A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Instagram Posts of Local UAE Social Media Influencers

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ABSTRACT

This research studies selected Instagram posts by Young Emirati social media influencers. The aim is to analyse how visual discourse on Instagram allows the said influencers construct their identity and propagate a reality through visuals and textual data. For analysis, the researcher has chosen a sample of 25 Instagram posts by 10 influencers through multistage purposive sampling. The said posts are analysed under the approach of discourse analysis. The methods used for analysis of the data under analysis are visual content analysis proposed by Bell. P and multimodal discourse analysis as proposed by Machin and Mayr. The findings reveal that there are two major themes; the first theme is of traditional versus global under which the researcher has found that both men and women use clothing styles to construct their identity of traditional or modern. For instance, women use Hijab or shaylas to construct their traditional Arabic identity and similarly men wear traditional Arabic clothes. To construct their identity as modern both the genders wear western clothing. The second theme is promotion of self through travel, in the visual and textual discourse of social media influencers on Instagram. The findings reveal that social media influencers use international destinations to promote themselves as travellers and construct their personalities as fun beings travelling the world exploring new places.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Social media influencer, Modern, traditional, identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to analyse the content on social media platform of Instagram which has become a home to many influencers. The popularity of the platform has surged up since its launch in 2010. In this technology infused world, social media provides people with a platform where they construct their identity by sharing themselves with other people. This research seeks to investigate the relationship between social media influencers and the content they use to create an identity and promote their culture based both on textual as well as visual data. The paper examines the stylistic and discursive characteristics of the linguistic and communicative styles of social media users as employed by young social media influencers. While there is some research on the general effects of social media on users' personal and social identities (Doble, 2018; Elsayed, 2021; Samutachak, 2020; Seibel, 2019), it does not concentrate on the communicative and linguistic tools that shape these identities in the virtual space of social media networks. There is also no focus on specific social media platforms that could provide rich and meaningful data for analysis. Therefore, this study will use Instagram as a selected platform due to its unique combination of visual and textual language (Ferreiro, 2019).

The increasing use of social media platforms, especially among the young population, has raised multiple concerns. For example, researchers have pointed to these platforms' potential negative effects on mental health (Cao & Tian, 2020). Scholars have also raised concerns about the cultural and social effects of these platforms on youth. In particular, social media use has been associated with "Westernization" and dominance of English at the expense of native languages such Arabic. (Hopkyns et al., 2021). According to El-Sayed et al. (2015), Emirati social media users prefer to use English than Arabic on these platforms. Emirati users themselves increasingly utilize English and other western linguistic tools and styles when communicating with each other. Some scholars perceive these processes as a threat to Emirati youth's social and cultural identities (Gjylbegaj & Jararaa, 2018). Despite these

concerns, few studies have been conducted in the context of GCC countries and UAE in particular to probe the implications of social media use for youth and local culture. In this regard, this study is important because it gives a novel perspective on how social media can be used to construct identity.

Over the past few years different social media apps have developed rapidly and they have changed circumstances of identity construction taking it from a traditional level to a global one (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin 2008). This study intends to understand how Emirati social media influencers use Instagram to build their identity and use their culture to create a glocal reality for their followers. Kavakci and Kreaplin (2017) postulate that social media allows people to build a cyber-persona. This research is important because youth nowadays it frequently using social media apps and follow millions of influencers which influence them in many ways to construct their identity. Wielki (2020) postulates that the way social media influencers carry themselves affect their influencers and follow them to make decisions including eating habits, shopping of goods and services, buying gym memberships etc. This study is important in this regard because it the way in which selected Instagram influencers use media to create an identity and affect youngsters construct their reality.

Research Questions

a. How social media influencers use specific content to create their identity?

B. What are the typical visual, linguistic and stylistic features of the discourse selected social media influencers of UAE Instagram influencers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis-MMDA-is the approach which helps the reasercher know about the 'weaver' of 'threads' of meaning in discourse (Kress 2012). Various methods/features of MMDA also help

the researchers understand the diverse nature of layers of meanings through enabling them to decode colors, gestures, images, writing, sound and music. Kress calls texts 'multimodal semiotic entities' because of their multi-dimensional nature and structure. Moreover, Halliday (2001) insists the importance of cohesion in texts and how that coherence can be established by a recourse to the context in which the texts are weaved. Kress (2012) adds that the meaning of the text depends upon the author who is the actual 'weaver' of the ideas. Since MMDA enables the researcher/ reader to dig out that context and decode/ unearth the meaning of the text intended by the author, it becomes a very potent tool of textual analysis. Also, MMDA helps understanding various contributing to the making of meaning as a one unit. In addition to that, according to Kress, multimodal discourse analysis is applicable to both the modes of discourse i.e. speech and writing. Van Leeuwen (2011) pointed out the fact that multimodality had been under development for almost two decades, and the aim of multimodality was to study multimodal units or ensembles of meanings.

It can be said to conclude that MMDA enables the researchers to investigate various 'communicative events' how layers of semiotic modes come together to make a unified text. MMDA advocates the idea that discourse does not only comprise of written text, but can exist through other media or as a mixture of multiple modes like color, layout and typography at different levels. It is actually because of this multi-pronged methodology/ approach- content analysis, conversation analysis and semiotic analysis etcetera- of the MMDA and its capacity to effectively engage with different modes of discourse that it has become so popular in discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001).

Social Media in the Gulf-Arab Context

Conservative media institutions of the Gulf-Arab-countries have been encountering the growing influence of rapidly booming and less formal influencers of social media. (Azaiz, 2017). Denis, Martin, and Wood's research suggests (2017) that 55% of the young population, ranging from

18 to 24 years of age, prefers using Instagram as the primary medium of expression. Preference for using Instagram can be explained in terms of the medium's flexibility and scope for the use of content ranging from videos, photographs, hashtags, filters and also the posting of live content. Also, Instagram launched its feature of Stories in 2016, which although considered a derivation of some other media's features, has added into its popularity. Ahmed (2016) argues that temporariness of the content is actually relieving for the youngsters who take it as giving a sense of genuineness to their content. Since 2017, Instagram has introduced this additional advantage of saving those Stories, still their disappearance from the platform within a certain times adds into their immediacy and authenticity for the people. Although women from Gulf-Arab regions are generally portrayed as oppressed and conservative, overlooking the diversity of their lives, they do not necessarily consider themselves so. Moreover, for last few years, they are also seen as potential agents of sociopolitical change because of investment in their education (Romano, 2017). Also, Social media has progressively played its role in liberating women, improving their participation in social life and drawing attention to hitherto neglected spheres their rights. For example, the drive for women's rights for driving cars in Saudi Arabia (Agarwal, Lim, & Wigan, 2012) or their right to choose their dress- Hijab or otherwise-as postcolonial resistance (Golnaraghi & Dye, 2016). A significant contribution has been made by the growth of visual representation of women- a luxury which is being increasingly afforded by social media.

1.1 Social Media: Overview and Role in Identity Formation

Social media is a place where people not only create their identities they publish material which helps them further this process by publishing their experiences, motives, values and self-attributes. The aim is to create impression of self on other by gaining a recognition which is monitored on a public level (Kesperiuniene, 2019). In this regard, Guida and Wilson (2019) postulate that social media is a platform which is used by people for various intentions and reasons. This study focuses on the role of Instagram in creating the identity of social media

influencers. Glucksman (2017) postulates that social media influencers share their experiences and views and shape the attitudes and behaviors of their followers. They succeed in achieving their sense of identity because they form a relationship with the followers on a personal level by sharing different aspects of their lives. According to Ganda (2014), Instagram is a window into users' daily activities and, more importantly, a space for interpersonal interaction and the "development of the self" (p. 7). Stokes and Price (2017), in turn, added that social media such as Instagram help build identity through "visual branding," which refers to the use of "imagery designed to attract followers and maintain careful curation of an online persona" (p. 159). Given that Instagram is also one of the primary online routes for social interaction (Thomas et al., 2020), it can contribute to the formation of social or collective identity, which refers to the perception of self as part of society as a whole or its specific groups (Brünker et al., 2019). Thus, exploring identity formation and demonstration via Instagram is a pressing need due to the growing popularity of this platform. Campbell (2018) postulates that there is a relationship of reciprocity between Instagram influencers and their followers because where on one hand influencers share their values and goals with their followers and shape their lives there on the other they are also dependent on their followers because they are understood by them more in a way than their real friends and family offline.

Social Media in the UAE: Shaping Influencers' Identity

Social media networks such as Instagram are increasingly popular in the UAE. Statistics show that most of Instagram's 6.67 million Emirati users are young people and that more than half of Instagram influencers in this country are young adults aged 18-34 years (GMI, 2021; Statista, 2021). Hurley (2019) argued that Instagram allows UAE users to construct their identities through visual modes such as style and dress and create a visual culture that is both localised and globalised. The immense popularity of Instagram in this country led to the emergence of influencers or micro-celebrities who create content on various topics, ranging from fashion,

food, fitness, and family to business and education, and have a significant social influence (Midwood, 2021). Their accounts are dominated by glamour, positivity, and achievement, which are the most culturally and politically acceptable forms of online discourse in the UAE (Michaelson, 2021).

A more recent study by Alzara and Ben Moussa (2020) examined a sample of 300 young Emirati users. It demonstrated that social media promote two types of self-representation: defensive (seeking social approval and avoiding social rejection) and acquisitive, involving an active search for social status and influence. Users depend on social media because they give them a sense of being liked, respected and appreciated (Alzara & Ben Moussa, 2020). This study offers useful background information on influencers' identity construction and management, but it does not relate to young adult influencers, so its usefulness is limited.

Hopkyns et al.'s (2020) study on linguistic hybridity among social media users in the UAE showed that Arab users mix English and Arabic languages and discourses in their online communication – a phenomenon also called "translanguaging.". Kennetz and Carroll (2018) reported a similar finding as they argued that multilingualism currently determines online and offline communication in the UAE. Arabizi, which combines Roman numbers and letters to represent the Arabic language, is another significant linguistic phenomenon in the UAE, but its effects on Emirati's influencers' identity are not understood well (Alghamdi & Petraki, 2018).

When it comes to Emirati social media influencers and their online discourse, research is very limited. Most of the data on this population comes from newspaper articles and online sources (Michaelson, 2021). Although these can be valuable for understanding the social context in which influencers' online identities are shaped and their general characteristics, they provide only anecdotal evidence. Moreover, available sources mostly focus on the business and marketing aspect of

social media influencing, which is not related to this paper (Ljepava & Selakovic, 2019; Wasel, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Examining social media platforms from this theoretical perspective allows suggesting that they serve as a tool for social categorization, us-them distinction, and self-identification. Social media websites help young people understand their place in a social hierarchy and create a distinct self-image and online self-expression (Park, 2020). Tajafel et al. (1979) also argued that people tend to engage in social comparison, which social media platforms may promote quite effectively. When applied to this study, this idea may help examine how young Emirati influencers compare themselves to others (both consciously and unconsciously) and how this comparison shapes their identities. In line with this understanding of constructing an identity in a peculiar way, this paper draws on a research methodology rooted in content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. Gül Esra Atalay and Gül Esra Coşkun (2015) developed a study on the use of multimodal CDA in media studies. The researchers were of the aim to discuss the sheer importance and need of multimodal critical discourse analysis in the field of media studies. Multimodal CDA refers to an aligned way of studying language alongside other semiotics such as pictures, diagrams, images etc. Visual media which consists of 14 different communication tools holds the need to be analyze fully and with an in-depth approach/ model. The researchers explained how Multimodal CDA attempts to denaturalize different semiotics and ideologies resulting a better and in depth understanding of the media discourse. The study explained the significant of CDA and Multimodal CDA followed up by seven stages to attempt Multimodal CDA proposed by David Machin and Andrea Mayr's prominent work; How to do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction in which various steps were given in order to conduct a meaningful CDA such as basic lexical analysis of texts, analysis of choice of individuals, quoting verbs, attitudes of speakers, search of metaphorical and rhetoric elements, presupposition and nominalization of

language. Ahmed Qadoury Abed and Ban Assad-Munshy conducted a study on multimodal critical discourse analysis on the front covers of some of the famous Arab women magazines. Tools of analysis found in Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and Machine &Mayr (2012) are used to identify the thematic and semiotic aspects in 30 front covers from Zahrat Al Khaleej and Sayidaty. It shows that these magazines are relatively similar in the number of headlines and the kinds of visual elements, but they are considerably different in headlines' content and themes. The magazines, ideologically, look for creating modality to convince readers and viewers with the covers' stories. Women are presented individually with headlines carrying their names and comments. Visuals, like color, font, shot, distance and others are used relatively different to convey a particular discourse that is completely paradoxical to the social norms, the actual image of Arab women and their problems, needs and aspirations.

This study in this regard, draws on Visual content Analysis by Bell (2001) and Multimodal discourse analysis by Machin and Mayr (2012), and uses several categories to analyze pictures, Iconography connotation, attributes, setting, salience, distance and angles of shots, and modality markers

METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and carries out a Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the content produced by Emirati social media influencers. For the analysis the researcher has chosen a sample of ten profiles of Emirati influencers. For the analysis, this study has used content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. The former will be used to enhance the understanding of the latter through careful supplementation of the themes allowed in content analysis. The discourse analysed focuses on how Emirati social influencers use social media to construct their identity and discursively position themselves in relation to their followers.

To ensure the successful integration of content analysis and multimodal discourse analysis this study has used a multistage purposive sampling.

Therefore, in the first stage of sampling the researcher has chosen a sample of twenty social media influencers and in the second stage chosen five males and five female profiles of the influencers through random sampling. Although, this technique was complicated, it allowed the researcher to achieve qualitative richness of the data and also made room for quantitative representation of the sample. Furthermore, for the analysis the researcher will analyse the data using content analysis and Multimodal discourse analysis as proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012). For categorization in content analysis the researcher has chosen three variables of names, gender, and number of followers of the Emirati Social media followers. In the second stage of analysis the researcher will identify themes for the analysis and carry out multimodal discourse analysis of the content produced by the selected influencers.

As mentioned above, the study has used multistage sampling technique. In stage one, the researcher has purposively collected a sample 20 profiles of local influencers of UAE. The reason to select these influencers was the ever increasing popularity among the locals. Since the chosen participants were locals, they represent UAE's culture. Furthermore, in the second stage of sampling the researcher singled out ten profiles of most followed influencers of UAE. Moreover, the profiles are stratified as file profile of males and five profiles of females.

Influencer	Gender	Follower #/ k	Specialization/field
sumaya_almarzouqi	Female	61000	co-founder of a yoga studio. Focuses on the travel, fashion, and lifestyle content.
_noon.mohd	Female	8,000	aArt director, the Content focused on photography, fashion, and lifestyle.
aisha_kbs	Female	8,000	a photographer. Content dedicated to photography and travel.

sumayyahalsuwaidi	Female	12000	an artist and a curator
asmalshehhii	Female	46000	a traveller
Shmedmhm	Male	140,000	an engineer. Content focused on business and economy.
Houseofahmed	Male	11,500	a graphic designer, photographer and filmmaker. Content focused on art and photography.
Mansoor Alhosani	Male	28000	a photographer, traveller, lifestyle guide, and coffee addict
mohamed al rais	Male	12000	a traveller
ilovemydeskjob	Male	10000	a traveller, adventurer, and a sportsman

For analysis, the researcher collected 30 posts published by 10 selected participants over the course of two months (October and November 2021) that contained both images and accompanying texts. The researcher selected both men and women to enable a meaningful CDA comparison of gender differences in identity presentation. The reason of selecting these posts is to analyse the kind of content social media influencers use to influence people.

The multimodal critical discourse analysis sample was drawn from available discursive pieces online (in this case, Instagram posts). The researcher took screenshots of all the photos and text published in the posts of the selected influencers over October and November 2021. The screenshots were then scanned to identify major ideas and notions present in the posts. Posts that were among the most popular and concerned issues of identity were selected and further analysed in the context of the other posts and literature on UAE and Middle Eastern identity. The researcher focused on the connotations of the posts regarding what constitutes UAE youth identity and the ways its different aspects are negotiated through visual and textual communication. The researcher also looked at the way semiotic choices (such as clothing details or specific

phrases) were employed in conjunction with one another to elicit a certain aspect of the words and images used (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

ANALYSIS

This section combines two methods of visual content analysis as proposed by Bell, P. (2001) and Multimodal Discourse analysis by Machin and Mayr (2012) together to analyse the discourse of selected posts of Instagram. The study approaches the selected Instagram posts under the lens of visual content analysis and has identified four key variables as Gender, Number of followers, Roles, and setting of portrayal. Using the variables and values the researcher has identified that the content produced by social media influencers are composed of five major dimensions including: Western versus Traditional portrayal, Social opportunity and attraction, accommodation and transportation.

Traditional Versus Western

The first theme identified by researcher is the use of western versus Arabic clothes by the social media influencers and how clothes contribute in construction of their identity. Figure 1 to 8 below show how social media influencers propagate their identity in different ways wearing different attires. Researcher has identified two themes of western portrayal versus traditional Arabic portrayal in the images above.

Iconography

Machin and Mayr (2012) contend that iconography deals with how people use discourse to connote or denote different ideas. In the images above we can see two different connotations resulted from denotations.

Figure 1

Figure 2

All the Figures from 1, 2, 3, and 4 show men and women in traditional Arabic attire, whereby men are wearing white Arabic dress and women are wearing long dresses with their heads covered. Although the denotation of these images is fairly straightforward, connotatively the actors in the pictures are trying to promote their identity as Muslims.

All the social media influencers are promoting their traditional dress.
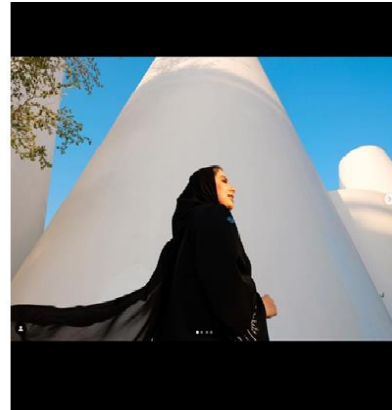

Figure 3

Figure 4

In comparison if we look at Figures 4, 5, 6 and 8 we see men and women wearing western clothes. In figure 5 and 6 both men are wearing shorts which connote that they want to be a part of more global setting denouncing their cultural selves?

Figure 5

Figure 6

Furthermore, figure 6 also promotes the idea of women in a liberal setting whereby she can be part of sports, taking an active part. This image connotes the idea of women empowerment parallel to figure 3 and 4 which promote traditional women. Similarly, figure 8 shows women clad in western dress, wearing high heels having a text of "not guilty" written in her background. This phrase connotatively promotes an idea of free self for women. It is an attempt to stir social action that suggests that women can wear whatever they want and should not feel guilty.

Figure 7

Figure 8

Attributes

Machin and Myar (2013) content that attributes are the ideas and values that depicted objects represent. Clothing, hairstyle, accessories, and many other objects appearing on Instagram may reveal the influencers' lifestyle, culture, beliefs, and religion. In figure 1 to 8 men and women have assigned different attributes to their posts. As discussed above, both genders are using images as discourse to promote a traditional sense of their identity. However, one stark difference can be seen in terms of attributes. In figure 1 and 2 both men are seen wearing traditional Arabic dresses, however, their background suggest that they have a desire to be a part of a global setting, @ahmedmhm's the background in figure 1 reveals a modern office designed like millions of similar offices across the globe. This visual content connotes that he is seeking reconciliation and amalgamation of identity in both local and international spheres. This desire to combine traditional and modern is not found in the women's accounts, given that men tend to stick to traditional clothing more and are less likely to show their globalised identities.

Setting

Machin and Mayr (2012) postulate that settings of visual discourse promote a certain sense of self and connote specific ideas and values.

They are the places in which the photos are set, and these can connote specific ideas and values and create a desired effect on the audience (e.g., urge them to purchase the displayed accessories).

As discussed above, the setting of figure 1 and figure 2 are very modern. The interior of the offices Arabic men are sitting in is very English, chic and modern. This connotes their desire to create a *glocall* setting merging local and global. Furthermore, figure 3 and 4 do not have objects found in the background of traditional Arabic. It shows detachment on their part, it can also show that the focus of women is on themselves instead of other things. In figure 5 and 6 the background of men suggest that they are on a vacation, it constructs an identity of men as having a fun side where they are enjoying water and sunset respectively. On the other hand, figure 7 show women busy in playing sports, which is an attempt to show them in a non-traditional setting. In figure 8, the setting reveals women all alone, enjoying the spot-light free of guilt.

Salience

The way salience is given to different backgrounds and objects in figure 1 to 8 reveals some interesting gender differences. Female influencers both modern and traditional included in the sample show themselves in the everyday context and present lifestyle, travel, and fashion content (e.g., clothes, accessories, places). In contrast, traditional men focus on depicting themselves in professional settings (e.g., offices.), the image of traditional men in figure 1 and 2 establish their identity as serious men, inclined towards winning bread, in contrast to traditional women who are covered from head to toe without any object in their background. The setting of influencers here gives salience to the kind of identity they want to produce. These traditional portrayals are questioned by both men and women in figures 5 to 8 where men are shown to have fun side as well and women connote the growing empowerment and independence of Muslim women who are willing to break social and cultural stereotypes. Thus, analysis of posts from this perspective allows for identifying clear gender differences in occupations, interests, and activities.

Social distance and intimacy

It is determined by how close or far the objects and people in the shots appear (Puente et al., 2015). Visual close-ups achieve greater intimacy with the viewer, allowing followers to perceive the Instagrammers as approachable and relatable. They also satisfy followers' expectations of authenticity and peer-to-peer equality (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). The way women and men carry themselves is very interesting as it reveals gender differences between the two. It shows how they carry themselves and construct their social identity as influencers. In figure 1 and 2 traditional Arabic men are shown facing the audience. They are making direct eye contact with the audiences, trying to exude a sense of connection. In comparison traditional women in figure 3 and 4 are shown looking on left and right. They are not making any contact with the camera; their faces are also not fully revealed. This shows the social distance that women are supposed to observe in Arab. Parallel to this in figure 5 and 6 men are not making any eye contact with the audience, they are busy in their own activities. These posts are an attempt to construct a non-traditional identity of men where they can enjoy and are not compelled to make eye contact. On the other hand, the figure 7 shows three women, where one women is having gaze focused on the rope, one is facing the camera and one is shown climbing the rope with her back facing the camera. This post is an attempt to promote the idea that women no matter what kind of distance they establish should be free and should not be compelled by the society to do its bidding. Figure 8 shows women enjoying their attire and boots, feeling not so guilty. Here, the salience is given to women in relation to her background. The phrase "not so guilty" shows that the women here is not wearing a Hijab, her ankles are showing, half of her arms can also be seen by the audience and this is acceptable because it is her choice and this does not criminalizes her in any way.

Image Angles

Machin and Mayr (2012) contend that angles play a significant role in visual semiotics because they way participants are angled in an image can have a number of effects. In figure 1 and 2, the angle can be seen low to high angle; this angle gives men a very grand stature. They appear strong and powerful. Furthermore, the shot is also medium which makes them connected to the audiences. The meaning potential in figure 1 and 2 suggest agency of men in the world. In comparison if we look at women in figure 3, it is a long shot, and the women are not facing the camera, it shows vulnerability on her part. Similarly, in figure 4 the women in the image is not looking at the camera, she is not attempting to make any relationship with the audience. In figure 5 and 6, camera angles again are low to high, giving men a powerful look. Although gaze is missing in these images, the camera angles assign men with agency. In figure 7, the camera angle is vertical; it shows three women on same level, and attempts to build a relationship of equality between them.

As far as the identity is concerned, women use camera angles to establish vulnerable identities, lacking agency, they do not like to make direct eye contact with the audience. On the other hand, these posts reveal that men have more agency and they like to establish direct relationship with the audience through their gaze.

Modality Markers

A central concept for the present study is what Machin and Mayr (2012) term modality, or how an image is used to simultaneously communicate different types and levels of truth. In more precise terms, they talk of the 'unrealness' (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 201) media images often have. The same unrealness can be seen in the self-representation of Instagram influencers.

Degree of articulation of detail

This degree deals with how simplest line is drawn to the sharpest one in terms of details. In figure 1 and 2 the modality has been lowered by the dressing of men, it shoes natural setting. Here the identity of the influencers has been shown through their specific dressing, posture, style. The men in both these images represent a certain type and construct their identity as true Arabic men. In figure 3 the influencer is wearing bright blue colour while in figure 4 woman is wearing black. In figure 3 the woman enhances the modality of the images by bright colours used in the background, the gaze of the audience is directly focused on the background. In figure 4 the audience pays direct attention to the women who is showing high modality because of black colour she is wearing. Figure 5 shows high modality as the colours used are bright, figure 6 shows low modality, figure 7 shows very high modality and figure 8 also shows high modality. It can be construed that figure 5, 6 and 8 connect directly with the audience because of their bright colours.

As far as the construction of identity is concerned through modality it can be postulated that it is a tool for gender identity construction. For instance, all visual tools used by men aim at making their identity salient. Their face appears more often in the posts, and they feel comfortable talking directly with the audience through videos, which is something female bloggers rarely do.

Promotion of Self through Travelling

The second theme which the researcher has identified is promotion of self through travelling. All social media influencers promote their selves through their travelling experiences. Most of the material posted by the social media influencers revolves around the idea of travelling.

Iconography

As discussed above it deals with denotation and connotation. Here Figure 9 and 9a are posted by aisha_kbs, where she is presenting herself as an object of denotation attempting to form connotation of her identity as a

traveller. Here she has posted a picture of her travel to Expo 2020 Dubai and is associating herself with Iran and Finland through this picture. She also posted another picture where she is interacting with plants. The location she tagged was Lala Land, which is not a real place, but a utopian place. The connotation of this picture is a desire which is in the heart of a woman desiring for something which does not exist.

FIGURE 9   FIGURE 9A   FIGURE 9B

Similarly in Figure 11, and 11a the influencer asmalshehii_ creates a connotation of travelling by adding location of the place where the photo has been captured. The pictures above have been captured with a caption which talks about the idea that people do not regret what has passed in the past rather their experiences create awareness for them. Both the pictures talk about past and how it shapes human beings. Through these captions it can be contended that the social media influencers is using the picture of herself as a traveller to create an idea of a self which is temporally changing.
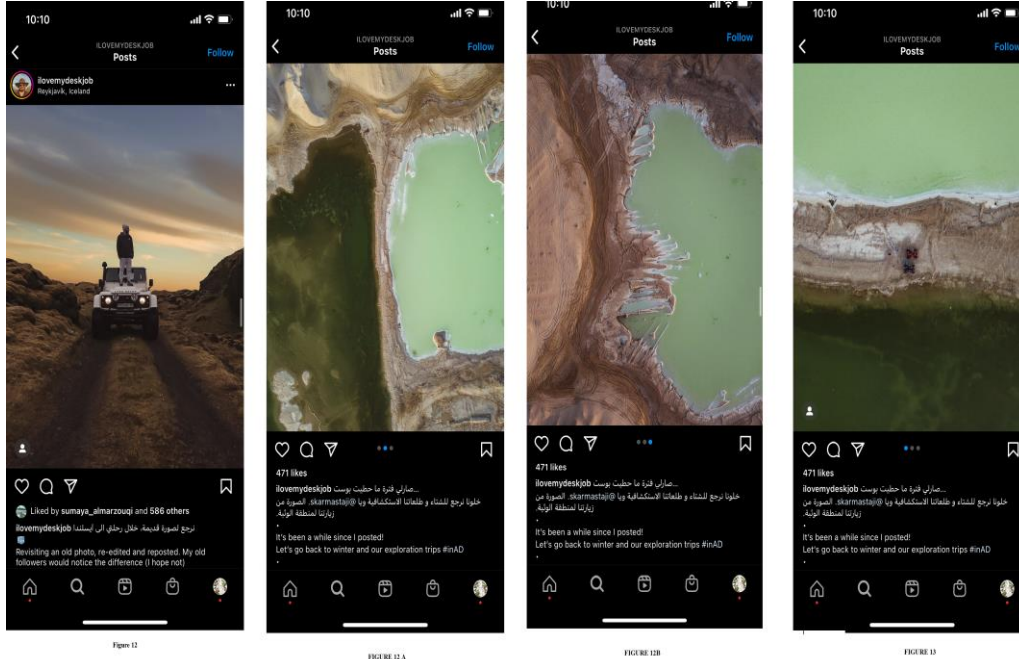
FIGURE 11

Figure 11a

Figure 12 has been captured by ilovemydeskjob, who reposts a photo of himself in Ireland, he is also trying to construct his identity as a traveller, here the caption states that he has posted an old picture. Here the connotation suggests that he is trying to hold on to his identity of a traveller that is why he is using an old picture to reiterate the fact that he is a traveller. Figure 12a, 12b and 12c are captured by the same influencer, but they lack actors. They denote to his wide travelling experiences and connote to his identity as a traveller.

In figure 13, mal7__ uses the option of sharing location to show that he has travelled to Flamingo Island. The picture lacks people and it is an Ariel view of the island. In denotation this picture is simple as it is just a picture of a particular place however; it has a connotation whereby the identity of the social media influencer as a traveller has been constructed. In figures13a, 13b,13c again actors are missing and it is only the places which have been promoted.

FIGURE 13   FIGURE 13A   FIGURE 13B   FIGURE 13C

mohd_alrais, another social media influencer similarly promotes a place of travelling and thereby constructs his identity as a traveller. He promotes a beach, in this picture again actors are missing and there is only one woman seen in the picture who is not aware of the idea that her picture is being taken.

Figure 14

FIGURE 14A

FIGURE14B
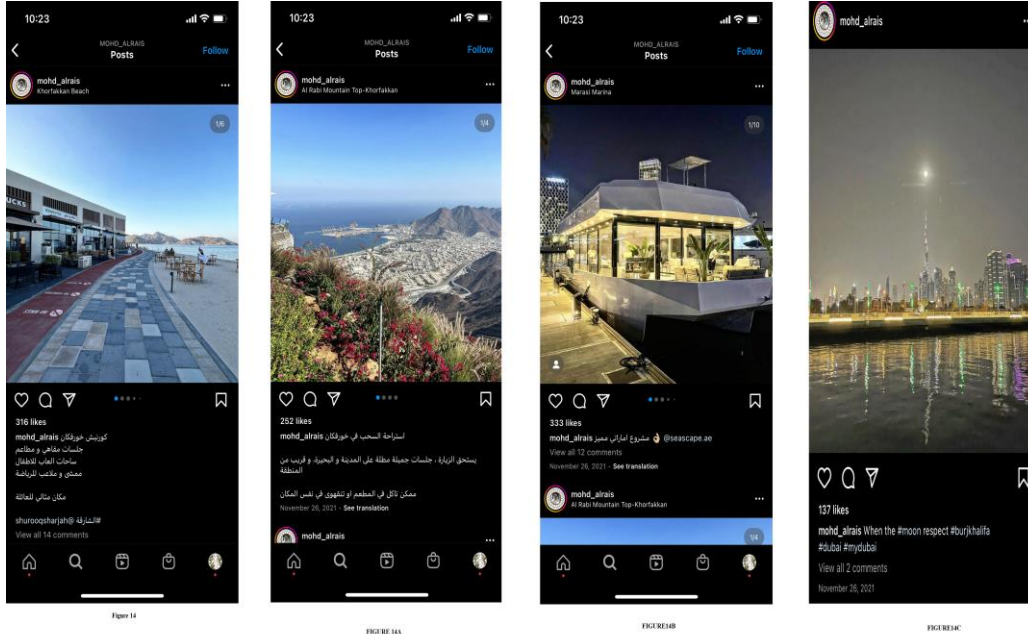
FIGURE14C

Attributes

In terms of attributes, figure 9 and 10 represent women clad in traditional Arabic clothes. In figure 9 there is only one woman while in figure 10 she is accompanied by a man. Here the lifestyle rooted in Arabic culture is promoted through travelling. The central idea is that it does not matter where the actors are travelling their identity of Arabs is fixed and it does not change.

Similarly, figure 11 shows a woman in Maldives, she is an actor too and she is also clad in Arabic clothes. The woman in the said image is wearing a hat and still her head underneath the hat is covered in Hijab. Here the clothing of the woman is evident of her Arabic identity.

In figure 12, a man is travelling to Iceland; here he is not wearing Arabic clothes here he is trying to adapt into a new milieu by accepting the change. Figure 13 and 14 lack social media influencers as actors, here the attributes they attach are not to themselves it is rather to the environment around them.

Settings

Setting of the images is very important as it helps actors achieve certain desired affects. The setting of social media influencers is also very important because they are using different settings to achieve specific goals by influencing people into thinking that travelling is what makes them popular and happy. The setting of Figure 9 and 10 in DubaiExpo2020 where the influencer has posted two pictures in Pavilions of Iran and Finland; here although the setting is spatially fixed, it creates a triangular connection between three places of Iran, Finland and Dubai instigating an affect that it is important to travel to have familiarity with different cultures.

Similarly, figure 11 is set on a beach in Maldives, where a long camera angle shot has been taken to show the connection between social media influencer with her background which enhances her stature and gives her a look of grandeur. It can be seen that the setting has amplified her status and gives her a happy look and it is further accentuated by the caption she has used which states that travelling has awaken a sense of awareness in her, it gives has shown her that the only constant in human lives is continuity.

Figure 12 has shown social media influencer in Iceland, he has used this setting once again as he has mentioned in the caption that he has reposted and reedited this picture. Here, the setting is temporally fixed in the past; however, social media influencer has used technology to change its value in time and used Instagram to create an illusion for the followers that he is in Iceland.

Figure 12 and Figure 13 do not have social media influencers themselves in the frame. Figure 12 shows only setting and lack actors; as mentioned above it is an aerial view of an island only, here the sole focus is given to the setting. Similarly, Figure 13 only has a woman who is shown busy with herself enjoying the scene.

Vertical angles and Salience

Figure 9 and 10 are both medium angle shots, they are used to achieve a relationship of intimacy with the audience as the social media influencer can be seen very closely in both the frames. Here through medium shot, salience is given to the features of the influencer she is shown indulged in the setting in both the Instagram posts. In Figure 9, it can be seen that the social media influencer has her back to the camera, she is accompanied by her spouse, as mentioned above there is an attempt for form a relationship of intimacy with the audience. Figure 12 is a long shot and the social media influencer is not facing the camera, here there is an attempt to invite the audience as viewers to look at the picture without forming any bond with them. Figure 12 does not have any actors and it is an extremely long camera angle shot, it just amplifies the scenery of an Island, similarly Figure 13 is also an extremely long shot which amplifies the scenery and not the actors.

Degree of detail articulation: In figure 10 the degree of articulation gives us a very intimate look of the social media influencer, she is shown from a very close angle, which is revealing her true expression of being involved in the setting around her, in Figure 11, we see the social media influencer from distance, here it is difficult to gauge the truth about her, however, her smile shows she is happy, similarly figure 12 is also captured from a long distance, here the only truth measured is that the person is happy.

Degree of background articulation: Figure 9 reveals details of background which are connected to the identity of the social media influencer as a travelling. Figure 10 also amplifies the background of the picture. Figure 11 show great details about the background of the actor which reveal that she is connected to her surroundings. Similarly, figure 11 shows a man who is very much in connection to the surroundings.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study has focused on the content of social media platform of Instagram which has become a home to many influencers. The content

chosen for analysis was 25 social media posts by different popular influencers of UAE. The findings reveal that social media influencers use Instagram to create their identity in a specific way. To achieve their purpose they use certain visual, linguistic and discourse features using two main themes of a contrast of modern versus traditional and promotion of self through travelling. The findings further reveal that women choose to portray themselves in two different ways of veiled or unveiled. These portrayals contribute to the construction of their identity. For instance figure 3 and figure 4 show women clad in traditional Arabic dress, all veiled from head to toe, here, they are creating an identity of traditional Arabic women, on the other hand figure 7 and 8 show women in western clothes, here they are using Instagram to be part of a more global culture. (Hurley, 2019) studies Instagram posts of women from Gulf countries and they found that Muslim women wear scarves traditionally known as *shyalas* to strengthen their identity as Muslims. Furthermore, they also found that women always propagate a luxurious lifestyle. Both their findings relate to the findings and questions of this study as well because the researcher has found that women use veil to construct their identity of Muslim women and also use their Instagram posts to show that they are living a high end life. (Taher et al., 2021) studied the representation of veiled and unveiled women in Egyptian ads and have contended that women veiled or not use media to realize certain visions in the minds of their audience. They further contended that different body displays have various desirable effects on the audience. In this study, in the posts posted by women it can be seen that there are different ways in which women portray themselves, for instance as discussed above, in figure 3 and 4 we can see full body of women however, they are not facing the camera; in figure 7 and 8 we can see women clad in western dresses, we can also see some revealing body parts in figure 7, which is an attempt to achieve women empowerment. In figure 8, the background of the women is adding to her sense of freedom by giving her a look of empowerment. In contrast the portrayal of men in terms of modern versus western is fairly simple, it lacks diverse body display as well; as in figure 1 and 2 we can see men clad in traditional

Arabic dress however, it is a simple picture where they are shown busy in a professional environment. Figure 5 and 6 show men in western clothes where they are happy and engaged with the audience here their clothes reveal their bodies as well, which shows that they are enjoying their freedom as well. Morey and Yaqin (2011) contend that the way Arab women promote their selves on the social media runs in contradiction to their stereotypical view of women in oppression. Moreover, findings of the theme two reveal that Instagram influencers use social media to promote travelling and their selves as travellers.

All the social media influencers use diverse landscapes to construct their identity of travellers and to show that travelling has won them popularity. It is their constantly travelling beings which creates influencer for them on the social media. All the influencers make use of their attires, background, camera angles and colours to stir some affect in the audience. (Hurley, 2019) postulated that social media influencers use diverse location revealed through an array of strategies of commercialism, disclosure and interaction to promote travelling spaces and their selves for their followers. The findings also relate to this study as social media influencers were found using their travel experiences to promote themselves.

In figure 9 and 10 social media influencer makes use of media to show that she part of Dubai's biggest expo and at the same time that experience has allowed us to feel culture of Iran and Finland. In Figure 11 the social media influencer is visiting Maldives; the need of these Instagrammer to tag their location in their posts is evident on the idea that travel has a very significant effect on their identity and contended women use social media to create and sustain their identities. In figure 12, social media influencer has tagged his location again which adds to his profile as an influencer. Similarly, in figure 13 and 14, there are locations which are tagged. (Taufiqqurrachman, 2020) postulates that social media provides influencers with a space where they negotiate and contest in a process of meaning formation. They use certain destination and materials to construct their images.

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