lana, both notions are valued. Consequently, the next sections will address the relationship between the selfie and the gaze of the selfie producer. Afterwards, I will explain the expectation of gazing at the selfie by other users on social networking platforms.

6.4. Viewers’ Gaze

“I mainly take selfies with the intention of sharing with others.” This was Layla’s reaction when asked about selfie posting motives. The subject, who, in this case, is a selfie

producer, wants to be recognised by others. In fact, this study confirmed that sharing one's prettiness with others was ranked as the top reason for posting selfies (see Chapter Four). Applying a constant comparison among participants' gazing narratives revealed the three cases of Halah, Donia, and Elaf, which exemplified that the content of a selfie is more significant than how one looks.

Drawing on Mulvey's gaze theory (1975), I will cast light on how selfie producers construct images based on a particular gendered gaze. In contrast to Mulvey's feminist theory presenting women as object of male pleasure in cinematic representation, my finding indicated that Saudi selfie producers shape their selfie presentation to be gazed at by other women, in addition to family and friends. In so doing, selfie production includes production of the audience as well as the production of the self. The purpose of constructing selfie images to be looked at by female viewers is to find a future marriage partner as will be illustrated in the case of Afaf. Reproducing the offline environment in online spaces was another reason for constructing particular presentations and selectively allowing other women to view them as suggested in the discussion of Snapchat as a private space in Chapter Five.

Selfie producers are aware that viewers will be gazing at their Snapchat selfie and many others will gaze at their Instagram selfies. As an illustration, Merna, who is a 22-year-old student, described the expectancy of being gazed at saying:

At female social events, when one of our girlfriends is about to take a selfie, we would insert our faces to take the selfie with her without an invitation to signal the following message: "look at us and see us while we are dressed up and looking pretty. Similarly, Shaza, a 21-year-old student, expressed her expectation to be looked at by others "When we take a selfie after dressing up and putting on makeup ... that is sort of promoting ourselves...in order for others to see us as pretty". Here, Shaza implied that her group selfies with her girlfriends are intended to be looked at by viewers, yet she has not specified any

details about the viewers. In the second interview, she revealed that she only allows close friends and female family members to view her account. Thus, the underlying motive for displaying a frontstage performance is to be admired by other women and for self-fulfilment reasons.

Conversely, Afaf who is very selective when posting selfies and mostly posts pretty looking ones, explicitly clarified:

I post feminine selfies...and I sometimes intend to draw the attention of older women related to my family to my image so that if they were looking for a bride or something... So I don't directly disclose to my friends or people I know that I wish to get married but I imply that by sharing my attractive and good-looking selfies.

Considering the age difference and marital status between Shaza and Afaf, it is possible that the first participant, who is single and completing a bachelor degree, is not in a hurry to get married. On the other hand, it is very possible in the Saudi culture for a 32-year-old divorced woman to hear gossip and comments like: "she is getting old", "she might not be able to find someone nowadays ... unless a divorced man who has kids" and so on.

Given that selfie producers mainly post their images to be viewed by others, this explains the great emphasis on appearance and facial details. While some participants thought of the selfie as a reflecting mirror, the majority perceived the selfie as a perfecting mirror that allows the user to perfect the image of the self using digital effects and filters and to present a prettier version of the self. As a participant said: "A selfie may not be a true reflection of the person." As the analysis indicated, participants communicated the edited reflection of the self that is customised to be gazed at and admired by others. Interestingly, participants did not perceive selfie editing as a form of manipulating the viewer, instead: "I mean ... it is not pretending but trying to make a good attractive impression" as expressed by Rotana, the-18 year-old student.

It is essential here to point out that participants shared their personal selfies online to be viewed by users based on proxemics. The selfies examined were included in Snapchat and Instagram accounts that were set up as private accounts and required access codes. When discussing who usually views her selfies, Maraya, who is a 23-year-old engaged student said: “So if my account was set as a public account I wouldn’t have posted any personal photos in it”. When I asked her why, she continued: “Because I don’t just share my photos with everyone on the internet ... I believe there should be personal privacy... it’s my tradition...it’s my family’s tradition.” (Chapter Five explained proxemics and selfie).

Most participants wanted others to look at their selfies to acknowledge their prettiness. Yet, conducting a constant comparison on what participants said on viewing their selfie emphasised that three participants wanted their selfie to be appreciated because of the context of the selfie. Halah, a 57-year-old activist, said “there is a tendency to let everyone know what I am”. This was the only time when the phrase “What I am” was used instead of phrases like “how I look”, “my outfit”, “ my facial details”, “my makeup”. This indicates that most selfie producers aged between 18 and 35, especially unmarried women,³² have a tendency to focus on looks, appearance, and aesthetic elements. As an activist whose vision is to empower women, Halah is more focused on actions and outcomes rather than external appearance as she mentioned in another part of the interview “the selfies I share are goal-directed”. Halah’s case is significant because it signals that it is not what I look like that matters, but who I am and what I do. So, even selfie takers who are not beautiful or not focusing on aesthetic elements still take selfies in an attempt to show something important about themselves or something special, as in the next case.

³² In Saudi, unmarried women who are over 27 years old are considered to be getting old and are negatively perceived, as are divorced women.

In the case of Elaf, a single 21-year-old nutrition student, who strongly believes in a healthy lifestyle and in voluntary work, the content and usefulness of the messages included in her selfies are what matter to her. In fact, her use of Snapchat is devoted to spreading awareness and to sharing her work with others. Another example would be Donia, a 22 year-old single student. Donia indicated that she posts her selfies to make people laugh and to communicate her sense of humour. When asked about her appearance, she said: “Do you see how casual I look? Once you start seeing my account, you will notice that I appear with the same look, no makeup, no form of selfie editing.” These three cases exemplified the fact that the content of a selfie is more significant than how one looks. Most importantly, selfie producers expected viewers to provide feedback on the selfie in the form of a comment or a Like.

6.4.1. Gazing and Beauty Standards

According to Mulvey’s (1975) view, gaze is about how socio-structural power relations structure the production of images in a way that often indicates a particular type of implied viewer; in my study viewers are close girlfriends and matchmakers. With that in mind, the selfies taken by women for appreciation by women are constructed in relation to the social conventions of gendered beauty ideals.

Women are well-trained to exhibit a beautiful appearance from an early age as beauty standards are socially constructed. In the Saudi culture, these standards, which are impossible to achieve by one person, include: slim and fit body, perfect long hair, flawless skin, and cinched waist (Abid, 2017; Muhammad, 2018). Women not up to these standards are usually reminded of their limitations and of the decreased possibility of getting married. This fits with Mulvey’s (1975) idea that women sometimes adopt the male perspective and gaze at women in the same way as a man would and thus objectify other women. Yet, it is possible that Saudi selfie viewers might adopt the male gaze as a result of cultural conventions related

to the desired characteristics of a bride as opposed to being influenced by media representation which, in the case of Saudi women, is relatively new.

Thus, it is understandable that despite the fact that participants, for the most part, produced their images for female audiences, they were constantly trying to exhibit their “upgraded self” and adhere to gendered beauty ideals by applying technological and non-technological enhancing effects. The cases discussed here and the selfies to be discussed in 6.5 both confirm that the hegemony of gendered beauty ideals encourage Saudi selfie producers to achieve certain standards of face and bodily appearance. It is essential here to note the constructed images by Saudi women to be “looked at” by other women have been informed by cultural norms to a great extent. The producers considered veiling habits, privacy concerns, and they excluded non-mahram male viewers.

All in all, this section argued that selfie takers find their selfie to be attractive and likable. In addition, there is an expectation that viewers will gaze at and admire the selfies. Selfie takers post attractive selfies after gazing at their selfie and because they want viewers to gaze too. In the words of Arwa: “I share attractive selfies because I like beauty. So do other people”. I also demonstrated how the viewers of selfies are determined by their relational proxemics with the selfie producer. While the majority of selfie producers desire their beauty to be the focus of the gaze, a minority of participants indicated that their aim was that the content would come to the attention of the viewer. Most importantly, participants’ narratives and images confirmed that male gaze still exists in Saudi culture, but it is refracted through female gatekeepers who choose a woman the men in their family will like.

6.5. Gazing at Oneself

In Mulvey’s (1975) theory, women are treated as objects to be enjoyed by a voyeur. However, selfie production is empowering because it allows women to choose and control the parts of the body and the posing they wish to share with viewers.

“I really like my selfies” This was Lamar’s expression when asked about her motivation to post selfies. Gazing at the self on a smart phone screen is the contemporary equivalent of gazing at the self in a mirror, a water reflection, or an artist’s impression. The main difference is that a selfie taker may edit the image as desired and share it with an unlimited number of viewers with a click of a button.

Participants expressed the view that sharing an attractive selfie is the result of gazing at and admiring how pretty they look in the selfie. For instance, Ruba, a 32-year-old single lady, was asked “When producing a selfie, what is the experience like?” She replied: “I feel so in love with myself...I feel that way even if I am just standing in front of the mirror (laughing) Yes I love myself so much.” Maha who is 22 years old shared a similar point of view:

Um the selfie experience...as I always say “love yourself” and at the moment of taking a selfie I feel that I love myself more... after a couple of hours it is the same amount of love, but at this moment (selfie taking) I admire the art piece that I made of my face with makeup (laughing). I get excited when I apply makeup to my face. I am soooo into art.

Considering her social media accounts, Ruba’s case suggests that she might have a level of narcissism as she loves how she looks even without any editing or beautifying effects. On the other hand, in the second interview, Maha implied that: “I have some issues in accepting who I am from time to time...When I fix something, something else is damaged.” Therefore, she likes to gaze at herself and to take plenty of selfies after applying makeup and filters to boost her confidence. Previous research (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015) noted that more narcissism predicts the frequency of selfie posting. The exemplified cases highlighted the fact that high narcissism is not necessarily correlated with the frequency of selfie posting. Ruba really loves who she is regardless of her selfie practices. Maha feels in

love with her face only after enhancing her facial features and covering undesired blemishes and imperfections. It is only then that she begins to take countless selfies and share them online. The majority of research focusing on selfies and narcissism used quantitative measurements (Jonson & Webster, 2010; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Weiser, 2015). The relationship between narcissism and selfie practices should be further investigated from a qualitative approach.

The context and appearance were key reasons for constructing images and sharing them with other women. When participants were asked “How often do you take a selfie?”, phrases like “When I am going out”, “When I am dressed up for an event”, “When I am looking pretty and I like how I look”, “After applying makeup”, and “It depends on the appearance and look”, “Whenever I feel that I am looking good and my hair is styled I take a selfie” were consistently repeated. Additionally, participants indicated they would usually take a selfie before going to a women’s social event, in the car while going to the event, or after getting back from the event. That is because the woman would be dressed up and likes how she looks. Thus, it is meaningful to take a selfie to remind herself and others of how pretty she looks in a particular gown and makeup style. This is also significant because the decision to share images, in which the producers display pretty clothes and lavish restaurants, supports Cohen’s (2010) idea that the female gaze is related to fascination with the material world and a dependence on consumer culture. I will further elaborate on this in the upcoming sub section 6.5.1.

Furthermore, the preference for taking selfies over regular photos was found to be related to the gaze factor. When discussing their interest in selfie communications, participants mentioned that: “A selfie allow me to control how I look”, “It allows me to see how I am looking”, “I like that it gives you the opportunity to see your image”, “It enables me to know the good-looking angles and I take picture of myself”, “A selfie let me see

myself and to see if the poses and expression look good, then capture the image.” As framed, the notion of gazing at one’s selfie, admiring the self, and managing the image all make selfie portraiture a trending form of visual communication on SNS. This exemplifies the connection between controlling one’s image by using the front camera as a digital mirror, which was addressed in the previous section, controlling the statements the participants want to convey to others, and gazing at oneself to admire the final product.

Becoming experienced at selfie taking was another indicator for longer gaze at selfies. Participants indicated that they started taking selfies at shoulder level. Later, digital filters were launched and the participants also learned that taking selfies from above or with a selfie stick gave a more flattering result. These factors affected the final outcome of the selfie and the experience became more entertaining. As Shaza explains, “At first, I didn’t take many selfies. Now, I like my face...I feel that I look pretty...I feel delighted”.

In sum, this section argued that selfie producers gaze at their selfies mainly because they admire their prettiness, which has been upgraded by applying multiple effects. Indeed, selfies taken while being dressed up were likely to be gazed at by their producers. Furthermore, the ability to see one’s image and to control it made selfies a desirable form of visual communication on SNS compared to sharing regular photos. Finally, selfie producers indicated that becoming expert at selfie taking and applying digital effects leads to higher frequency of selfie posting and longer gazing time. Next, I discuss a particular type of selfie known as a mirror selfie which illustrates the underlying motives of sharing selfie images while gazing at oneself.

6.5.1. Mirror Selfie and the Female Gaze

The previous section outlined how selfie producers like to gaze at their enhanced selfie. Here I explore why the pattern of mirror selfies emerged among the participants. The idea of gazing at oneself on a phone is not novel. In fact, Lacan's mirror phase asserted that a child recognises that he or she is a separate entity (Lacan, 1998, pp. 67–122). A mirror selfie is a selfie captured while standing in front of a mirror (Uzlaner, 2017). As indicated in Chapter Six, the study identified 51 mirror selfies. The purpose of taking a mirror selfie is to display a larger area such as the body of the selfie producer and the location in which the selfie is taken. Mirror selfies add important elements such as the subject, the object, and the camera, which are not available in traditional selfies or photographs (Uzlaner, 2016).

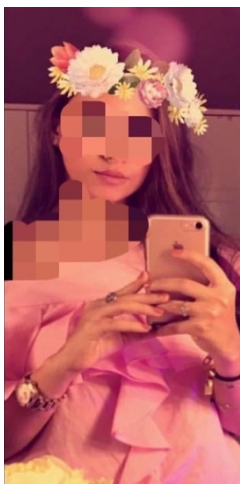


Photo 6.9



Photo 6.10



Photo 6.11

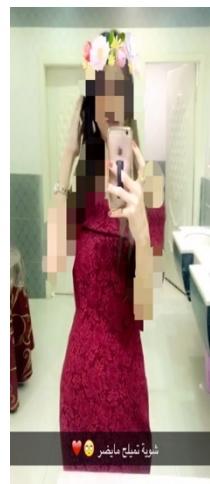


Photo 6.12



Photo 6.13

One of the questionable issues about mirror selfies is why a selfie producer would not ask another person to take a regular photograph of a wider area. My study presented original contributions by identifying five reasons that explain the mirror selfie practice: to display a greater portion of the body and location, to include an object that may only be included with a mirror selfie, if there is no one around to take photos, to capture particular poses and angles that are only known by the selfie producer, and to follow a selfie trend.

The mirror selfie in photo 6.9 was posted on the participant's Instagram account with a caption in English "Pink is not just a colour. It's an attitude" combined with a princess

emoji. The selfie was liked 101 times and received comments from Instagram followers saying that she looks adorable in pink. When I asked the participant why she chose to take this mirror selfie, she said: “When browsing their accounts, I noticed that many girls are doing so. Plus it is a new way to take a selfie other than just flipping the camera to one’s face.” Although her rationale indicated that she is mainly motivated by what is a current trend on SNS and the platform vernacular, everything in the selfie indicates that she is trying to create a positive impression. For instance, the beautifying flower crown filter, the plain background, the girly quotation, and her pose leaning to one side, all convey “I am a lady...I look pretty even while staying home in my bedroom... look at me.”

The mirror selfies 6.10, 6.11 and 6.12 exemplify how participants wanted to include their gown in the selfie. In image 6.10, the participant was dressed for her graduation ceremony. She wanted to share this memorable moment in her graduation robe, hat, and school logo. In addition, a face selfie would not have allowed viewers to know that she is a talented student. “Talented Section” is written on the sash. So, a mirror selfie is a tool that discloses all the details to those who view her Instagram account.

Selfies number 6.11 and 6.12 display two participants in the bathroom of a ballroom at a wedding ceremony. Taking mirror selfies in this location was found to be preferable among participants because there are usually mirrors all over the bathroom which means a selfie producer could be pictured from all angles in which the front view and the back of the dress and the hair style can be seen. In addition, women will generally be dressed³³ in a pretty evening gown, will have their hair and makeup done, and will be wearing jewellery. These preparations for the event form a desirable frontstage self so the selfie producer feels that she

³³ Sometimes this means overdressed with lots of jewelry and elaborate makeup and dress.

is in love with her look which motivates her to take multiple selfies in the bathroom or ballroom and share them with other to let them know how pretty she is looking. Image 5.8 included a caption that means “It is no harm to show off a bit”³⁴

The participant in image 6.13 wanted to share her final look after getting dressed up for a social gathering during Ramadan and she wore a popular dress for this season. In the background, a red Carolina Herrera handbag that matches the red high heel is placed on the couch to enhance the overall look. The participant included a quotation in Arabic “It is not an insult when they claim you are short”. When asked to comment on this selfie, she said: “I am short and everyone makes jokes about it...but high heels give me some confidence (laughing)”.



Photo 6.14



Photo 6.15



Photo 6.16

In image 6.14, the participant is taking a mirror selfie in an elevator while focusing on a Kipling yellow bag with a quote that says: “And of course, here we are.” In this selfie, the participant who lives a quiet life by herself had to take her young nephew to a doctor so she was complaining about how she had to carry his bag and she took a selfie showing the funny

³⁴ The phrase “temailah” used here does not have an exact translation in English.

face on the bag. In this case, the mirror selfie shows the back bag which would be challenging to include in a regular face selfie.

In image 6.15, the participant, whose account included many mirror selfies, indicated that she prefers this kind of selfie because “I love seeing others’ comments on my outfits”. She also explained that others do not take good photos of her. This is because she knows her facial features and the good angles and poses. She prefers to take mirror selfies rather than to ask someone to take a regular photo of her. Image 6.15 also shows that she can take many mirror selfies in many poses, include them in one layout, and post them in her Instagram account to be seen by others.

Not having someone to take photos was another reason for taking a selfie, especially if the selfie producer wants to show the location and surroundings in the image as in image 6.16. The participant here took a selfie in what seems to be a hotel or campus hall with a caption “here is a selfie...because there is no one to take pictures on Eid day”.

There are many reasons that motivate selfie producers to take mirror selfies, but what they all had in common was that all participants wished to create a desirable impression. Most participants want to show pretty images. The participant in image 6.14 wanted to show that she is a dutiful aunt. In addition, all participants used an iPhone for their mirror selfie, which is a clue about social class. In addition to mirror selfies, the flower crown and countering filters were also tools used to display the modified version of the self to others.

In the dialogue of the female gaze (Cohen, 2010), in most selfies 6.9–6.13 the producers were exhibiting material in a context that includes: stylish clothes, beautifully furnished bedrooms, branded products like the bag in 6.13, the iPhones, high heels, and expensive jewellery. These could be explained as means of making a favourable impression on the audience by including selected materials. At the same time the message is that all of the participants have middle or upper class status. What all mirror selfies had in common was

that all producers looked slim and fit. Participants who were heavier and did not look fit did not post a single selfie. This indicates that gendered beauty ideals inform how selfies are being produced, which could be explored by future selfie scholars.

Recent studies (Chae, 2017; Cohen et al., 2017; Chua & Chang, 2016; Fox & Vendemia, 2016) have noted that selfie producers carefully select, pose, and edit selfies before posting them online to be viewed by peers. However, these studies have not specified what enhancing effects and strategies are used to produce a more desirable digital self. The findings discussed in section 6.1 add to the existing literature by exploring the technological and non-technological practices used by selfie producers, patterns of selfie practices like using the selfie as a form of visual diary, and the replacement of mirrors by selfies. Finally, I outlined that mirror selfies are motivated by a number of reasons such as displaying a greater portion of the body, including objects, capturing particular angles known to the producers, following a selfie trend, and if there is no one around to take photographs.

6.6. Selfie Makeovers, Preparations and the Selfie Model

The developed selfie production model started with the “decision to take selfie” stage focusing on selfie taking motives. The second stage “offline preparations” and the third stage “decision to edit the content” were emphasised in this chapter. In particular, participants’ narratives and posted selfies pointed to a number of offline preparations such as posing, removing unwanted items from the background, positioning the camera to include an object in the image or in front of a mirror, applying makeup and checking how other people included in the selfie are looking (see 6.1.1). Also, I explored digital enhancing strategies such applying beautifying face filters, digital makeup, geofilters, removing less glamorous selfies, posting varying types of selfies on Instagram and Snapchat in addition to setting the phone to Airplane mode to see how the selfie would look when posted on Snapchat (see 6.1.2). These strategies, which are evidence of two stages of the selfie model, were applied

by Saudi selfie producers as a form of achieving gendered beauty ideals popular in the Saudi culture. The online and offline preparations were also significant in understanding how producers construct their images for a particular female audience.

6.7. Conclusion

Chapter Five highlighted selfie sharing and blocking practices in terms on proxemics theory (Hall, 1966) in addition to exploring how selfie producers use frontstage and backstage performances (Goffman, 1959) depending on the platform used and the viewing audience. This chapter focused on the early stages of selfie producing by exploring the offline pre-taking preparations suggested in stage two of the selfie model and the online enhancing effects proposed in stage three. The 15 technological and non-technological enhancing strategies used to present an upgraded version of the self are one of the empirical contributions of the study that add to existing selfie literature and online self-presentation research.

Examining selfies as a form of visual diary is another empirical contribution which broadens our understanding of the selfie phenomenon and contemporary visual self-expression in online spaces. The use of the selfie as a digital mirror and a replacement for the habit of carrying an actual mirror was another interesting practice noticed among selfie producers.

The analysis of selfies in relation to gaze theory has resulted in empirical and theoretical contributions. This study identifies reasons for taking mirror selfies, a type of selfie in which the photographer is gazing at her image in a mirror. This type of selfie, which portrays the photographer and the photo in one image, was posted to show a larger portion of the background, to signal economic status, to show off, and to freeze a moment of the self when no one is available to take a picture. In terms of theoretical contribution, I extended Mulvey's (1975) gaze theory to selfie online spaces. While her theory was originally used to

describe the male gaze at women in cinematic contexts, her theory was used as a framework to explain how Saudi selfie producers construct their online images to invite the gaze of other women with a view to a future marriage proposal. Next, the conclusion chapter will summarise the main arguments of the study and highlight the key concepts and contributions of the study.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore selfie taking and sharing behaviours and the role of cultural norms informing selfie practices. Drawing on Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and Hall's proxemics theory (1966), this phenomenological study made important empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions to knowledge, in particular around the areas of selfie posting motivations, the structural approach to the selfie taking and sharing process, the interpersonal space shared with selfie viewers, the role of the platform vernacular and technological affordances in shaping selfie practices, and the cultural norms related to selfie practices. With the exception of the quantitative selfie motive study of AL-Kandari & Abdelaziz (2018) this is the first qualitative study exploring selfie posting, sharing and editing behaviours in a Middle Eastern culture.

One of the key contributions of this thesis is that it provides a multi-dimensional understanding of the selfie phenomenon rather than focusing on one or two aspects as is the case in other studies such as, selfie-editing and social comparison (Chae, 2017), selfie behaviours and age and gender differences (Dhir et al., 2016), selfie posting motivations (Sung et al., 2016), managing impressions in selfies (Çadırcı & Güngör, 2016), and selfies and peer comparison (Chua & Chang, 2016).

On the other hand, the multi-dimensional understanding of selfies pointed to technological and cultural aspects. In terms of technology and selfies, my thesis presented key findings focusing on: selfie motives, sharing selfies in online spaces, using "virtual walls" to block viewers, presenting distinctive frontstage and backstage selfies, applying varying platform affordances when producing a selfie and editing selfies digitally. As for cultural aspects, the thesis provides significant findings on how cultural norms like veiling habits and privacy concerns inform selfie production, selfie production constructed to invite

the female gaze, using selfies to reproduce offline environments in online spaces as in Snapchat private space, and the kinds of selfies that are taken but are not posted online.

7.1. Developing the “Selfie Production Model”

The selfie production model was developed at the final stage of the study, and future scholars should take up this model to see how it applies to selfie takers in other geographical and cultural contexts. Previously, I referred to the selfie model throughout the findings chapters. Chapter Four elaborated on stages one and six by presenting findings on selfie motives and cultural impact (4.6.1). Chapter Five highlighted how platform architecture leads to stages six and seven (5.3) and the selectivity of audiences points to stage five (5.9). Chapter Six explored the offline and online strategies used to construct an “upgraded online self” leading to stages two and three in the model (6.6). Here, I present the model as a whole with comments on all stages.

As demonstrated in figure 7.1, my selfie model concluded that the experience of selfie taking and posting is determined by a structural approach that has seven stages: (1) decisions to take selfie, (2) pre-taking offline preparations, (3) decisions over content, (4) decisions to post or not post, (5) decisions to share selectively, (6) decisions about the platform used, (7) decisions to reproduce the selfie.

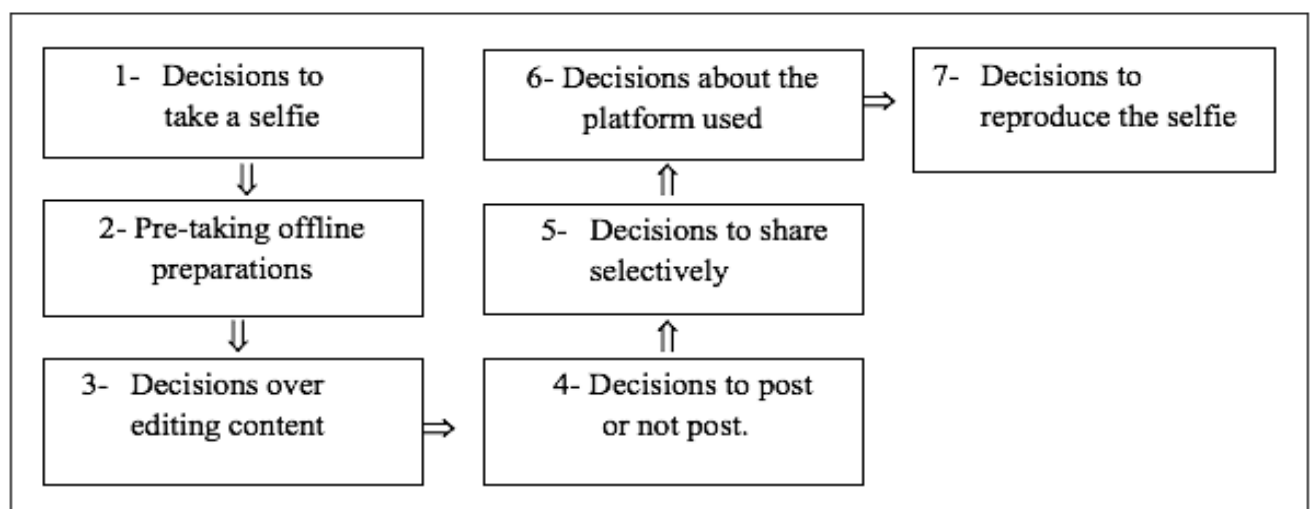


Figure 7.1: The selfie production model

7.1.1. Stage One: Taking Selfie:

In this initial stage the selfie taker becomes motivated to capture a selfie for many reasons such as, to document a moment, to archive being at a location, to attract attention, to be acknowledged by others, to receive comments on selfies, to pass time, to try face filters, to educate, or to empower others. The findings indicated that participants were most likely to decide to take selfies when dressed up and feeling attractive, while away on a trip, when going out as they would be doing something worth “documenting”, at weekends while doing something “interesting” in their spare time, or to counteract being bored such as at women’s social events, or while passing time in the back seat of a car. In these contexts, the decision to take a selfie is related to the notion of impression management. In other words, selfie producers signal to others that they are doing something interesting or they are looking desirable. These are the reasons why a selfie is shared online instead of being archived in a photo album on a smart phone. Chapter Four expanded on the six motivations I found that informed selfie producers’ decisions to take selfies: attention-seeking, communicating-the-self, entertainment, experimenting, empowering, and educating. Overall, the motivation to take and to post selfies are the main factors at this initial stage.

7.1.2. Stage Two: Offline Pre-taking Preparations:

After deciding to take a selfie, selfie producers apply a series of offline preparation strategies. This stage was identified when participants were asked to describe the experience of selfie taking and to depict how selfie behaviours in Saudi might differ from those in other cultures.

As mentioned in section 6.1.1, selfie takers engage in various pre-selfie taking preparations such as, arranging the area of the room appearing in the background, posing next an interesting object like statue or a bouquet of flowers, applying makeup, wearing a veil, removing an unwanted subject or an object like a cigarette.



Photo 7.1

As an illustration, selfie 7.1 displays a waterfall in Ireland behind one participant that was deliberately chosen as the background for a selfie. My interviews revealed how a photo such as this was usually the result of several attempts in which the participant ensured that the background was just right, all subjects were looking towards the camera and they all had presentable facial expressions and outfits. Interviews conducted in Phase One and Two of the study and discussed in the previous chapter expand further on the importance of offline pre-photo preparations and challenge Carbon's (2017) position that, unlike traditional self-portraits, selfie producing involves little preparation.

7.1.3. Stage Three: Decisions over Digitally Editing the Content:

While the second stage focused on offline preparations, the third stage outlines the online preparations applied to selfies. Significantly, my research demonstrated how these technological preparations depend on the platform architecture and design indicating the extent to which scholars must not assume selfie processes are uniform or static, but are, in fact, shaped by technological affordances.

In this stage, selfie takers make decisions about how to edit the shot in terms of content. They consider personalising the selfie experience through the application of editing

effects like face filters, geofilters, bitmoji avatars, details of the time or the temperature, black and white filters, occasional filters, seasonal filters, and, adding text, a caption or an emoji to the selfie. The following interview with two college students illustrates how selfie producers rationalised the editing stage.

Researcher: What is your opinion on editing selfies prior to posting?

Merna: I think people who do so are smart...so some people try to make their nose look smaller, their lips looks fuller...

Researcher: So, this editing you are talking about is different from applying the filters provided by Snapchat and Instagram?

Shaza: Yes. Using these features, we can control the brightness of the selfie, make it a black and white selfie, or edit the whiteness of the eye.

Merna: Snapchat has its own filtering options that have to do with brightness, adding location or time, and selfie filters.

Researcher: So what interests you in applying these makeovers and edits to your selfies?

Merna: To appear prettier. It is that simple.

Shaza: Exactly, we want our selfie to make us seem prettier than in reality.

This shows that the stage of digitally enhancing one's selfie is directly linked to presenting a frontstage self in online spaces. This also reveals that selfie producers make an extra effort by using editing in applications other than Snapchat and Instagram to ensure that all facial imperfections are fixed.

The editing and makeover of the selfie content are fully explained in Chapters Five and Six. It is significant that editing techniques were applied to both frontstage selfies with the use of beautifying face filters, and backstage selfies with the use of animal face filters. The significance lies in shaping the performance and the production of selfies to suit a variety of online audiences using technological tools. This also created dominant platform practices among users.

Sub-section 6.1.2 in Chapter Six expanded on the technological enhancing effects used by selfie producers such as the use of digital makeup and the application of beautifying

filters. Most importantly, this stage demonstrated how the platform affordances enable selfie producers to hide facial imperfections and to add glamorous effects to present a variety of online selfie presentations. In most cases, different types of face filters were associated with different audiences as beautiful filters were shared with a public audience while silly ones were shared with users who really “know” the person.

Selfie editing was pointed out in other selfie studies (Chao, 2017; Chua & Change, 2016; McLean et al., 2015), yet studies overlooked the virtual makeover step as a part of the broader selfie production process. Chua and Change (2016) specified that selfie producers used digital effects to brighten the skin, to enhance colour and effects, to change the size of the nose, to remove acne, and to blur facial imperfections. These selfie editing techniques were documented in my study and they are illustrated in the cases discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

7.1.4. Stage Four: Decisions to Post or not to Post:

While the last two stages focused on offline and online enhancing strategies, here we consider the selfie producer’s concern about the appropriateness of the selfie content in relation to cultural codes and family traditions. Selfie producers think deeply about sharing their selfie with their online network or not posting the selfie. Considering the social norms, participants evaluate the appropriateness of the selfie before posting the selfie. Most importantly, participants make predictions about how others will react to the posted selfie, what kind of comments they will receive, and the number of Likes they will receive. As an illustration, I asked Shaza a 21-year-old and Merna a 22-year-old, “Before uploading your selfies online, do you think of what people value in you or how you want them to perceive you?” They replied:

Shaza: I see the selfie 200 times and I think a lot about how people will view it.

Merna: And what would they see in it? And I ask someone who is sitting close to me about her opinion before I post it.

Shaza: And I zoom the picture and look at it closely.

Researcher: So there is a lot of process?

Shaza: Yes, and deep thinking.

The conversation indicates that selfie takers think carefully about viewers' reactions to their selfie by assessing how the selfie might be interpreted by others, looking at the selfie and its details up to 200 times before uploading the image, asking for another opinion prior to posting the selfie, and zooming in on the selfie to examine it meticulously. Afterwards, selfie producers make a final decision to post or not to post the image online. Considering the cultural norms in Saudi, Chapter Four identified types of selfies that are less likely to be posted (4.4.1).

7.1.5.Stage Five: Decisions to Share Selectively:

After careful consideration of viewers' perceptions of the image, selfie takers decide which audience can view the image. The findings reported that selfie producers make these decisions based on the relational proxemics with viewers. Some types of selfie are allowed to be viewed by an audience within public proxemics as in the case of Instagram followers. While unveiled personal selfies are intended to be viewed by a close group of girlfriends on Snapchat, veiled selfies were shared with broader audience on Instagram. Chapter Five drew on proxemics theory to investigate how selfie producers decide to selectively share selfies online. Selfie viewers controlled and segregated audiences based on the design of the platform. While some selfies were posted on Snapchat's public story or the Instagram public profile, others were shared through private messages to selected individuals or groups. Therefore, producers choose to share their selfies with personal, private, or social audiences based on their virtual intimacy with the viewers (see section 5.5). Producers were also seen to construct "virtual walls" at this stage to keep particular users out of the viewing zone in addition to keeping different audiences separated (section 5.6).

7.1.6. Stage Six: Decisions about the Platform to Use:

In stage six, the selfie producers select the platform used to post the selfie. My study examined Instagram and Snapchat platforms. Social networking platforms provide varying options and selfie producers' selection of the platform to be used is informed by the platform architecture, which is the focus of this stage, and the audience viewing the account as explained in the former stage.

In the context of Snapchat and Instagram affordances, both platforms are designed for sharing and editing photographic content but they have distinctive features. Snapchat, which is a visual based platform used to enhance connection in existing relationships, provides many selfie oriented features (Vaterlaus et al., 2016) like the wide range of face filters that can be applied to selfies including, sunglasses, masks, flower crowns, animal features, hats, and options to swap faces and to changes facial features. Snapchat provides limited viewing of an image for 24 hours making it a personal form of communication between close friends rather than communication with random public users. On Snapchat, selfie takers can choose funny, beautifying, or ugly face filters to serve attention seeking or experimentation motives. Additionally, it is possible to create and include a bitmoji avatar that participants found to be funny and expressive. The viewing time of the posted image can be controlled to last between 1–10 seconds. The application allows for adding text, emojis, geofilters, and occasional filters. One can receive comments on the selfie but not Likes.

On the other hand, Instagram offers affordances like posting status updates, check-ins, “Like” an image (Fatani & Suyadnya, 2015), colour editing, and archiving photos permanently in the profile. These affordances influence selfie producers' decisions about editing the photos before posting them online. Furthermore, users of Instagram develop communication cues with different image presentations (Nair & Aram, 2014). These include adding lighting effects, being able to indicate the location of taking the selfie, adding a

caption under the selfie, sharing the selfie as a direct message or a public image, tagging another Instagram user, including multiple selfies in one layout, and receiving comments and ‘Likes’ from followers. Also, selfies posted on an Instagram profile will be displayed permanently unless they are deleted by the user. Thus, selfie takers decide which platform to use based on the technical features, the audience, and cultural norms. Chapter Five outlined how Instagram and Snapchat affordances inform selfie practices (discussed in 5.1).

7.1.7. Stage Seven: Decisions to Reproduce the Selfie:

After posting a selfie on a selected platform like Snapchat, users consider whether or not to reproduce the selfie in other social media platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, or Path. The reasons for reproducing the selfie include, the digital enhancing effects available on a particular platform, the positive reaction to a selfie on one platform that can result in the user reproducing the image, and the desire to share a selfie with other audiences.

Although these stages are presented here in a linear structure, this is not necessarily how they occur in all cases. Sometimes, selfie producers post a selfie, and then decide to remove it and edit it. Also, not every posted selfie is reproduced in other platforms. These stages occur based on the preference of the selfie producers. In other words, not all stages apply to every selfie, but at least two of these stages is evident in all selfies. This is a general framework of the selfie taking and posting experience applied to the Saudi context and I encourage researchers to apply it to other selfie producers around the world. Some stages were noticed during the observation phase, while other stages were identified in statements made by participants during the interviews and focus groups.

This framework outlined above means that selfie producers think deeply about their digital self-portraiture and they ask themselves: Does the image look flattering? What enhancing effect(s) should I apply this time? How will others view it? It is appropriate for it to be seen by all Instagram and Snapchat audiences, or should I share it privately using a

private message? How does the background look? Why don't I repost it on other platforms since viewers responded positively to the selfie?

Moreover, the seven-stage selfie model suggests that both the "imagined audience" and the cultural codes are in the mind of Saudi selfie producers. Thus, controlling the image and deciding who can have access to it and in what context it may be shared online were determined by attention seeking motives from the audience who interpret the selfie in light of Saudi social conventions. This means that, in stage five, selfie producers take into consideration three circles of selfie viewers: a general audience, a personal audience including judgemental individuals, and a private audience consisting of non-judgmental females in the same age range (discussed in 5.5.1).

7.1.8. The Selfie Model and Literature on Selfies

Selfie activities include taking selfies, editing selfies, and posting selfies. The first two stages refer to the process of taking a selfie while stage three refers to digitally editing the selfie. Posting and sharing selfie images takes place in the sixth stage of the model.

My selfie model was one of the original contributions that emerged from the four phases of this study. However, a number of studies referred to individual stages of the model. Al-Kandari and Abdelaziz (2018) noted that documentation is a predictor for taking selfies, which happens in the first stage in my proposed model. Similarly, Etgar and Hamburger (2017) identified documentation, belonging, and self-approval as motivators for taking selfies, which points to the first stage. In terms of the first stage, Sung et al. (2016) and Al-Kandari and Abdelaziz (2018) highlighted selfie posting motives while Chapter Four highlighted key reasons for avoiding posting selfies online. Others emphasised the second stage by analysing the positioning and posing in a selfie as in mirror selfies (Shipley, 2015) and selfies taken in museums next to art works (Kozinets, Gretzel, & Dinhopl, 2017). In both cases, the positioning of the subject in relation to other objects like a mirror or a sculpture is

perceived as offline preparation as explained in stage two. Furthermore, editing selfies to present a desirable self has also been identified (Al-Kandari & Abdelaziz, 2017; Chae, 2016; Chua & Chang, 2016; McLean et al., 2015), which is addressed in the third stage.

In addition, Costa's (2018) study conducted in Turkey asserted that the imagined audiences on SNS guide users to adjust their performances actively including posting different content to different audiences using different profile accounts. Therefore, her study points to the fifth stage of my model in which selfie users select carefully who might view and access their selfies. When it comes to stage six, Keller (in press) exemplified how feminist girls prefer posting on Twitter and Tumbler compared to Facebook where it is likely that they would be judged negatively by family members. For this reason, they carefully selected the platform to address feminist issues.

The final stage of the model, involving the selfie transfer from one platform to others, had not been reported in previous studies. By bringing together various stages of selfie production, this thesis therefore makes a significant contribution to knowledge by providing a holistic and comprehensive understanding of various stages in selfie production process which ideally alerts other scholars to dimensions of selfie production which they to date have missed. This also links to methodological contributions of the study.

7.2. Methodological Achievements

The multimethod design conducted in this phenomenological study consisted of four phases: focus groups, in-depth interview, online observation, and photo elicitation interviews. This enhances the validity of the results and triangulates the accuracy of the findings. The data for this multiphase design took a year to collect and 36 hours to transcribe and translate. The effect was to generate an insightful understanding of the selfie phenomena practiced in Saudi that would have been challenging to achieve by using a single method design.

The methodological design was one of the contributions of my study as the qualitative design provided an in-depth investigation of selfie production that had not been conducted as part of other selfie studies. Previous selfie studies used interviews and questionnaires (Sung et al., 2016), interviews and written narrative exercises (Milcot, 2015), an online survey (Dhir et al., 2016), a survey and Instagram analysis (Kim et al, 2016), an interview and focus groups (Tiidenberg, 2015), an experiment and an online survey (Re et al, 2016), and ethnographic observation (Tiidenberg, 2013). While these studies provided valuable insights about selfie behaviours, their findings were reached by using one or two methods. By contrast, this study examined visual content in the observation, and textual data collected from the interviews, in addition to hearing participants' reflections on their images in the photo-elicitation interview, which also served as a member check strategy, further enhanced the credibility of data.

Moreover, the multi-phase method design of this study illustrated the methodological limitations of previous selfie studies. A single design method may not explore selfie phenomena with the same depth of information provided by the multimethod design. The focus groups provided a general understanding of the selfie experience and cultural norms intersecting with selfie behaviours. The online observation displayed personal preferences and daily usage of selfie communication and participants' experimentations with filters. The photo-elicitation interview highlighted the selfie producers' reflections on the selfie and viewers' feedback. The in-depth interview acknowledged the role of platform architecture, the virtual intimacy aspect, and selfie blocking behaviours. The majority of arguments and themes developed in this study required the consideration of a variety of data to understand how they complement or diverge from each other.

As an illustration, the development of the selfie production model consisted of seven stages: decisions to take selfie, pre-taking preparations, decisions over content, decisions to

post or not post, decisions to share selectively, decisions about the platform used, and decisions to reproduce the selfie, resulted in moving between different types of data. For example, while the focus group discussed motivations for selfie taking (stage one), the in-depth interview data highlighted the decisions about sharing the selfie and the viewers (stages 4 & 5). On the other hand, the online observation phase noticed that participants post various types of selfie on Instagram and Snapchat in addition to reproducing Snapchat selfies in Instagram accounts (stages 6 & 7). The pre-taking selfie preparations (stage 2) were recognised while discussing a particular selfie with participants in the photo-elicitation interview.

Furthermore, including two image-based platforms (Instagram and Snapchat) in the study illustrated how social networking users' performance might be completely different. In other words, Snapchat selfies clearly highlighted backstage performance whereas Instagram selfies displayed frontstage performance. Thus, SNS studies examining users' interaction on one platform at a time are limited because it is possible to identify one type of performance based on the trend of using the platform and the privacy setting offered by the platform.

In addition, understanding selfie taking and posting motives was informed by the in-depth interview, the online observation, and the photo-elicitation phase. While the interview identified communicating-the-self as a motive for selfie posting, observing participants' accounts identified various forms of the communicated self on various platforms. Additionally, the online observation identified filter experimentation motives which were not noted in the interviews. Similarly, understanding selfie sharing behaviours, which resulted in developing the online proxemics model, was informed by participants' narratives in the interview and their observed online postings. Finally, the focus groups and interviews highlighted the non-technological enhancing effects whereas the technological enhancing effects like adding filters were recognised through the online observation.

In sum, the mixed methods design enabled me to capture aspects of the selfie production process, to understand how producers make offline decisions, and to see their daily online communications. Accordingly, future new media scholars could benefit from the design in examining areas like online self-presentation, platforms affordances and identity construction, and platform vernaculars and cultural norms.

7.3. Goffman and Selfie Presentation

My thesis took a phenomenological approach to understanding the experience of selfie taking and posting from the perspective of Saudi women. I extended Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory to digital spaces conveying that selfie producers use technological capabilities of platforms to extend aspects of the strategic construction of both frontstage and backstage performances.

In particular, selfie producers used what I term "frontstage selfies" by applying beautifying selfie filters like the flower crown filter to selfies that are shared with a public audience on Instagram and Snapchat's public story. On the other hand, the "backstage selfies" performance, created by using silly and funny filters, is shared with close friends using Snapchat's private messaging features. Additionally, Snapchat private messaging constructed an area for exchanging backstage private content with close female contacts rather than posting on a frontstage level in which actions like smoking a hookah or wearing revealing clothes are likely to be judged negatively by older viewers.

The application of digital face filters to selfies extends Goffman's (1959) theory of using physical surroundings, costumes, and objects for staging purposes. In the context of digital staging, certain filters, like black and white filters, were used for frontage performance while other playful filters like animal filters were used for backstage performance. According to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, performing on a frontstage or backstage level varies depending on audiences in the offline setting. Furthermore, selfie research (Çadırcı &

Güngör, 2016) indicated that there is no backstage in selfie practices. However, my study suggested that Saudi selfie producers engage in both backstage and frontstage performances. Backstage performances were highlighted in the editing selfie stage, which is stage two in the selfie model identified in this study, and in the selectivity of considering particular viewers or using a particular platform like Snapchat. These meticulous decisions about the details of the face and the viewers formed a backstage while the final posting step was seen as a frontstage performance.

Therefore, as indicated in the empirical contributions section, selfies practices were informed by the segregation of audiences, the technological affordances, and the cultural norms. Such audience segregation and varying performances extended Goffman's (1959) concept of offline theatrical performance to selfie online visual communications. Such audience segregation using platform features and informed by cultural practices developed what I called "virtual walls". Saudi selfie producers used virtual walls, similar to an offline environment, because their self-presentation varies in front of different audiences.

In addition, I argued that the digital makeup, consisting of face filters and effects applied by selfie producers before posting the image on the platform, is a contemporary backstage makeover similar to Goffman's (1959) idea of using costumes, objects, and masks in offline spaces. Indeed, digital makeup and other digital and non-digital beautifying strategies created a contemporary presentation of the frontstage desirable self.

Communicating the filtered selfie to segregated audiences is interpreted in light of backstage and frontstage performance. Sharing a "backstage selfie" that reveals a silly or funny dimension with close friends and family members is expected to be perceived positively (e.g., cheer up the viewer, joke about it). However, sharing the same filtered selfie with an unfamiliar audience might violate the expectation of the viewer or be negatively judged. This distinction between audiences is part of impression management. Chapter Five

provided a detailed section on conceptualising frontstage- backstage performances in relation to selfie behaviours.

Selfie posting motives were found to inform the performance of selfie producers. The intersection of communicating-the-self, attention-seeking, and filter experimenting motives means that selfie producers make distinctions between backstage performance “unfiltered” selfies and frontstage performance. Indeed, this study highlighted a number of digital enhancing techniques (e.g., using face filters, using lighting filters, applying digital makeup, adding geofilters) as well as non-digital techniques (e.g., retaking many selfies until satisfied with picture, taking mirror selfies, taking a selfie from above, arranging the background, focusing on the prettier side of the face, and applying real makeup) that are processed on a backstage level prior to posting the selfie in frontstage to the audience. Accordingly, enhancing one’s image using digital and non-digital techniques, which occurs in the second stage of the selfie model, the pre-taking preparation, is informed by imagining the audience while taking the selfie.

A mirror selfie is a type of selfie that presented another layer of performance in which the producer is performing in front of the self by looking in a mirror and adjusting the pose and then performing in front of an online audience when the selfie is posted. The findings of this study presented original contributions to selfie literature by exploring the reasons for taking mirror selfies. Four reasons for taking mirror selfies were identified: to include more of the background, when there is no one present to take a photo, following a selfie trend, to capture poses and features known by only the selfie taker.

The popularity of mirror selfies among the sample in this study and in other studies (Shipley, 2015; Uzlaner, 2017) indicates that it is a trending practice in social media. It could also reflect the fact that selfie producers want to signal things indirectly like the brand of the smart phone, the luxurious jewellery, the stylish dress, the high heels, the handbag, and the

location. All of these elements show a larger snapshot of the moment and they indicate attention seeking, and communicating the self, motives. Including such items in a traditional selfie would be challenging and it would be obvious that the selfie taker was showing off. However, the mirror selfie practice gives the impression that the selfie taker is using this practice to show more of themselves while the real motive is include other praiseworthy details.

7.3.1. A Dialogue on Selfies between Hall and Goffman

Throughout my study, I have referred to Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory and Hall's (1966) proxemics theory to explain selfie practices. Yet, it is uncertain how these scholars would apply their theories to contemporary selfie online communications. Here, I cast light on how these separate perspectives of social interaction relate to each other in the dialogue of selfie practices.

Goffman's (1959) self-presentation theory was framed to explain varying selfie performances shared with varying audiences on two separate platforms. His dramaturgical analysis can help us to see how selfie producers present varying appearances, clothes, face filters, and veil, when sharing the image with an Instagram audience, a Snapchat audience for the public story, and the viewers of private snap. While Goffman focused on the individual's appearance and behaviours displayed in front of an audience, Hall (1966) focused on boundaries and territorial spaces, which I term "virtual walls", determining who can access the public story selfie, the private snap selfie, or the Instagram selfie, and who is to be blocked or rejected.

In sum, the concepts of "frontstage selfie" and "backstage selfie" point to Goffman's focus on the characteristics displayed when responding to and communicating with an audience. In addition, the "virtual walls" explain Hall's (1966) concern with self-boundary formation, which liken online spaces to a protective bubble surrounding the selfie producer.

7.4. Key Concepts and Ideas

My thesis was able to build conceptual contributions by identifying the following key concepts that describe selfie practices used by Saudi selfie producers: the selfie model, virtual wall, upgraded version of the self, digital makeup, digital mirror, visual diary, and car selfie. The selfie model is a framework that describes the process of selfie production. Virtual walls and online proxemics are focused on selfie sharing and audience segregation in online spaces. However, the concepts of the upgraded version of the self, the female gaze, digital makeup and digital mirror, all focus on the aesthetic dimensions and the frontstage performance. A visual diary using selfies is a form of digital storytelling.

7.4.1. The Virtual Walls and Online Proxemics

The “virtual wall” is a term used to describe Saudi women’s marking of online spaces as part of audience segregation. The findings asserted that Saudi selfie producers post selfies in varying online spaces to keep different online audiences separated. For instance, posting a selfie while smoking a hookah as a private snap with a girlfriend is a form of building a virtual wall between the performance sent to this viewer and the remaining audiences in the public story of Snapchat and the Instagram audience. The virtual wall concept was explored in Chapter Five.

The finding recognised Hall’s (1966) four spaces: intimate, personal, social and public, because I found that Saudi selfie posting was based on audience segregation. Yet, segregating the audience based on virtual intimacy was more significant in the case of Saudi women. While Hall’s theory positioned family members in the intimate zone and friends in personal zone, this study showed that virtual walls are used to include and exclude members according to their virtual intimacy with the selfie producers. For instance, a selfie producer may allow her girlfriend to view her selfie while excluding her husband or her mother from viewing the images. In an offline setting, this marking of spaces is informed by cultural

norms and practices. However, in online spaces, the marking of spaces is determined by personal preferences and technological affordances. Using the platform posting features, selfie producers build virtual walls to keep the three online proxemics separated as will be illustrated next.

Developing Hall's (1966) proxemics theory is one of the theoretical contributions of this thesis. "Online proxemics" is a term that I developed as referring to the three circles of selfie viewers based on their virtual intimacy. A social audience includes male users such as colleagues, relatives, or friends. A personal audience includes family members and girlfriends, and a private audience or "team of best friends" includes close girlfriends who are in the same age range as the selfie producer and who usually socialise with her. The main distinction between the second and the third circle is that users from the second personal circle may judge or post negative comments on the selfie, while viewers from the third network are likely to support the selfie producer and to share secret performances. Selfie interactions with the third circle mean that Saudi selfie producers actively shape an online private sphere to interact with others away from the supervision of parents and the judgment of relatives.

This framework of the three circles of selfie viewers means that Saudi selfie producers intentionally decide to keep different online social contexts separated from one another, which might be part of wanting to have a separate space for close girlfriends in a male-dominated society. A previous study (Costa, 2018) confirmed that SNS users created up to twelve Facebook accounts to distinguish social spheres and social groups from one another. This is the first study to identify the three circles of selfie viewers and to introduce the concept of virtual walls in relation to SNS communication.

The transitioning between digital spaces is a reproduction of the traditional offline environments in Saudi. While women dress up and do not wear a veil in women's gatherings,

they change their appearance when they leave the host's house and they wear the hijab when appearing in public. Also, the level of formality maintained in selfie practices when dealing with non-mahram males in offline spaces was identified. These distinctions between spaces in offline setting have extended to selfie behaviours occurring online. In addition, the architecture of platforms played an important role in allowing selfie producers to control their presentations easily, presenting the performance that suits the viewing audience.

In the context of online proxemics, I investigated reasons for excluding users from viewing selfies. The findings identified four main reasons for blocking selfie viewers: the evil eye, passive viewers, power relations, other (loss of interest, privacy violation). Blocking certain viewers could be understood as a way of attracting viewers who would interact positively with the image while excluding others. However, in the Saudi context, a more significant reading of blocking actions would be that women who face power relations and who are not allowed to express themselves publicly in the offline environment, tend to compensate by using self-portraiture in digital spaces while excluding dominant family members or judgmental relatives.

7.4.2. The "Upgraded Version of the Self" and "Digital Makeup"

The upgraded version of the self is a key concept used to describe a selfie taker's "perfected" image after applying digital effects like face filters and lighting filters which enhance facial features and conceal imperfections to present a more desirable self. It is essential here to note that it is not only Saudi selfie producers who strive to present an upgraded version of their selfies. This is also true of Korean women in their 20s and 30s (Chae, 2017) and of female teenagers born in Australia, East Asia, New Zealand, and Europe (McLean et al., 2015) who were found to edit selfies before sharing them in a more desirable online presentation.

This common tendency to present the upgraded version of the self is motivated by seeking attention from viewers. Indeed, presenting a “frontstage self” fulfils social needs such as boosting confidence, self-esteem, and self-promotion among online peers. The simplicity and flexibility of the enhancing techniques provided by the platforms also determined their use by selfie takers. In other words, if a selfie user can look prettier by using filters instead of having expensive plastic surgeries or wearing time consuming makeup, then why not? In sum, the upgraded version of the self is a free effortless way to beautify facial features. Yet, this upgraded version might have consequences on decisions to undergo plastic surgery or to go on an extreme diet. These considerations could be features of future research. McLean’s (2015) study confirmed that selfie-editing is associated with body dissatisfaction.

Throughout the phases of the study, the desire to appear prettier and the focus on aesthetic elements emerged consistently. This notion was found to be significant to Saudi selfie producers in particular. The findings highlighted the fact that selfie producers apply “beautifying filters” which either add pretty touches to the face or cover up unwanted elements. The use of such filters provides Saudi women with a mean of displaying their prettiness on online spaces. Such expressions of the pretty self in online spaces are more acceptable compared to appearing in public places wearing makeup and not covering the face. For these reason, sharing enhanced selfies figured largely in participants’ accounts. Additionally, face filters applied by selfie users extend our understanding of Goffman’s theory to digital spaces. The technological practices applied to selfies enable selfie takers to adopt a persona or to wear a personality mask to perform the enhanced self in digital spaces. The upgraded version of the self was explored in Chapter Six.

The notion of presenting an upgraded version of the self was implied both from using enhancing effects, which are suggested in stages 2 and 3 in the selfie model, and the underlying motives for posting selfies. While selfie producers outlined communicating-the-

self motives, the selfies they produced pointed to attention-seeking. Communicating-the-self motives and attention-seeking motives were found to be interrelated. When participants were asked to comment on flattering selfies posted they indicated that these selfies were posted for self-expression purposes. However, online observation revealed that both the enhancing and editing effects applied, in addition to the expectations of viewers' interactions with the image, implied that sharing a "virtually upgraded" selfie fulfilled social needs that fall under attention seeking motives. Most selfie research focused on the notion of self-presentation and communication (Bellinger, 2015; Katz and Crocker, 2015; Frosh, 2015) and not on attention seeking motives (Sung et al., 2016). However, the present study confirmed that sharing an upgraded frontstage self and seeking attention from selfie viewers are strongly related. This finding contributes to the literature on selfies by highlighting the connection between motives for visually expressing oneself and attention seeking motives.

"Digital makeup" describes one of the digital strategies used to present an upgraded version of the self to online networks. Participants used technological capabilities such as, eyelashes and red lipstick filters, contouring filters, and skin clearing filters, which are all provided by the Snapchat application. This points to the interrelations between applying "digital makeup" and seeking the "upgraded version of the self". Saudi women's use of digital makeup to appear more feminine and to achieve beauty ideals is socially constructed. According to Dillaway's (2005) study on gendered beauty norms and on menopausal women, women are affected by changes in the skin and body. Therefore, in such cases, digital makeup offers an opportunity to manipulate online audiences.

Recent research used the term digital makeup (Khan et al, 2018) to describe a novel algorithm technique that changes the makeup of internet images. My usage of the term in this study is applied to selfie practices performed by the producer. Applying digital makeup was found to be done in the third stage of the selfie model known as "decisions to edit the

content” (see 6.1.2). Using technological tools and filters to present a favourable image is equivalent to using surroundings for staging purposes as proposed by Goffman (1959).

7.4.3. The Female Gaze

Another theoretical contribution related to adapting the female gaze theory, which originated in a cinematic setting, to contemporary selfie online communications. In response to Mulvey’s (1975) male gaze theory, the female gaze theory has been used in reference to female viewers and the perspective of female filmmakers. In the context of Saudi selfie producers, the construction of the female image to be viewed by women was conceptualised in terms of:

- A- Reproducing offline environments in online spaces as displayed in selfies taken at women’s social occasions and shared with selected viewers using Snapchat.
- B- The desire to find a future mate and marriage proposal as illustrated in the multiple stages of filtering the selfie to present a desirable self in an attempt to seek the attention of matchmaking women searching for a future bride on behalf of a prospective husband (see 6.4 for details).

The concept of the gaze was found to be related to communicating the self and attention seeking motives. The finding implied that both digital and non-digital enhancing effects applied to selfies are related to the desire to be looked at by viewers in digital spaces. The notion of being “looked at” was addressed by Mulvey’s (1975) theory arising from a cinematic view suggesting that American media positioned women as objects to be gazed at by men. However, taking into account the data generated by this study, the enhancing processes applied to selfies were with a view to women being “looked at” by other women instead of by men. The desire to be looked at by other women is strongly linked to Saudi cultural codes in which expressing feminine and pretty dimensions are practiced in female offline spaces that exclude men. The desire to be looked at and admired by people of the

same gender is related to explicit motives like receiving positive feedback and implicit motives like attracting the attention of females who might be searching for a future wife for their son or brother. The notion of gazing at the selfie can be applied to the selfie producer as well as to online viewers. Indeed, the ability to control one's image and to edit facial features made the action of gazing and admiring the "upgraded version" attractive.

7.4.4. Digital Mirror

The digital mirror is another term that I developed to describe how female selfie producers use selfies as a tool to adjust their look and to control their pose instead of using an actual mirror. In fact, taking selfies using a camera phone was seen as a replacement for an actual mirror carried in a woman's handbags. Most importantly, physical mirrors can merely reflect an exact image, whereas a selfie serves as digital mirror that is capable of hiding imperfections and beautifying the real image. Yet, both physical mirrors and digital mirrors are used to control one's image before presenting a frontstage self.

Considering the selfie model, selfie producers use either mirror in stages two and three to adjust their images prior to capturing the selfie. This management and control of the image are important in showing that even if selfie is a depiction of the self, it is a well-planned performance expected to be admired by a frontstage audience. It is essential here to note that the digital mirror is a selfie practice used as a replacement for physical mirrors while a mirror selfie is a type of selfie in which a selfie taker stands in front of a physical mirror to include a larger area in the image (see 6.5.1).

7.4.5. Visual Diary

Visual diary is a term developed from participants' narratives about how and why they post selfies. My findings revealed that selfie producers post selfies to share personal snapshots from their daily life with a close network on Snapchat. With that in mind, this practice of visually sharing personal moments from one's life is seen as a contemporary form

of written diary. Blogs are also a modern form of self-expression (Rettberg, 2014). However, the public aspect of an audience reading a blog means that a blog is not as personalised as a selfie diary. In other words, Saudi selfie producers only shared their selfies through a private account that required access permission. Also, the design of Snapchat which displays selfies for only 24 hours, presented visual diaries as “live stories” that are consistently changing, unlike blog pages. This ephemeral open-ended nature of Snapchat and Instagram stories is important in constructing a new form of personal online narrative consisting of incidents (Dayter & Muhleisen, 2016; Georgakopoulou, 2007).

7.4.6. Culture & Selfie

Throughout my research, I found that cultural norms informed how selfie producers constructed their images and sharing preferences as the selfie model illustrated. This influence of cultural norms on shaping online presentation was significant because it presented a contrary viewpoint to most social networking research emphasising the influence of platform architecture on users’ online interactions. My study argues that the user’s management of the viewers, and the influence of cultural norms on content creation, are significant factors in shaping the platform vernacular. The platform design and user interactions on the platforms are two faces of one element in understanding the human behaviours that construct the platform usage and that are constructed by the architecture of the platform.

My findings confirmed that the Saudi culture informed selfies practices in many areas. I identified that selfie producers consider the following cultural dimensions: veiling habits, privacy concerns, the privacy of others, respect for parents and the elderly, religious boundaries with males, content such as hookah smoking that might be negatively judged, revealing clothing, and sitting in close proximity to a man. The consideration of these cultural norms indicates that audiences play a significant role in participants’ selfie practices. In

Goffman's (1959) view, humans prepare their performance before "staging" it in front of an audience. Thus, selfie producers' awareness of the different audiences on their Instagram and Snapchat accounts resulted in presenting veiled attractive looking selfies on Instagram while sharing more "authentic" unveiled selfies on Snapchat.

This means that not only does the architecture of the platform inform selfie practices, but also that users are actively shaping different selfie norms for use on different platforms and techniques. In other words, in the fourth stage (decisions to post or not to post) selfie takers consider how the selfie might be interpreted in terms of the Saudi cultural norms, especially when including aspects that are negatively perceived like smoking a hookah or appearing unveiled in a public place. In the fifth stage (decisions to share selectively) and the sixth stage (decisions about the platform used), selfie producers consider the platform design and audience managing options such as the fact that Instagram selfies will be permanently saved online while Snapchat selfies will only be viewed for 24 hours. In addition there is the possibility of selecting particular users on Snapchat and of being able to temporarily block viewers and then unblock them again without notifying them. Such control of selfie viewers was understood in terms of the notion of virtual intimacy. It was noticed that females sometimes wanted to present a frontstage view for particular audiences, including relatives or parents, while they presented a backstage self for a small group of girlfriends.

Veiling was one of the essential factors that informed selfie practices. In fact, selfie producers segregated audiences and shifted their performances in a similar manner to offline environments. For instance, in Saudi, men are required to notify female family members before entering the house especially if unrelated women are expected to visit. By the same token, when women enter a space, they would usually ask if there are men present or not so that they keep or remove their veil. In online selfie practices, participants segregated their

audiences using virtual walls by sending unveiled selfies through private messages, excluding males from their account, or having a second account to share selfies with girlfriends.

The different performances on Snapchat and Instagram mean that selfie users have developed a clear normativity that fits the expectations of three specific audiences: a general public audience formed by colleagues, family members, classmates, and opposite sex relatives, and friends on Instagram; a personal Snapchat community consisting of a more personal audience including family members and friends; a private Snapchat network including non-judgmental girlfriends.

In sum, the consideration of veiling practices, maintaining the formality with non-mahram males, and the segregation of audiences in digital spaces means that Saudi selfie takers reproduce offline environments in digital spaces.

7.5. Limitations

The study limitations stem from the sampling type, snowball network sampling, used for collecting the data, as it resulted in a narrow selection of highly educated participants and a strong regional focus. Considering the Saudi cultural codes, accessing female personal photos required a level of trust which impacted my choices to use a network and snowball sampling. As a result, most participants came from Jeddah and they were middle or upper social class.

In addition to the narrow selection of population in terms of class and demographics, the size of sample which included 25 Saudi females was small. However, the objective of this study was to not produce generalisations about selfie production. Instead this phenomenological study was aimed at a deep exploration of the stages of taking, editing and sharing selfies with a view to understanding how selfie production is informed by Saudi cultural norms and by platform affordances. Future studies could focus on different regions in

Saudi or try to reach participants from lower social classes or younger age groups or include larger sample size.

Finally, the translation of the conversations and transcripts from Arabic to English is another limitation. According to Simon (1996) and Temple and Young (2004), translating data in qualitative research may result in semantic loss of those meanings, especially when translating cultural meanings that are embedded in linguistic expressions. Some meanings and expressions in Arabic which do not have exact translations were translated to their closest meaning in English. An example would be the word '*temaileh*' which was translated as 'to show off'.

7.6. Suggestions for Future Research

The identification of the selfie model for the process of selfie taking, editing, and sharing was one of the important contribution of my study. This is the first study to identify the stages of selfie production as informed by the mixed methods design. Selfie and social media researchers may assess the selfie model in different research settings, for example, a younger sample, or a cross- gender sample. They could undertake longitudinal studies, or they could investigate social media platforms other than Snapchat and Instagram.

This study identified a structural approach to the selfie experience consisting of seven stages: (1) decisions to take selfie, (2) pre-taking preparations, (3) decisions over content, (4) decisions to post or not post, (5) decisions to share selectively, (6) decisions about the platform used, (7) decisions to reproduce the selfie. Future selfie studies could investigate whether these stages also apply to western cultures. Indeed, as SNS environment and peer influences make for depictions of an idealised female body (Cohen et al., 2017). An investigation of male selfie takers would be useful to see whether or not such processes are gender-specific. It is expected that male selfie takers will use fewer stages when deciding to

take and post selfies. Accordingly, a cross-gender study might provide novel insights about how each gender conceptualises selfie presentations.

Recent changes, in 2018, including the legalisation of women driving, the lifting of the cinema ban, allowing music concerts, and allowing women to watch sport in stadiums, are changing the cultural norms (Alkhalisi, 2018). Considering that 70% of the Saudi population is under the age of 30, the crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman indicated that the remaining 30% should not restrain the Kingdom from moving forward (McKernan, 2018). These transformations in Saudi are likely to have very visible impacts on selfie taking and sharing practices. For instance, in Saudi, sharing selfies taken while driving a car or attending a football game are likely to increase as a signal to others that these activities are being experienced for the first time.

The legalisation of movie theatres is also expected to have an influence on visual culture by the sharing of selfies while at the cinema. In the long term, it is possible to see how Saudi female viewers and film makers will embrace the female gaze theory. Furthermore, the gradual relaxation of the policing of religious rules is leading to a mixed gender environment in public places. It is possible that the minimisation of religious policing and the current focus on these activities by the General Entertainment Authority will change how Saudi females construct their online presentations when posting a selfie. For instance, a selfie that was once treated as personal, and was only shared with private viewers, might be shared with a wider online audience. Embracing the new social changes may decrease privacy concerns regarding women's images and thus selfie producers may be less concerned about segregating audiences or building virtual walls.

In light of the new social and cultural changes in Saudi, car selfie taking from the driver's seat, selfies taken at concerts and in cinemas, selfies taken in public places with men,

selfie sharing and online proxemics are areas for future research to investigate and to examine how social reformations inform online selfie presentation.

Appendices

Appendix A. Focus Groups Participants (Phase One)

Focus Group One					
Name ³⁵	Place	Demographic Information	Age	Marital status	Notes
1. Reham	KAU campus Nursing college 25 April 2016	Western region Jeddah	31	Married	All participants are completing a degree in medicine while having a job at the same time. Participant Samar doesn't post selfie but wanted to share how family members used it.
2. Lana		Jeddah	30	Married	
3. Suha		Northern region, Tabuk. Derrah suburban rural area.	30	Single- living apart from parents	
4. Zenab		Eastern region (Khobar city)	34	Married- long distant relationship	
5. Amal		Western region Taif	32	Married- family in another city	
6. Samar		Western region	43	Married	
Focus Group Two					
Name	Place	Demographic Information	Age	Job	Notes
1. Rana	Private house 29 April, 2016	Western region Jeddah	32	Postgraduate living in Ireland	All participants were single.
2. Thelal			26	Unemployed, unmarried	
3. Abeer			30	Employed at call centre	Participants distinguished between image selfie and video selfie.
4. Lyla			19	Student	

³⁵ Original names were changed to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Appendix B. In-Depth Interview Participants (Phase Two)

Initials	Age	Job	Marital status	Social Status
1. Kholod	34	Executive manager, her own design company	Single	Mid-income
2. Lamar	19	Medical Student	Single	High income
3. Ghaida	20	Medical Student	Single	High income
4. Nehal	32	Nurse	Married, mother	Mid- income
5. Shorog	18	Student, Speaker, Book club instructor (UBT private university)	Single	High-income
6. Merna	22	Undergraduate student	Single, previously engaged	Mid- income
7. Shaza	21	Undergraduate communication student	Single	High income
8. Elaf	21	Undergraduate nutrition student	Single	Mid- income
9. Sara	31	Dentist	Married, 3 kids	High income
10. Rema	26	Photographer, visual communication graduate (Dar Alhikma private university)	Single	High income
11. Donia	22	Undergraduate student (popular)	Single	High income
12. Shehana	23	Undergraduate student	Single	Mid-income
13. Maha	22	Undergraduate student (UBT private university)	Single	High income
14. Rotana	18	Undergraduate student	Single	High Income
15. Batool	22	Undergraduate student, part-time advertising job	Married, no kids	Mid- income
16. Marya	23	Undergraduate student	Engaged Orphan	Mid-income
17. Afaf	32	PhD student in Autism in USA	Single, previously married.	Mid-income
18. Arwa	25	Unemployed with BA degree	Single, recently ended her engagement.	Mid-income
19. Mozn	32	Administrative job	Single, engaged 3 times in the past.	High income
20. Hanadi	31	Lecturer, PhD candidate in the field of special education	Single	Mid-income
21. Neyar	19	Undergraduate student	Single	Mid-income

22. Basma	26	Employed in private sector	Single	Mid-income
23. Ruba	32	Graduate biology student	Single	Mid-income
24. Hutaf	30	Doctoral biology student	Single	Mid-income
25. Halah	57	Retired teacher, freelancer trainer, motivational speaker	Legally married, living separately, a mother of 5girls, grandmother of 15	Mid-income

Appendix C. Online Observation Participants (Phase Three)

Initials	Platform Used	Selfie Activates Notes
1. Kholod	Instagram	She is 34 years old. She posted veiled & unveiled selfie depending on the places. She had individual selfies, selfies with girlfriends, London selfie, wedding selfie, restaurant selfie, beach selfie, car selfie, home & workplace selfie.
2. Lamar	Instagram	She is 19 years old. All selfies are taken while being dressed elegantly (with makeup) no casual selfies. Most selfies are alone, few with girlfriends and family members. Most are unveiled selfies in her bedroom, car selfie, mirror selfie, school graduation selfie in ballroom, wedding selfie, beach selfie, selfie with mask, black & white selfie, library campus selfie, <i>Double face selfie</i> , Eid holiday selfie.
3. Ghaida	Instagram	She is 20 years old. Most selfies are with family members or girlfriends. Selfies while travelling (London, Dubai). Also wedding selfie, car selfie, cafe selfie, Disney, graduation selfie). has a combination of casual and dressed up selfie. Most selfies are unveiled (even public places) not practicing veiling (hijab).
4. Nehal	Snapchat	She is 32 years old. The participant has posted only two selfies (college graduation ceremony) so I excluded her from phase four (photo elicitation).
5. Shorog	Snapchat	She is 18 years old. Uses video selfies to inspire & image selfie as visual dairy. She mainly tries to make funny faces with her selfies (double eyes selfie, fat face, messy hair, nose warm selfie). She included (selfie in her book club, <i>Ramadan filter</i> & dress selfie, car selfie, <i>Eid selfie</i> , on campus selfie. A combination of veiled & unveiled selfie depending on public/ private places. Regularly posts useful content about reading and forgiving.
6. Merna	Instagram Snapchat	She is 22 years old. Changes her profile picture on Instagram occasionally. Created her own filter (Congratulation MB 2017) & add to selfie. Instagram selfies are good looking, Snap selfies random in bedroom with dog filters and kids. Selfies included (girlfriends, family members, Ramadan Nights filter, Eiffel tower selfie, Chicago selfie, Disney land selfie, haram selfie, A LOT of private girls' party selfies, car & café selfie, wedding selfie, Turkey selfie, Morocco selfie). Veiled & unveiled selfie (location didn't matter- not practicing veiling). <i>Double face selfie</i> .
7. Shaza	Instagram Snapchat	She is 21 years old. Her selfies are mostly with girlfriends or family members. Selfies increases in occasions (travelling, birthday parties, seasons). Most selfies are unveiled. A lot of Mirror selfies, wedding selfie, girlfriend gathering & birthdays, car selfie, Washington D.C+

		Dubai+ Orlando filters selfies, <i>theme park selfie</i> , Halloween, <i>ballroom bathroom selfie</i> .
8. Elaf	Snapchat	She is 21 years old. Mostly posts image selfie with captions and video selfies to educate snappers about nutrition and making healthy food choices. Her private Snapchat account is only shared with her sisters. All selfies with veil even ones taking in house because her account is public.
9. Sara	Instagram	She is 31 years old. Prefers Instagram as Snapchat is rapid and quick to her. Family oriented selfie (sister, husband, parents, friends) but doesn't include her kids in any of the selfies. (She maintains a professional identity after adding her students).
10. Rema	Snapchat	She is 26 years old. Independent person, selfies on the beach, selfies with girlfriends during Dubai trip, selfies with dog and mustache filter, with brother, car selfie.
11. Donia	Snapchat	She is 22 years old. Selfies in different context: hookah selfie, wedding selfie, dog filter selfie, on campus selfie, <i>selfie in the holy haram</i> , selfie with smurf while broadcasting in her room (700 snappers), <i>Double face selfie</i> . Very casual person who cares about content more than perfecting her look. She uses two Snapchat account using two smart phones.
12. Shehana	Instagram & Snapchat	She is 23 years old. Shehana posts the same selfies on Instagram and Snapchat. She seems very attached to her family, a traveller. Selfies in restaurants with family, <i>wedding selfies</i> , selfies with girlfriends, <i>Halloween party selfie</i> , rabbit-deer-cat- crown flower face filters, selfie with Dubai Cairo location filters, car selfie, veiled & unveiled.
13. Maha	Snapchat	Maha is 22 years old. She is very concerns with appearance and looks, she doesn't post selfies unless she has makeup on. She is a professional makeup artist. Face filters: dog, panda, rabbit, pig, skeleton, deer, <i>crown flower</i> . Communicates positive comments on her selfies. Veiled and unveiled selfie (place). She spends <u>three hours</u> applying makeup before posting.
14. Rotana	Snapchat	Rotana is 18 years old and she only posted one selfie on Snapchat, her Instagram doesn't include selfies so she was excluded from photo-elicitation.
15. Batool	Snapchat & Instagram	Batool is 22, she works in media production like her husband, takes selfies with male colleagues, promotes products with selfies. She posted car selfie, mirror selfie, crown flower selfie, with girlfriends, with husband, on airplane, in historic Jeddah. All her selfies are veiled and taken in public places.
16. Marya	Snapchat+ Instagram	Marya is 23, and she did not accept my follow request on Snapchat. She did accepted my request on Instagram and later unfollowed me. So she was excluded from phase four.

17. Afaf	Snapchat & Instagram	Afaf is 32 years old. She posted a combination of individual selfies and family selfies (brothers, sister, nieces), a lot of car selfies while driving (USA). Always indicate her relation to male included in selfie. Both veiled and unveiled selfie depending on public or private place. Only crown flower filter and location filters (Manhating, Chicago, Los-Angeles, Niagara Falls, Jeddah). Her selfie reflects satisfaction. She sometimes highlights cultural items (Arabia coffee, <i>Ramadan</i> rituals in selfies)
18. Arwa	Snapchat	Arwa is 25 years old who posted veiled selfie in public places in Saudi, unveiled in private places and while traveling (not practicing hijab but she indicate putting vail out of respecting culture). Uses crown flower selfie & bitmoji. Dubai & Chicago filters. Very casual person post selfies once she wakes up. Motivational video selfies. Boat selfie, car selfie with abaya, airplane selfie, <i>Hookah selfie</i> , wedding selfie, dancing at home selfie, fat face filter, mall selfie.
19. Mozn	Snapchat & Instagram	Mozn is 32 years old. She post selfies while looking very elegant and very casual (wedding selfie, selfie with natural mask). Also, workplace selfie, a lot of selfie while dancing, hookah selfie, car selfie, travelling selfie, <i>party selfies</i> . She talks for long times in video Snapchat selfies (she is a storyteller). Very energetic personality. She always talks about products and places she tried and find useful like salon services or lenses.
20. Hanadi	Snapchat & Instagram	Handai is 31 years old. I called her “the selfie queen” because loves posting selfies, her accounts are loaded with selfies. She consistently tries out new face filters and post selfies. Although her accounts are private but all her selfies with hijab (veil) doesn’t prefer posting unveiled images online. She posted car selfie, selfie with male-female colleagues, strawberry selfie, deer filter, pirate filter, mermaids filter, university filter, duplicate face filter.
21. Neyar	Snapchat	Neyar is 19 years old. She posts veiled and unveiled selfies depending on public and private places. Posted selfies with sisters, girlfriends, and alone. Wedding, car selfie, crown flower selfie. Posted casual & dressed up selfie. Her parents don’t use SNS.
22. Basma	Snapchat	She is 26. She posts veiled and unveiled selfies depending on public and private places. All selfies while being dressed up + makeup (desirable self). Posted car selfie, Taif city filter selfie, <i>half face selfie</i> , mirror selfie, crown flower selfie, <i>ballroom bathroom selfie</i> .
23. Ruba	Snapchat	She is 32 years old. She post. a combination of veiled & unveiled selfie (places). Posted selfie while traveling, strawberry face filter, crown flower filter, wedding & car selfie, Eid selfie, with sister, mirror selfie, Taiba filter selfie.

24. Hutaf	Snapchat	Hutaf is 30 years old biology researcher. She posted veiled and unveiled selfies (publicity of place). Posted <i>crown flower</i> filter, rabbit filter, mirror selfie, car selfie, with sisters, selfie with conference poster, air plane selfie, casual selfie at home, restaurant selfie, weekend selfie, selfie at lab, Dublin filter selfie.
25. Halah	Snapchat & Instagram	She is 57 years old, therefore she uses the basic features of the platforms. Doesn't know how apply face filter, her daughter did that to her selfie. the main purpose of posting selfie is to communicate useful messages to those who look up to her. She sends selfies not including meaningful message as private snap. Her Instagram selfies are family oriented (her mother, sons in law, grandchildren, brother, sister, her daughters, extended family member, husband). Bahrain and Borsa (Turkey) location filters with selfie.

Appendix D. Phot-Elicitation Interview Participants (Phase four)

Participant	Number of Selfies	Type of interview
1. Merna	17	Face- to- face
2. Shaza	15	Face- to- face
3. Lamar	14	What's app
4. Ghaida	16	What's app
5. Shorog	21	Phone interview
6. Sara	15	Face- to- face
7. Donia	17	What's app
8. Maha	22	What's app
9. Afaf	26	What's app
10. Arwa	22	Face- to- face
11. Handi	31	What's app
12. Basma	15	Face- to- face
13. Neyar	18	Face- to- face
14. Ruba	22	What's app
15. Hutaf	30	What's app
16. Halah	19	What's app
17. Merna	20	Face- to- face
Total	340 Selfies	

Appendix E: In-depth interview questions

Opening up Questions

- Can you tell me about the first time you communicated your selfie with others on SNS?
- How often do you post selfies on SNS?
- When producing a selfie, what is the experience like?

RQ1: What motivates Saudi women to take and share selfies?

Sub-questions of question one (total of 9 nine- from 1 to 9)

1. What interest you about selfie communication?
2. What are some of the feelings about yourself you try to communicate with the selfie?
3. What stories do your selfies narrate?
4. Does your selfies convey your personality, interests, particular values? Tell me about that?
5. How is the person on your Instagram/ Snapchat profile different from your actual sense of self?
6. Has your relationship with selfies changed and evolve overtime?
7. How do feel when others respond to your selfie?
8. Do you think selfies are a credible way to communicate who you are to others? Why?
9. What do people in your network say about selfies?

RQ2: What modes of self-presentation emerge from selfies posted by Saudi women on Instagram/Snapchat?

Sub-questions of question two (total of 11 items- from 10-20)

10. How your selfie relates to a sense of self-importance or a desire to be a “star” of your life in a bigger context?
11. What is it like to use the selfie to communicate one’s self-image as a self-branding tool?
12. Does posting your selfies have to do with gaining approval?
13. How does other’s comments make you feel about yourself?
14. What does it mean to you when others like your selfie? Does the number of likes on Instagram/ Views on Snapchat have any significance to you?

15. How does your selfies relate to avoiding criticism?
16. Why would you sometimes upload flattering selfies?
17. Have you removed tags including less glamorous selfie? Why?
18. What is your opinion on editing selfies prior to posting? Do you tend to do so? Why? What filters? what editing/enhancing effects?
19. Tell me about when someone made a positive comment on your selfie?
20. Tell me about when someone made a negative comment on your selfie?

RQ3: How do platform affordances inform selfie production?

Sub-questions of research question three (total of 8 items from 21 to 28)

21. How might selfies display multiple stories about a user in varying platforms?
22. Can you share with me your experience about exposing several aspects of your identity (e.g.: social role, professional career, and family role(s))?
23. Which aspects of your personality are most developed through selfies on Instagram (e.g. beauty related, family oriented, hobby related, friendship network, personal growth)?
24. Which kinds of selfies are you most likely to post and why?
25. Tell me about whether your selfies display a full representation of who you are or do they expose just some parts of who you are?
26. Have you thought about posting several kinds of selfies in order to connect to multiple audiences (girlfriends, family members, foreigners, consumers, students, males) can you exemplify?
27. Do selfies display a social aspect of your identity?
28. Does Snapchat selfie differ from Instagram selfie? Can you give examples?

RQ4: To what extent are women veiled or unveiled? Do these factors change for women with multiple accounts or varying platforms?

Sub-questions of question four (total of 7 items) from 29-35

29. How does the appearance and style of selfies relate to the Saudi culture, if at all?
30. Does your veiling practices differ in selfies posted with multiple accounts?

31. Can you share with me your opinion on the meaning conveyed by selfies taking with the following dress codes such veiled, unveiled, coloured headscarf, revelling cloths, make up on face, branded cloth?
32. In your posted selfies, how do you tend to represent yourself in term of appearance? And what does it say about you? Do you have a combination of veiled & unveiled selfie? Can you comment on that?
33. How does setting you Snapchat/Instagram account public or private influence your selfie behaviours?
34. How does your selfie's appearance on Instagram differ when using other social networking platforms like Snapchat, Path, or Twitter?
35. Does your veiling habits differ when posting selfies on Snapchat and Instagram? How?

RQ5: How do cultural factors play a role in presenting oneself through selfie on Instagram and Snapchat (e.g. privacy concerns, religious influence)?

Sub-questions of question five (total of 10 items) from 36 to 45.

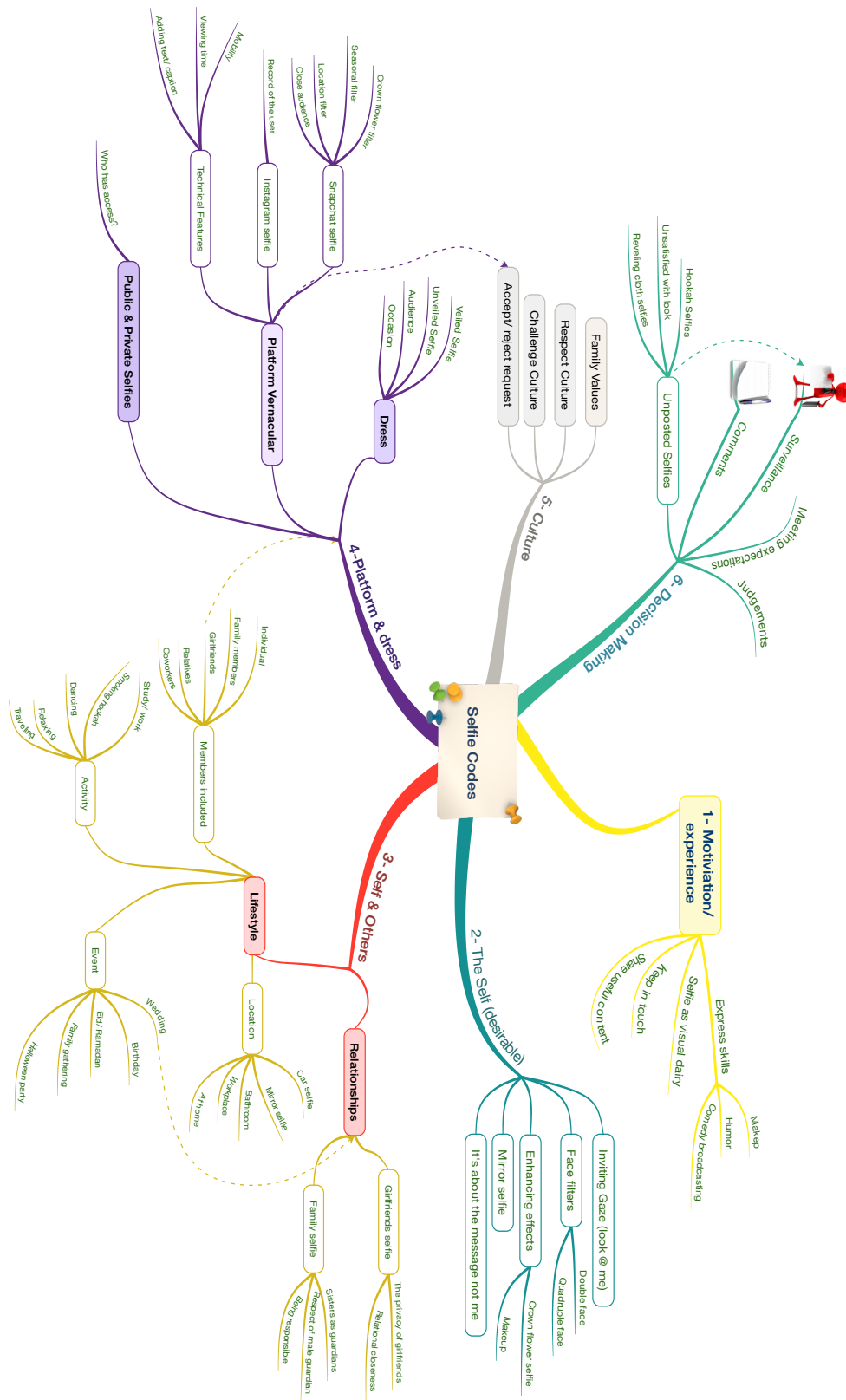
36. Do you become more careful or aware of your selfie posts after accepting the following requests? Which audience?
37. Do you tend to reject follow requests? When and whom?
38. How does the practice of selfie posting relate to the culture of Saudi in your opinion?
39. How does the publicity/privacy of girls' SNS account relates to the cultural norm in Saudi?
40. Share with me how might the cultural norm relate to your selfie behaviours?
41. In your opinion, do Saudi girls tries to challenge the cultural norms when posting selfies?
42. In your opinion, do Saudi girls tries to adhere the cultural norms when posting selfies?
43. What cultural aspects come to your mind when you're about to upload your selfies?
44. Does values such family tradition and your level of religiosity impact your selfie behaviour? How?
45. Do you see a relationship between your level of spirituality and selfie behaviours (make up/veil)?

RQ6: How do Saudi women make decisions about representing themselves in a certain way through selfies (e.g. personal preference, male guardian surveillance, who's following them, living out of Saudi)?

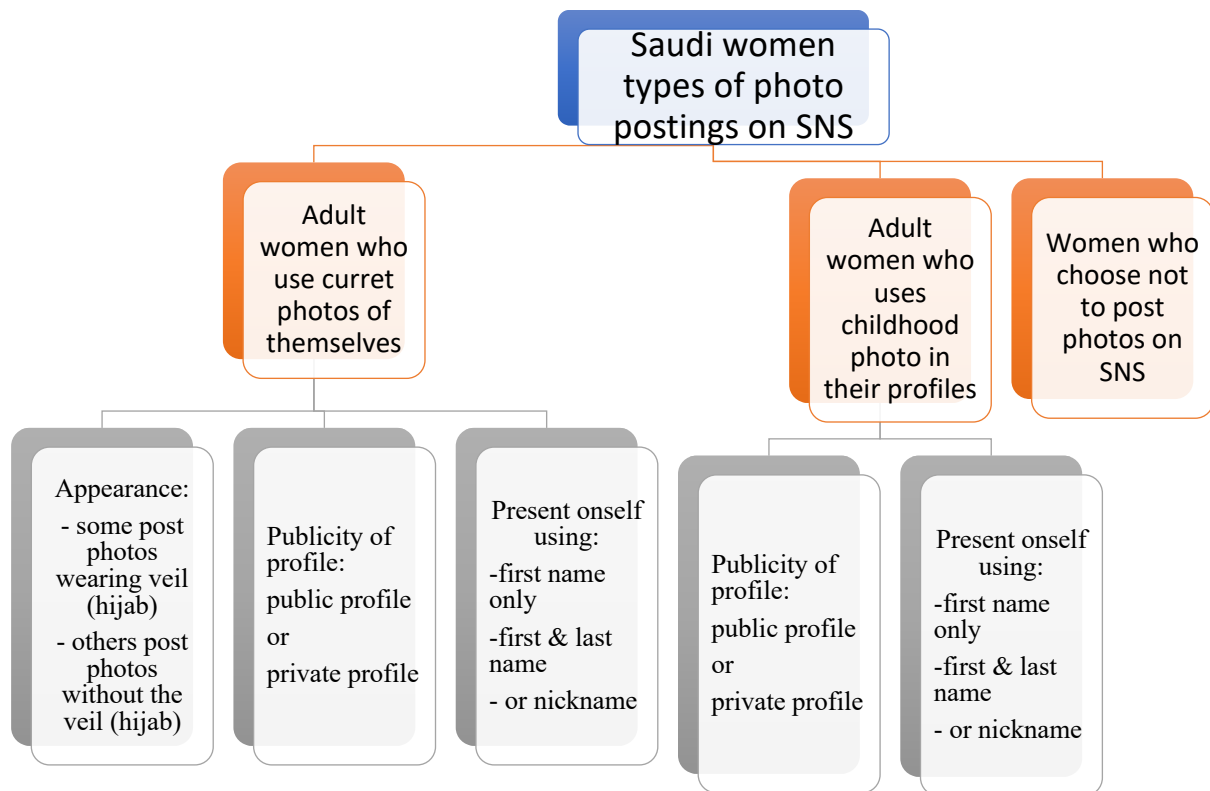
Sub-questions of question six (total of 7) from 46-52.

46. Before uploading your selfies on Instagram, do you think of what people value in you or do they want to perceive you?
47. Does the inclusion/exclusion of certain individuals (parents, family members, relatives, friends) in your network influence your self-expression through selfies? How?
48. What was your process in selecting your current profile picture on Instagram/Snapchat?
49. Have your views/judgments of a person changed after viewing selfies she posts?
50. What do the values you were taught by your parents and society influence your selfie posts? (e.g.: messages about how should a girl appear in public, or displaying photo)?
51. What selfies do you avoid posting and why?
52. Do you have any final thoughts or comments about selfie postings, selfie and our culture, women's online identity?

Appendix F: Conceptualizing and developing selfie codes, categories and themes.



Appendix G: Types of Saudi women photo posting on SNS



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