January 2019

The 'hypertextual' Self: A Mixed Methods Exploration Of Social Media Use For Identity Work Among Muslims In North America

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THE 'HYPERTEXTUAL' SELF: A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR IDENTITY WORK AMONG MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2019

MAJOR: COMMUNICATION

Approved By:

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Advisor   Date

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DEDICATION

To Allah's Beloved, Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), without whom Muslims would have never walked the face of this earth, to the participants of Muslim Social Media Research, whose lived narratives are a testament to human and spiritual resilience, and in loving memory of my maternal grandfather, Djahari Aksam (may Allah have mercy on him) whose lifelong dedication to learning has been one of my earliest inspirations in my own pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

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CHAPTER 1: MUSLIM SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH (MSMR)

Introduction

We live in an ever-changing world that constantly demands adjustments to the way we interact and how we perceive ourselves in relation to others around us. Advances in science and technology, most notably the proliferation of the internet, have changed how we live our lives, how we view ourselves and others, and most importantly, how we communicate with one another. Within the past three decades alone, we have witnessed an era of unparalleled globalization marked by the digital revolution and subsequent rise of social media. As suggested by many scholars, these developments have tremendously affected the way we interact and communicate with one another—a development pronouncedly marked by the rise of so-called *mass self-communication* (Castells, 2007; 2010).

The advent of the internet[1] and communication technologies have largely been facilitated by the emergence of mobile phone technology and its increasing penetration across the globe (Castells, 2010; Reid & Reid, 2010; Schrock, 2015). Digital connectivity and our fixation on social media—defined by Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 49) as *internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content*—within our everyday interactions have become commonplace as mediated communication increasingly becomes a dominant form of communication with substantial implications (Cover, 2016). Currently, about 2 billion people across the world have a Facebook account with over 1250 million of them accessing the platform on a daily basis (Statista, 2018). Meanwhile, Statista (2018) also reports approximately 328 million people are active Twitter users worldwide, 100 million of which are daily users.

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[1] While the internet is often spelled with an uppercase "I", in following Baym and Markham's (2009) lead on shifting away from technological determinism, as well as taking into account contemporary trends in internet research overall, I will use the term with a lowercase "I" throughout this dissertation.

While digital revolution has created notable ruptures as to how we understand the concept of time and space (Castells, 2010), one particular aspect I am most interested in is how we come to understand and enact our sense of selves in relation to others around us through internet-mediated platforms, particularly social media and social network sites (SNSs)—the latter of which is a particular subdomain of social media known for its interactivity (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Every single day, millions of people across the globe express their opinions, beliefs, and immediate emotions through writing, posting, and sharing content with other users on their online social networks (Azucar, Marengo, & Settanni, 2018). Along the years, scholars have gathered evidence suggesting that the content users generate, and share among each other, represents an extension of one's self, reflecting the actual personality of individual users (Back et al., 2010; Seidman, 2013). Hence, there is merit not only in examining the patterns of social media use as a communication outcome, but also in investigating the various individuating factors that may influence the process. The purpose of this dissertation is therefore to further explore some of the *substantial implications* of social media use as Cover (2016) had referred to above but in reference to a particular group of users, namely members of minority, underrepresented, and marginalized populations in America[2], specifically those who identify as Muslim or belonging to the Islamic religion, and in relation to various individual difference variables, such as personality, sociodemographic factors, and cultural (including religious) identifications.

Scholars have long suggested that human behavior is best explained through a trifecta of (1) personality (which concerns basic human needs), (2) social interaction (which operates as a way of fulfilling these basic needs), and (3) culture (which are based on group-oriented rules guiding these interactions) (Hogan & Bond, 2009). While the role of personality and

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[2] America here is used as a geographical shorthand for the entire North American region, which includes Canada.

social interactions are evident, the third element of the trifecta is thought to be influential since mental representations of culture, or *cultural knowledge*, forms one of the building blocks of one's sense of self and self-representation (Halloran & Kashima, 2006). From race, ethnicity, to religion, people have associated and identified as belonging to certain groups that inevitably influences how they respond to a range of circumstances (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010).

Even though there is no clear scholarly consensus on what culture actually means (Halloran & Kashima, 2006), here it is broadly defined as a *complex and diverse system of shared knowledge, practices, and signifiers of a society, providing structure and significance to groups within that society and an individual's experience of his or her social world* (Halloran & Kashima, 2006, p. 138). In other words, culture is the totality of an individual's worldview and ways of living. Hence, in its broadest sense, culture (and one's identification thereof) overlaps greatly with the concept of *social identity* as defined by Tajfel (1972), which will be discussed in the following chapter. As such, when cultural identification is referenced, readers should consider this to include an individual's racial and ethnic affiliation and belonging, as well as religious membership.

Amidst new developments and implications facilitated by the digital revolution and subsequent rise of mass-personal communication (Castell, 2007; 2010); this dissertation examines the way minority and marginalized group members, particularly Muslims in North America, engage with and communicate through social media and SNSs to create, articulate, negotiate, perform, and manage their identities in everyday life—a concept I define as *identity work*. More specifically, however, I will explore how self-concept, sociodemographic factors, and cultural identification (here conceptualized in its broadest sense, such as beliefs and practices, be it religious or ethnoracial, and one's affiliations thereof) intersect with the use of social media. I am interested in examining how these interactions shape how people

subsequently use social media platforms in identity expression and self-presentation. By investigating the role of popular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, in the creation, negotiation, and perpetuation of identity among active social media users who culturally identify as being both belonging to the Islamic religion and living in America, this dissertation focuses on the life stories and everyday communication praxis of "Muslimness", specifically in relation to individual Muslim's use of social media in identity work. Further, these patterns of social media behavior are examined against the backdrop of a peculiar sociopolitical and historical context, on which I will elaborate below.

As a woman of color who also identifies as Muslim and currently residing in America, my research interest is not only important to me personally, but it is also academically and socially relevant. Anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments and discriminatory practices have manifested in various forms across many countries where those who identify as belonging to the Islamic religion exist as a minority population (Cinnirella, 2014; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2017). Specifically, within the American context, the post- September 11, 2001 (i.e., 9/11) era and ensuing *War on Terror*[3] discourse represent shifting sociopolitical milieus where "Muslimness" as an identity has suddenly become a focal point; attracting the scrutiny of the state, the media, and public discourses. GhaneaBassiri (2013) and Kidd (2009), for instance, have argued that while anti-Islam and anti-Muslim sentiments are deeply-rooted in America's history as a nation due to Orientalism (Said, 1978) and nativism (Higham, 2002), these attitudes have largely been latent within national politics and public discourse prior to 9/11. This was demonstrated, among others, in a national poll on attitudes about Islam and Muslims held prior to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, which had found that most

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[3] Following Beydoun (2018) and Shryock, Abraham, and Howell (2011), this study defines *War on Terror* as the domestic and global campaign instigated by President George W. Bush on September 20, 2001 that lasted throughout the Bush administration (2001-2009) and well into the Obama administration, which had kept much of the apparatus in place.

Americans polled at the time (62%) claimed they "haven't heard enough to say" or that they were "not sure" (GhaneaBassiri, 2013, p. 53). Another example, pertaining to the media and press industry, is the evolution of the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook[4]'s entry on 'Islam', which had grown from a meagre *cursory four-line reference in 1977* to a significantly longer entry in the Stylebook's 2002 edition, published a year after the 9/11 terror attacks (Vultee, 2012, p. 458). Further, this was followed by a marked emphasis on the image and representation of Islam as a religion imbued by violence in Evangelical and Conservative discourse during the War on Terror era (Kidd, 2009; Vultee, 2012).

The War on Terror has not only led to a national security policing that links the presumption of terrorism to Muslim identity (Beydoun, 2016), its implications have also vastly impacted the day-to-day reality of ordinary Muslim residents in the United States (U.S.). So much so that amidst the complexity and intersecting nature of identity markers that make up an individual (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status), Muslims in America are almost *exclusively targeted for* and *reduced* to their religious identity. The Muslim label thus becomes the only marker of difference and a totalizing trope against which everything else seems to be measured (Echchaibi, 2018). Contextualizing these developments within the Metro-Detroit area, for example, Shryock, Abraham, and Howell (2011) have described the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and the War on Terror era as the *Terror Decade* for Detroit's Arabs and Muslims. Marked by an overwhelming climate of fear, the Terror Decade has not only seen Arabs and Muslims in the Metro-Detroit area experience heightened prejudice and governmental surveillance as their Arab and/or Muslim identity became synonymous with terrorists and terrorist sympathizers, but it has also witnessed an increase in Arab and Muslim communities' political and economic agency, representational political organizing, and

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[4] As Vultee (2012) mentioned, the AP Stylebook is a normative reference book and publication manual reflecting the *language of news*.

advocacy efforts directed on both local and nationwide levels (Shryock, Abraham, & Howell, 2011).

While prior studies have demonstrated the significant importance of religion for Muslims' overall self-identification, scholars have argued that the War on Terror discourse and the "Othering" of Muslims post-9/11 has made Islam even more visible, facilitating further reinforcement of religious identity within the Muslim population in the U.S. thereby (Iner & Yucel, 2015). In a context where problematic unidimensional and essentializing portrayals of Muslims have become far too common, capturing the complex communicative behavior and strategies of individual members of the population, including the psychosocial intricacy, tensions, and the sustainability of intersecting identities is thus not only necessary but also a timely scholarly endeavor to pursue.

Moreover, while there is no dearth in literature on the overall application of the internet and social media among members of underrepresented and marginalized groups in society, explorations into the lived experience of Muslims' identity expression and self-presentation on social media platforms—on the level of individual members—within the context of North America remains relatively underexplored. Although prior research has looked at Muslims' use of the internet to facilitate both individual and collective agentic responses against dominant narratives and public discourse exclusions (e.g., Eckert & Chadha, 2013), scholarly inquiries investigating behavior on Muslim-identifying users of social media leaves much to be desired. This is even more so as scholarship examining identity processes that takes into account individual difference variables, such as personality correlates of social media use, is rarer still.

Further, exploring identity expression and self-presentation as it relates to internet-mediated platforms is relevant for several reasons. Social media have experienced close to a 90% adoption rate among young adults aged between 18 and 29 years nationwide (Perrin,

2015). According to Perrin (2015), nearly two-thirds of American adults and three-quarters of internet users writ-large reported using at least one social network site. SNSs, such as Facebook and Twitter, allow users to publish *hypertextual links* (i.e. hyperlinks)—a technological capability enabling users to seamlessly move from one site of information to the next (Sotomayor, 1998)—on their personal profile pages while listing preferences, disclosing group memberships, as well as affiliations with interest-based communities (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2013).

Through hyperlink technology, SNSs also enables users to interactively co-create online personas with those on their social network. As scholars such as Haraway (1997) and Walther, Gay, and Hancock (2005) highlighted, the interlinking of information through hyperlinks becomes the basis of *hypertextual culture*, which emphasizes connections, turning hyperlinks into discursive spaces of encounter thereby. Additionally, Rettberg (2014) argued that hypertextual culture leads us to encounter other people or SNS users as *texts*—in other words, other people's self-expression is self-representation that is read and interpreted. Hence, in a way, the advent of Web 2.0 has led to the formation and perpetuation of *hypertextual selves*.

The numbers of users across various social network platforms exceed hundreds of millions, with some cases (i.e., Facebook) reported usership exceeding the number of citizens in the world's largest country (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). Further, SNSs are unequivocally the most popular form of communication among *Millennials*, namely young adults who were born from 1981 to 1999 (Diamant & Gecewicz, 2017). While this dissertation research does not highlight in particular the Millennial cohort, considering how more than one-third (i.e., 35%) of the U.S. Muslim population is currently under 30 years of age (Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017; Mohamed & Smith, 2017), Muslim Millennials may be an important population to take into account within the broader U.S. Muslim population. Moreover, Muslim Millennials are an

important cohort in identity research as they have either witnessed or experienced a significant portion of their lives in the politically-contentious post-9/11 era. Elsewhere, scholars have found young U.S. Muslims to be a unique population where religious social identity is more salient in their identity matrix than others in the population as a result of broader sociopolitical developments (e.g., Sirin & Fine, 2008).

In exploring the implications of social media use in identity work among Muslims in America, seven broad guiding research questions based on prior research and existing scholarship (to be elaborated in subsequent chapters) are presented:

RQ1: How do users' sociodemographic factors influence general social media use (as measured by the Social Media Use Integration Scale, or SMUIS)?

RQ2: How do users' sociodemographic factors influence identity work-related uses (i.e., (a) self-presentation, (b) impression management, (c) positive- and (d) negative disclosure) of social media?

RQ3: How do users' cultural identity (i.e., (a) ethnoracial, (b) religious ingroup, and (c) religiosity) influence *overall* social media use (SMUIS)?

RQ4: How do users' cultural identity (i.e., (a) ethnoracial, (b) religious ingroup, and (c) religiosity influence *identity work-related uses* of social media?

RQ5: How do individual members of North America's Muslim population make sense of their self-concept and praxis of Muslim identity, specifically amidst a sociopolitically contentious environment?

RQ6: How does social media use function in the above process of identity work?

RQ7: To what extent does identity intersectionality translate into social media use among North America's Muslim population?

In addressing the above questions, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) is conducted, and it will first involve the collection of

quantitative data before collecting in-depth qualitative data to help explain and contextualize the quantitative data. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, self-report measures containing (1) sociodemographic questions, such as age, sex, income, and education level, (2) the Big Five personality trait measures using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), (3) cultural (ingroup) identification measures, namely two six-item Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identification Measure (MEIM-R) and a ten-item Religious Commitment Index (RCI-10), as well as (4) a combined measure of social media use, including the ten-item Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS), will be collected anonymously from participants through an online survey administered through Qualtrics, a web-based surveying software. These measures are used to test; among others, the cybernetic Big Five theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2015), Communication Theory of Identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), and an affordances framework (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017) to assess whether (1) sociodemographic background, (2) personality traits, and (3) religious identity and cultural identification relate to social media use in identity expression and self-presentation among the Muslim population in North America. The second, qualitative phase is conducted as a follow-up to the quantitative findings to help provide context and explain the quantitative results. In this exploratory follow-up, the tentative plan is to further explore (1) the content or dimensions of identity and (2) patterns of social media use among Muslims in America. Taken together, Study 1 addresses RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, while RQ5, RQ6, and RQ7 are addressed in Study 2.

In the following chapters, I will lay the theoretical groundwork underlying the conceptualization of my research. Walking through some of the key concepts related to identity within social sciences in general, including psychology, and communication studies in particular, I will focus on DeYoung's (2015) Cybernetic Big Five (CB5T) Theory and Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as foundational sensitizing frameworks. Thereafter, I will elaborate on contemporary treatment of identity within the hypertextual

digitally-mediated era. A discussion on intersectionality and the Muslim identity will follow, followed by an exposition of self-presentation related social media affordances. A presentation of the guiding research questions and hypotheses of interest will be presented as I discuss the methodology of Study 1 and Study 2. As this dissertation is a two-phase explanatory sequential mixed methods design where the first phase is based on survey data and quantitative analysis (i.e., Study 1), while the second phase is qualitatively-driven (i.e., Study 2), it is important for readers to note at this point that preliminary discussions on theories and theoretical concepts primarily serve as sensitizing frameworks to help guide my research.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZING IDENTITY

Definition, Frameworks, Theories

The main objective of this dissertation is to better understand how a particular population within a specific cultural and religious segment of North America uses social media in identity and self-presentation processes amidst a peculiar sociopolitical milieu. This chapter presents the theoretical approaches forming the sensitizing foundation of this study. In particular, I focus on the Cybernetic Big Five perspective (DeYoung, 2015; Van Egeren, 2009) and Communication Theory of Identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993). A discussion of relevant prior studies on identity, identification of current gaps in the literature, as well as a presentation of the research questions addressed in this dissertation research are also included. The chapter will first address identity as a concept across social science more broadly before discussing how identity and personality traits intersect. I will then close the chapter with a discussion on how identity is treated in communication studies, particularly through the lens of CTI.

Identity

Identity; at its very core, is a "way of conceptualizing the self in the context of representations, self-representation, demarcations of identity categories, linkages between self and behavioral attributes, and ways of approaching and understanding "being" in our everyday lives" (Cover, 2016, p. x-xi). Here, individuals actively and passively categorize themselves into categories, or in Cover's (2016) terms, *coordinates* of identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity, social-economic status, sexuality, in addition to other denotations of identity, such as nationality, citizenship, and educational background. While this process of identification varies in degrees and contexts, it is part and parcel of the personal and individual experience of existing or being as the self (Cover, 2016).

As a core construct to understanding human thought and behavior, identity has received much attention from scholars across various social sciences (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Because of

its centrality in the human experience, theorists have articulated many different ways of understanding and explaining identity: Since the concept's debut in the 1950s, identity has progressively emerged over time as a multidisciplinary field of study in and of its own (Gleason, 1983; Wetherell, 2010). Though it is one of the oldest and more persistent concepts in social sciences, identity has also been a notoriously elusive concept from the start, consequently rendering dismissals from some researchers as to its analytic value (Wetherell, 2010). Scholars who persisted in its investigation, however, have found ways to define and operationalize the term based on their disciplinary leanings and scholarly orientations (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

While the concept may be elusive and complex, at its very rudimentary sense and core, identity has come to reflect the meanings of both "sameness" and "difference" (Brah, 1996). It largely relates to the key questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?'—questions that have preoccupied the minds of scholars and lay people for centuries (Brah, 1996; Cover, 2016; Wetherell, 2010). Despite its rather abstract nature, particularly when it comes to scholarly investigations, identity has always held an important role in society in part because it has triggered some of the most fundamental problems underlying human civilization (Syed & McLean, 2015). Whether it be prejudice and discrimination driven by nativism or "an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign connections" (Higham, 2002, p. 4), or disagreements over political attitudes and religious beliefs (e.g., Hammack, 2011), issues of identity have driven much of the conflicts and disagreements witnessed between people and societies. As such, identity as an area of study goes beyond mere academic ruminations and pontifications, it is a concept that has real tangible meanings and implications for people all over the world, spanning geographical boundaries and also temporal realities (Syed & McLean, 2015).

Putting the challenges of conceptualization and operationalization aside, identity scholars have come up with useful heuristics in their research along the years. Wetherell (2010), for example, identifies three broad categories of how identity has been broadly examined throughout the decades: (1) as "personal achievement"; where identity is agentic, self-producing, and ego-centric, (2) as "group membership"; where identity is a collective concept ascribed and avowed by individuals through passionate affiliation, and (3) as an "ethical and political question" where research is geared towards gaining understanding as to how we live and act amidst sociopolitical, cultural, as well as economic structures. Identity as personal achievement has largely been informed by psychology's psychoanalytic perspectives that conceptualizes identity as a developmental achievement of the ego (Frosh, 2010)—a salient aspect of the self and self-concept, functioning as a way of giving meaning to individuals through self-images or self-categorizations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Identity as Personal Achievement

Identity as personal achievement correlates with identity as a concept at its most expansive (Breakwell, 1986). It encompasses all things people may say about themselves, such as their status, their name, their personality, their past life (Klapp, 1969). At this level, identity converges with terms such as characteristic traits, the self-concept, and personality, which are used to connote unique social, psychological, and behavioral characteristics differentiating one individual from another (Breakwell, 1986). In identity research from a personality psychology perspective, scholars such as Erikson (1968), mention how identity becomes particularly salient to an individual in tumultuous contexts, i.e., when particular identity axes become incongruent with one another. When perceived inconsistencies in thought and behavior occur from one life situation to the next, this state of dissonance stirs up a motivation within the individual to resolve it and construct a more coherent sense of self thereby (Erikson, 1968;

McAdams, 2010). From a sociological standpoint, scholars such as Giddens (1991), identify this state of dissonance as instigating a *self-reflexive project*. To some extent, identity as personal achievement also correlates with the concept of personality and personality traits, a discussion to which we will turn to below.

Personality, Traits, and Identity

Before discussing the role of personality and characteristic traits in identity, it is important to clarify some key notions. First, even though many have conflated personality traits with personality, the two are actually separate concepts (DeYoung, 2015; Syed, 2017). According to McAdams and Olson (2010), personality is a multi-level system that goes beyond just traits, which are defined as relatively stable patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviors on which individuals differ (DeYoung, 2015; McCrae & Costa, 1995; Van Egeren, 2009). Researchers often use personality traits as a way of categorizing individuals so as to predict and explain certain behaviors (DeYoung, 2015). Research in personality psychology within the last three decades has demonstrated how individual differences in basic personality traits are relatively stable over time, substantially heritable, and highly predictive of important cognitive, emotional, and behavioral trends aggregated across different situations (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018).

Second, clarification is warranted between personality and identity, which are two distinct but overlapping constructs (Syed, 2017). In order to tease out and better understand the role of both concepts in understanding personality, McAdams (1995, 2001) proposed a three-level analytical model. He argues that personality can be meaningfully understood as three separate but interrelated levels of analysis: traits and dispositions (level 1), personal goals and projects (level 2), and life stories (level 3) (McAdams, 2001). This model was later expanded by McAdams and Pals (2006) into the *new Big Five* to include evolution at level 1 and culture at level 5 (Syed, 2017).

Further expanding on level 1 analysis, traits are typically broken down into two types: broad and narrow traits. Traits are considered *narrow* when they relate to specific tendencies and concrete behaviors (e.g., communication apprehension and self-disclosure), and *broad* when they correspond to more general tendencies and aspects of behavior (e.g., Introversion and Agreeableness) (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018). By the early 1990s, the Big Five had emerged as a unifying framework of personality traits through which individuals are classified based on the broad dimensions of Openness to new experience/intellect, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN) (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990). The Big Five is known for its predictive power in capturing the five most rudimentary aspects of personality, as well as predicting a range of important behavioral implications, such as subjective wellbeing (Anglim & Grant, 2016; Steel, Schmidt, & Schultz, 2008; Sun, Kaufman, & Smillie, 2017), academic and job performance (e.g., Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009), political attitudes (e.g., Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010), romance (e.g., Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005), online behaviors (e.g., Wang, 2013), and even mortality (Bogg & Roberts, 2004). Due to its relative stability and predictive ability, scholars have also taken into account personality traits in various investigations of communication processes, including self-presentation and social media use (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Bogg, 2017; Liu & Campbell, 2017; Pentina & Zhang, 2017; Taber & Whittaker, 2018).

Meanwhile, the second level brings in more developmentally- and socially contingent and contextualized constructs of personality, such as goals and values, motives, stage-specific concerns, and domain specific skills and tendencies or *characteristic adaptations* (McAdams, 2006). Characteristic adaptations refer to what people want (and do not want) in life, how they strive to get what they want (and avoid what they do not want) in particular situations, at particular developmental periods, or with respect to particular social roles. McAdams (2006)

noted that while dispositional traits may demonstrate considerable stability overtime, characteristic adaptations may wax and wane as a function of changing circumstances and contexts. As such, characteristic adaptations fill in many of the details pertaining to the dispositional traits sketch.

In describing and explaining what makes an individual different from another, personality psychologists typically start with reliable and valid data regarding where the person stands on the Big Five and then move on to more contextualized and individually-rich detail found in characteristic adaptations. From a personality theory perspective, these two levels of personality analysis (i.e., the Big Five and Metatraits) largely comprise an individual's personality (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018; Taber & Whittaker, 2018). Further, in an effort to provide a higher-level account of personality and human behavior, such as social media use, personality scholars have begun to incorporate a cybernetic Big Five theoretical approach (Liu & Campbell, 2017; DeYoung, 2015). The cybernetic Big Five theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2015) attempts to provide a comprehensive explanatory model on human personality and behavior based on the premise that humans are complex systems whose behavior is goal-oriented and driven by feedback processes. According to this perspective, the Big Five represents behavioral parameters guiding human behavior, with each factor of OCEAN reflecting cybernetic systems working both independently and together to facilitate the pursuit of goals in relation to an individual's particular life circumstances (DeYoung, 2015; Taber & Whittaker, 2018). The CB5T is thus an approach that combines an examination of both level 1 (i.e., traits and dispositions) and level 2 (i.e., characteristic adaptations) personality, as suggested by McAdams (2001) above.

The Big Five trait perspective, combined with a two-level hierarchical treatment of personality traits as comprising of domains and facets—both of which comprises the CB5T— have been a useful conceptual tool in examining human behavior, including social media use,

as it homes in on the central characteristics of self-regulatory processes underlying goal-directed behavior, known as the approach and avoidance systems (Van Egeren, 2009; DeYoung, 2015). According to Van Egeren (2009), human temperament is largely driven by motivational-emotional dispositions to either approach environmental rewards (i.e., behavioral activation system or BAS) or avoid environmental threats and punishments (i.e., behavioral inhibition system or BIS). These two systems are superordinately governed by two metatraits: (1) plasticity and (2) stability (Bogg, 2017; DeYoung, 2015). While *plasticity* represents Extraversion and Openness to new experience, the two traits responsible for exploration and goal creation pertaining to the possibilities of an individual's environment, *stability* is thought to represent the components of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism, which are responsible for goal maintenance in the face to threat and distraction (DeYoung, 2015).

As can be expected, CB5T allows us to understand how the Big Five personality factors drive different kinds of human behavior. Personality scholars have, for example, consistently linked trait Extraversion to individual differences in sensitivity and reactivity to rewards and activation of approach behavior (Depue & Collins, 1999a; DeYoung, 2015; Van Egeren, 2009). While extraverts are believed to engage the world in a more public and self-revealing way (e.g., talkative, verbal, outgoing, show-off, sociable), introverts were found to be more private and self-concealing (e.g., quiet, reserved, shy, retiring, timid, bashful) (Van Egeren, 2009, p. 98). Further, these differences are particularly noticeable with respect to social scrutiny (Van Egeren, 2009). As such and as previously mentioned, this variance in Extraversion may translate into propensity for certain behaviors such as internet use (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Ross et al., 2009; Ryan & Xenos, 2011) and social media engagement (i.e., membership and activity) (e.g., Bogg, 2017; Hughes et al., 2012; Wang, 2013), as well as online self-presentation (i.e., how people shape attitudes and behaviors of audiences through presentation of self-relevant information) and impression management

(i.e., goal-directed activity of controlling information so as to influence impressions formed by an audience) behaviors (Schlenker, 2003). As Schlenker (1985, 2003) pointed out, both self-presentation and impression management are activities that are influenced by a combination of personality, situational, and audience factors, and reflect the interaction between self and audience within a particular social context.

Still, other scholars believe identity—in process and content—is captured in the way people put their lives together into stories of the individual self, i.e., the stories people construct, internalize, and revise throughout time and situations about their lives to provide them with a sense of meaning, purpose, and unity (McAdams, 1985; 2010). In other words, identity processes may manifest in people's autobiographical reasoning that narrative researchers have categorized as *narrative identity* (McLean & Syed, 2018). One of the leading narrative identity researchers is McAdams (1985, 2010), who claimed that the introspective and sensemaking processes involving past experiences make up what are known as *life stories*. These are stories that we construct to make sense of our lives, which highlights how we reconcile who we imagine we are in the past, in the present, and who we might be within the broader social contexts of the family, the community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ-large (McAdams, 2010). While McAdams' life story protocol has been one of the key frameworks in personality psychology (McAdams, 2006; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992), I choose to use a less-structured approach in my attempt to understand people's identity sensemaking processes as pertaining to social media use, which will be elaborated in my discussion of Study 2.

Identity as Group Membership

The second area of study according to Wetherell's (2010) taxonomy, which looks at identity in collective terms, owes its intellectual pedigree to the psychology discipline as well.

In particular, this line of research is associated with the psychosocial tradition of social psychology through the works of Tajfel and Turner (1979) and their concept of *social identity*. While the agentic approach to identity is aimed at mapping out intrapersonal, cognitive processes involved in identity construction, the psychosocial perspective looks at individual processes with respect to their perception and interpretation of their surrounding socio-cultural milieu—a perspective that also overlaps to some extent with sociology (i.e., symbolic interactionism), as well as anthropology (i.e., culturally-constituted meanings of 'the self') through the works of Mead (1934), Goodenough (1963), and Geertz (1973) (Van Meijl, 2010).

Identity as an Ethical and Political Question

Shaped by the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, the third research path in identity opens the concept up to ethical and political interrogations (Wetherell, 2010). Not surprisingly, this approach has largely found home in sociology. Within this discipline, identity is primarily conceptualized as social roles and how one's social positionality affects one's sense of self (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Additionally, these broad identity trajectories may be situated within the broader philosophical underpinnings of post-positivism, social constructivism (within the epistemology of interpretivism), and critical postmodern research. These various philosophical treatments of identity, in a way, also reflect the evolutionary trajectory of the concept from a tendency to speak of identity in *essentialist* terms—the idea that major facets of our identities are innate, fixed, and emerge from the internal—to a conceptualization based on *constructivist* approaches, which understand identity as being formulated through socio-cultural forces that ever-shift as history unfolds (Cover, 2016).

While the study of a combination of dispositional traits and related goals, values, and motivations may provide us with some understanding as to who an individual is, a more holistic and comprehensive understanding would involve taking into account an individual's own

perspective and understanding of who they are—in line with a constructivist approach to identity. As suggested earlier in the chapter, despite differing scholarly and disciplinary treatments of level 3 personality investigations, McAdams' (2005) life story protocol has been one of the more popular approaches to the subject. Questions pertaining to this third level of personality are typically formulated along the lines of what life means to the individual, or what provides the individual a sense of meaning, coherence, and purpose. Taken together, while the third level of personality can be examined through people's life stories, for the purpose of this dissertation, I seek to expand this notion from a more grounded theory perspective that will allow for any and all sensemaking behavior and narrative accounts, which will take up much of Study 2 (to be further elaborated on in the coming chapters).

As we have seen from the aforementioned discussion, it is evident that there is a plethora in ways which identity and personality are conceptualized and measured as a consequence of philosophical and disciplinary orthodoxy. That said, there are common themes that transcend these various treatments, namely that identity is (a) psychosocial, (b) multifaceted and fluid, and (c) that it is interactional. Furthermore, the modern trajectory of identity is one that is both facilitated and disrupted by ever-shifting identity information made available through traditional and digital media (Cover, 2016). In other words, implicit in our understanding of identity as a concept today is the idea of *co-construction*, which can only occur through communication. Whereas psychological and sociological approaches to identity (and personality) have been indispensable to contemporary understanding of identity processes, communication approaches to identity exclusively addresses the question of *identity expression* or *performance*—a discussion to which we will now turn to.

Identity from a Communication Perspective

The theoretical perspectives to identity expression as conceptualized in communication studies originated in the formative works of Symbolic Interactionism scholars, such as Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959; 1967), the latter of whom had written extensively about communication as *dramaturgical* or a "performance" of identity (Hecht, 2015). Goffman's (1959; 1967) work is considered foundational for identity expression theorists who have borrowed his conceptualization and operationalization of identity. Goffman conceptualizes identity as something that is emergent—one that is constantly and continuously shaped and influenced by and through our interactions with other individuals, as well as the various contexts we find ourselves in (Goffman, 1959). Implied here is the idea of an idiosyncratic psychosocial point of view and the idea of an audience. Identity, then, is idiosyncratic in that each individual engages in self-categorizations situating themselves to either be similar or different vis-à-vis their social surroundings. Following self-categorization, individuals then project or enact these self-concepts as they interact with others through *self-presentation*, where certain behaviors are intentionally tailored to achieve a particular communicative goal (Goffman, 1959; 1967).

"The self" is, therefore, a performed character—a dramatic representation constructed from any activity on the part of the actor that influences others' opinion of that individual. Moreover, in his later work, Goffman (1967) makes the case that people strive to achieve and maintain a well-received performance of "face"—a process commonly known today as impression management. People "maintain" their "face" when they are able to present impressions that are consistent with their own view of themselves and agreed upon by other interactants (Goffman, 1967). Taken together, Goffman's (1959; 1967) dramaturgical and identity as performance perspectives suggest *identities are social*—they are made, displayed, and [re-]shaped through interactions with others (Baym, 2016). This notion that identities are

defined and reified through social interaction is particularly relevant in the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI, Hecht, 1993), that strives to explain identity work.

Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and identity layers. Hecht's (1993) Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) draws on the premise that communication, relationships, and communities are central components in the process of identity construction (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2004; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). Wadsworth, Hecht, and Jung (2008, p. 67) describes identity as being "both a sense of self and communication or enactment of self, resulting in the articulation of four different levels or frames of identity that merge the individual with the society around him/her". Hecht (1993), therefore, envisions identity as being both a cognitive and social process, where understandings of the self are constructed and negotiated through the interplay of four different frames or "layers" of identity—personal, enacted, relational, and communal—in which different perceptions of an individual's identity exist. Since Hecht (1993) had envisioned the four layers of identity as being interpenetrating and inseparable, understandings of identity may shift among and between different layers and contexts. Thus, multiple and dynamic identities may exist in a single person or actor, as distinct conceptualizations within different layers.

In the *personal layer*, identity exists as a sense of self. Here, the individual is the focus of identity in which feelings about oneself and self-cognitions or self-categorizations shape how one identifies (Hecht et al., 2005; Wadsworth et al., 2008). For North America's Muslims, the personal layer may refer to an individual's internal sense of who they are as a member of a community, particularly as it pertains to their religious identity. In the *enacted layer*, this religious identity is expressed through communicative behavior. The self, therefore, exists as a performance, enacted through verbal and nonverbal messages, cues, and behaviors (Hecht et al., 2005; Wadsworth et al., 2008). The performance of Muslim identity may manifest in

various ways and certain mannerisms, such as the way we dress—for example, the wearing of headscarf for Muslim women, or the grooming of facial hair for Muslim men.

In the *relational layer*, identity is co-created through a process of interaction with others in three different processes. First, identities are formed in relation to others' perceptions about the individual. Second, identities are constructed through one's roles and relationships to other people. Third, identities are formed through the very establishment of a relationship as an identifying unit, such as romantic dyads (Hecht et al., 2005; Wadsworth et al., 2008). The relational layer is where an individual's identity is formed with respect to their social roles and relationships. In this layer, we may come to understand our identity through others—such as one's role as a spouse in relation to a romantic partner.

Meanwhile, in the *communal layer*, group membership is the focus of identity, wherein societal ascriptions about identity are based on avowed membership (Hecht et al., 2005; Wadsworth et al., 2008). North America's Muslims may understand various aspects or coordinates of their identity, including religious identity, through their interactions with other Muslims or additional group or collective-level identities, such as ethnicity and race. Manifestations of an individual Muslim's identity as pertains to the communal layer can therefore occur at collective gatherings that take place at the mosque, community centers, or other communal events.

Identity gaps. Even though the four layers are conceived as interpenetrating, Jung and Hecht (2004) argue that the layers do not always coincide. While in most cases, these different aspects of identity are complementary throughout each layer, in other cases the layers present incongruent conceptualizations of identity—a state described as *identity gap* (Jung & Hecht, 2004). While these gaps are considered inevitable, they vary in degrees, types, and implications for social interactions (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Identity inconsistencies or discrepancies have elsewhere been found to cause a state of dissonance during attempts of enacting identities in

social behavior through communication (e.g., Festinger, 1962; Henson & Olson, 2010). Following previous research in psychology vis-à-vis the repercussion of cognitive dissonance, individuals would then be motivated to reduce the state of discomfort by engaging in negotiations of identity and 'selective presentation' (Colaner, Halliwell, & Guignon, 2014). In other words, the state of dissonance may lead to the enactment of various strategies as attempts to negotiate tensions surfacing between the conflicting layers in order to regain a sense of identity coherence (Hecht et al., 2005; Hecht, 1993).

Identity gaps have been studied within various intra- and inter-cultural contexts (Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Hecht et al., 2003; Jung & Hecht, 2008; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). Further, recent scholarship has focused heavily on identity gaps as a way of providing a more holistic and richer understanding of *intersectional identity* or the interpenetrations of race, sex, gender identity, etc. (Crenshaw, 1989; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wagner, Kunkel, & Compton, 2016; Wagner, 2017). While scholars have elsewhere identified up to 11 potential identity gaps surfacing across the four different layers, research has thus far documented evidence of certain gaps to occur more frequently than others, namely the *personal-enacted* and the *personal-relational* (identity gaps) (e.g., Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Nuru, 2014; Wadsworth et al., 2008).

This pattern of findings may demonstrate the relative ease for people to identify personal-enacted gaps, i.e., individuals are quick to identify whenever their outward messages or manifestations are not consistent with the meanings they had envisioned to communicate in interactions (Wadsworth et al., 2008). *The personal-enacted* (identity gap) is characterized by a difference in an individual's self-concept and the way it is expressed through communication (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Similar to Goffman's language, this gap has been described as occurring whenever there is a discrepancy between the "face" individuals present and how they actually view themselves (Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Jung & Hecht, 2008). Personal-enacted identity

gaps may occur whenever individuals suppress certain aspects of identity expression, in other words, the suppression of their authentic selves in order to fit their outward behavior into the parameters in a given situation (Jack, 1991, 1999; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). One example of this within the Muslim context would be the lived experience of queer-identifying Muslims in conservative Muslim circles.

The personal-relational (identity gap), on the other hand, is defined as the discrepancy existing between an individual's self-view and the identity ascribed by others (i.e., an individual's perception of how others view the individual) (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). According to Jung, Hecht, and Wadsworth (2007), others may under- or overestimate an individual due to stereotypes, inaccurate information, or relational issues with the individual. Hence, the personal-relational identity gap becomes not only a potential identity gap but may arguably be one of the more common gaps to occur among North America's Muslims considering the rampant negative stereotyping and misrepresentations in the media and society more generally, particularly under the Trump administration.

Identity gaps in the digital era. The potential for identity gaps to occur across the four layers of identity become even more curious amidst the ubiquity and dominance of social computing technologies as a mode of interaction. This is particularly so when taking into account the issue of *context collapse* that occurs on and across various social media platforms. Context collapse is defined as "the aggregation of distinct audiences or segments of one's social network into a group" and poses challenges in self-presentation and impression management (Ellison & Vitak, 2015, p. 218). An example of this is when a single identity is presented to an audience when a range of different performances may be more appropriate (Baym & boyd, 2012).

Taken together, CTI's identity gaps concept may therefore be relevant to the study of mediated identity expression, particularly among members of underrepresented populations

where individuals may avow multiple coordinates of identities that may be in constant tensions across specific communication frames. CTI provides us with a framework to investigate the actual communicative process involved as individuals engage in identity work. Considering the prevalent use of social media in our day-to-day communication repertoire while taking into account various affordances a social media platform may pose, one might therefore ask: "what role; if any, does social media play in the creation, perpetuation, and management of identity gaps today?"—a discussion to which we will turn to in the following chapter.

Embodied Religion as Identity

As previously highlighted, following recent developments in the conceptualization of identity, individual identities are conceived as multilayered and situational—a product of dialectical processes in which individuals define themselves and are defined by others, and also as groups of individuals operating as a collective (Korte & van Liere, 2017). According to Tajfel (1972, p. 292), *social identity* is "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of his group membership". Social identity therefore plays an important role in our socio-cognitive and emotional lives since it serves as both a reservoir of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and a source of certainty and coherence of one's self-concept. Given the intersectional nature of identity, individuals may therefore draw upon multiple social identities (Wetherell & Edley, 2014). Intersectionality, in this respect, emphasizes "interactions between categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 64).

There are various categories of difference or identity markers in one's life that are social or collective in nature, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and religion (Hjelm, 2013). Social identities based on religious affiliations are, however, particularly unique as they are

inextricably tethered to a religious belief system, i.e., certain collection of values and beliefs are commonly shared by individuals within a religious group due to the socialization of faith and religious teachings (Nguyen, 2017). Religious beliefs are systems of life-regulation shaping societies, acting as systems of communication and shared action (Von Stuckrad, 2003). Religions are therefore powerful discursive regimes that not only govern discourses in religious understandings, but also guide the construction and negotiation of self-presentations, where one is expected to perform the roles related to such social identities (Hjelm, 2013). While religious beliefs may provide a stabilizing effect on both individual and group identities (Mol, 1976), they may also become a source of tension (Hjelm, 2013), thus pushing individuals to create the development of more complex and nuanced identities thereby.

According to Korte and van Liere (2017), religious identities are representations about the self and the social, about origin and destination, belonging and direction, which are shaped by stories, images, things, and rituals. Religion is not only instrumental in identity-formation but is itself an important marker of identity as one's adherence to its practices is often used as criteria for distinguishing between groups and for identifying an individual as belonging to one group rather than another (Korte & van Liere, 2017). Religious social identities are influential by providing identity claims that believers "constantly validate by their social behavior, to the approval of their coreligionists and the hostility or apathy of others" (Herriot & Scott-Jackson, 2002, p. 252).

Within the current sociopolitical climate in the U.S., religious social identities—specifically for Muslims or those who adhere to Islamic beliefs—are particularly contentious. While some North America's Muslims, for instance, use the ritual stands of their bodies as a public statement of their faith such as in their way of dressing and mannerism, others may see their physical statements as a contestation of fundamental values between the secular and the religious, or between the religious of Judeo-Christian backgrounds and those of traditions that

are not Judeo-Christian (Korte & van Liere, 2017). To certain Muslims in North America, particularly those who identify highly with their "Muslimness" (i.e., high identifiers), this state of contention may be perceived as a form of societal devaluation or marginalization, which results in a state of threatened social identity (Breakwell, 1986; Doojse, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Major & O'Brien, 2005).

Since an individual's identification with certain social groups may influence behavior in a variety of contexts and circumstances, one's state of feeling threatened may instigate particular behaviors, such as identity management strategies, including coping mechanisms (Doojse, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Schmalz, Colistra, & Evans, 2015). For example, Schmalz, Colistra, and Evans (2015) have found that people's social media use is associated with the act of coping with a threatened social identity. Similar to the notion of a threatened identity (Breakwell, 1986; Doojse, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995), CTI also suggests that the alleged contention of public avowal of certain markers of collective identity may pose unique paradoxes—or dissonance (i.e., identity gaps)—within an individual member of the Muslim faith on the enactment and communal layers. As such, exploring the ways in which members of the Muslim population in the U.S. and Canada navigate through identity gaps and particularly vis-à-vis the use of social media, thus becomes an interesting area of investigation to pursue.

Identity in Context: The U.S. Muslim Population

History. In order to examine the identity and experiences of North America's Muslim population, it is imperative to briefly review the historic and demographic context of Muslims in the U.S., as well as analyze the various historical trajectories that may have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of Muslim identity in the contemporary sociopolitical milieu. Historically, Muslim immigrants have been a part of the American cultural landscape—their

presence can be traced back to the early European expeditions and the African slave trade (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Subsequent phases of Muslim immigration, however, have distinct characteristics. Researchers have described five different phases or stages of Muslim immigration (Bukhari, Nyang, Ahmad, & Esposito, 2004; Haddad & Lummis, 1987). The first phase is thought to have occurred starting from the late 19th century to early 20th century and consisted mostly of rural and illiterate Arab peasants. The relocation of their families to America had characterized the second and third phases, roughly taking up much of the early 20th century. According to Sirin and Fine (2008), the relatively poor sociodemographic backgrounds of Muslim immigrants comprising the first three phases of immigration and ensuing failure in assimilating into existing American culture and lifestyle had somewhat laid the basis for Americans' perception of Muslims as being anti-American.

In the fourth immigration phase, which had spanned between the late 1940s to early 1960s, America saw an influx of South Asian (i.e., Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) and Arab immigrants who were mainly political refugees and members of the urban literati. The fifth and largest immigration pull thus far had followed the introduction of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which had facilitated the mass immigration of skilled and educated Arab and South Asian individuals into the country—making a significant departure from the historical preferences for Europeans. Further, as far as Muslim identification goes, due to major political upheavals that were religiously based occurring in the Middle East during the fifth Muslim immigration phase, higher religious sentiments and national pride were observed among the immigrants (Leonard, 2003; Sirin & Fine, 2008). While the long history of Muslim presence in the country is well-documented, America's Muslim population has arguably only received significant academic interest following the 9/11 terror attacks (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Research on Muslims as a minority group in the U.S. thus considerably lags behind

that of other ethnoracial groups in America, such as Asian Americans and the Latino-Hispanic community (Eltantawy, 2007).

Demographics. The Muslim population in the U.S. are a highly heterogeneous and immensely diverse population, with differences spanning ethnicity and racial groups, as well as religious denomination (Leonard, 2003). Unlike the distribution of Muslims worldwide, Muslims in the U.S. are particularly unique with no single racial or ethnic group forming the majority of Muslim adults in the country (Leonard, 2003; Mohamed & Smith, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Three predominant ethnic and racial groups comprise U.S. Muslims, namely Arab Americans (including Persian/Iranians) who roughly represent 41%, African Americans who represent roughly 20-30%, and South Asians at approximately 28% of the U.S. Muslim population (Ahmed & Reddy, 2007; Leonard, 2003; Mohamed & Smith, 2017). The remaining population consists of immigrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Southeast Asians (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia), Caucasian/White, as well as Hispanic and Latinx converts at about 8% (Mohamed & Smith, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Approximately three-quarters of Muslims in America are immigrants and their descendants (Mohamed & Smith, 2017; Ross-Sheriff & Tirmizi, 2007).

Identity in Context: The Canada Muslim Population

History. Historically, Muslims have been a part of the Canadian population and have continued to expand as a population in Canada since the 1960s, with considerable influxes from immigration having taken place in the 1990s due to the Gulf War (Abu-Laban & Abu-Laban, 1991; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018)—developments of which have occurred significantly later than U.S. Muslims' immigration patterns as discussed above. Due to sustained immigration patterns in the last several decades facilitated by Canada's point system, immigrants comprise a significantly larger share of the general Canadian adult population (18%), with approximately

91% of Canada's Muslims reported as having been foreign-born (e.g., Hanniman, 2008). Somewhat paralleling the state of research on Muslims in the U.S., there has been an intensification of scholarly investigations of Canada's Muslim immigrant population since the 2000s and this concern is reflected in the composition of the country's key political debates and discussions wherein the issue of Muslim immigrants and their integration into Canadian society has been a consistent fixture (Kazemipur, 2018).

Demographics. According to Statistics Canada's 2014 data, Canada's population of self-identifying individuals who identify Islam as their religion to be approximately 3% of the total Canadian adult population across Canada's 10 provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island. Further, approximately 62% of Canada's Muslim population reside in Ontario's large urban centers; namely Toronto and Montreal, while 0.4% are situated in the Northern Territories (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). Compared to U.S. Muslims, who comprise roughly 1% of the total American adult population, the Canadian Muslim population is slightly larger. However, similar to the U.S. Muslim population, Canada's Muslims are; on average, younger and better educated (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). For example, 60% of the population are estimated to be younger than 35 (compared to 43% of broader Canadian adult population) and 35% of Canada's Muslims reported having a university degree (compared to 20% of the general Canadian population). Ethnoracially, Canada's Muslim population is just as diverse and heterogenous as U.S. Muslims, comprising individuals who have largely immigrated from Northern and Eastern Africa, West Central Asia, the Middle East, as well as South Asia (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018). According to Environics Statistics (2007), 37% of Canada's Muslims comprise of South Asians, 21% of Arab/Middle Eastern descent, 14% of Caribbean heritage, and the remaining 28% of Other ethnicities, such as African, Chinese, Turkish, Bosnian, Afghan, Persian, Indonesian, etc.

CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL MEDIA, AFFORDANCES, AND THE 'HYPERTEXTUAL' SELF

Introduction

As mentioned earlier on, for the purpose of this dissertation research, social media is defined as internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 49). A specific type of social media is social network sites (SNSs), which Ellison and boyd (2013, p. 158) define as a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles consisting of user-generated content and/or system-level data; 2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-supplied content provided by their connections on the site. Through online profiles, SNSs enable people to present a curated self-image to other users, and also allow for the creation and maintenance of online relationships—personal and professional—via various platforms (Schauer, 2015).

The digital revolution ushered through by the advent of the internet, mobile phone technology, and social media (Castells, 2010) has increasingly turned computer-mediated environments into crucial spheres of conduct in our everyday lives (O'Reilly, 2007). A significant portion of our waking moments is now spent in digital environments or involve communication technologies in one way or another. In light of these developments, researchers, too, have increasingly directed their intellectual curiosity and study of identity processes from what was previously exclusively in face-to-face (FtF) settings to one that is progressing predominantly in online spaces and computer-mediated platforms. Scholars have long asserted the popularity of computer-mediated communication (CMC) for identity expression. For example, proponents of the reduced social cues in early text-based CMC perspective, such as Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire (1984), asserted that CMC is an ideal

medium for escaping the restrictions of social categories and identities that bind us to them in unmediated or offline contexts (Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2007). In other words, early CMC research suggested that the technological properties of CMC had inevitably siphoned out social cues that would otherwise enable us to be socially identifiable, hence enabling users to envision alternative selves online that are liberated from the constraints (and in some cases stigma) of certain social categories offline (e.g., Haraway, 1990; Turkle, 1995; Walther 1996).

The freedom to express alternative selves in CMC is part of the understanding that digital media and the internet revolution had disrupted the long-held notion of one body – one self, a phenomena Baym (2016) describes as disembodied identities. Here, certain digital media affordances (e.g., visual anonymity, pseudonymity) facilitate the separation of selves from bodies, thereby expanding possibilities for individuals to not only explore but also represent their selves (Baym, 2016). On the other end of the spectrum of CMC and identity, proponents of CMC as a medium to present the true and authentic self, such as Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002), too consider identity expression through CMC to be especially liberating. For example, a study by Marwick and boyd (2011) on Twitter users revealed that maintaining personal authenticity is just as important a self-presentation goal as is managing audience expectations.

As theory on CMC and identity expanded, scholars identified how certain characteristics of CMC, such as visual anonymity and identifiability (i.e., the ability of users to see others and for other users to see them), might affect users' identity and subsequent behavior. Both Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal communication model and the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) model of Spears and Lea (1992; 1994) suggest that CMC users' reduced access to information about their communication partners leads them to place greater attributional value on the remaining information or cues available through a CMC platform, and that this over-attribution of identity information between partners can produce

varying implications, particularly for relational development (Sassenberg & Jonas, 2007). In addition to relational development, however, SIDE also suggests that reduced social cues leads us to be more aware of our self-concept, particularly coordinates relating to group-level identity, such as social identity (Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2007).

As such, CMC users' reduced access to social cues is thought to increase self-categorization, collective behavior (e.g., normative conformity), and disinhibition, leading to greater emphasis on social or group level facets of one's identity (Sassenberg & Jonas, 2007; Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2007). This push towards one's social identity may also affect social influence online and how users process information, such as promoting disinhibited behavior, namely "flaming" or the hostile and verbally-aggressive expression of strong emotions and feelings intended to express disagreement or as a response to a perceived offense by outgroup members (e.g., Spears & Lea, 1992; 1994; Reicher et al., 1995; Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010; Postmes et al., 1998).

On the other hand, the hyperpersonal model purports that CMC's features lead people to selectively self-present their identities, while at the same time over-idealizing others, creating a feedback loop that accelerates the positive aspects (i.e., intimacy, attraction, liking) of online relational development (Walther, 1996). While selective self-presentation is particularly relevant in the context of relationship formation and maintenance online, we can also argue its relevance within the context of CMC users' social identity performance. In other words, these processes are similarly relevant within the context of people's enactment of identity on both the relational and communal layers as Hecht (1993) posited through CTI.

Scholarly fascination with identity has evolved from one that was previously centered on the experiences of offline-online disembodiment (Baym, 2016; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2007; Turkle, 1995), and CMC's influence on self-presentation and impression formation processes, to a focus on how our day-to-day use of the internet may

affect our sense and performance of identity—phenomena facilitated by increasing penetration and usage of mobile internet technologies, such as smartphones (Page, 2012; Verschueren, 2006). This move, which could also be interpreted as a shift of focus toward a more user-centered approach to CMC research (vis-à-vis medium or platform-based investigations, e.g., Ellison & Vitak, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012) has also led to an increase in investigations interpreting the pragmatic and social functions of mediated communication in personal, relational, and group-level identity work (Page, 2012). Harking back to the works of early CMC research, such as Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons' (2002) on the notion of the true- and authentic-self online, internet-mediated identity is now considered as an extension of offline identity performance, thanks to increasing media richness within and across platforms.

Within CMC research, the study of identity expression through mediated technologies (e.g., Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002, Cunningham, 2013; Donath, 1999; Hogan, 2010; Kuznekoff, 2013; Miller, 1995) has heavily relied on Goffman's (1959; 1967) dramaturgical and identity as performance approach (Leary, 1996; Mead, 1934; McEwan, 2015; Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). This particularly manifests in how virtual identity work is theorized as mediated *self-presentation*, or the expression of self-relevant information to other people (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Schlenker, 1980; 2003), and associated with the act of *impression management*, or the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people (Leary, 1996; Schlenker, 1980; 2003). Managing impressions, or identities, becomes a complex cycle where aspects of the self are selected, presented, and adjusted to meet the gaze of an audience (Cunningham, 2013; Papacharissi, 2013). Within the context of identity work, self-presentation is peculiar as it brings together a series of features incorporating an individual's self-concept, personality, social roles, as well as beliefs about the audience's preferences (Ong, 1975; Schlenker, 2003).

While Goffman's (1959, 1967) original conceptualization of the audience was in FtF settings where the audience is unequivocally defined and determined, the advent of social media has arguably ruptured this very notion. The audience in a social media environment is not only unspecified, it is also exponentially borderless—a phenomenon that scholars have elsewhere defined as the *imagined audience* (boyd, 2008; Litt, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011; McEwan, 2015; Page, 2012). According to Litt (2012), the imagined audience refers to an individual's mental conceptualization of the people they are addressing through a communicative act.

Since mediated platforms differ in cue availability and are typically limited (Walther, 1996), people have had to resort to whatever remaining cues that the audience may "give off" as they engage in acts of self-presentation and impression management (Goffman, 1959; Litt, 2012; Ong, 1975; Schlenker, 2003). In actuality, then, the imagined audience is invoked whenever users engage in performative acts through social media (Litt, 2012). This is documented, for example, in a qualitative study of people's use of microblogging platform Twitter (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Marwick and boyd (2011) found that while users may not precisely know who their audience is (i.e., "audience addressed"), they are relatively discerning and do have a mental picture of who they are writing to (i.e., "audience invoked") conceptualizing them in diverse and varied ways. In this way, people's conceptualization of their imagined audience may shape the content they communicate, which may have interesting effects on how they enact their identity online, particularly vis-à-vis the various layers of identity prescribed by CTI.

The imagined audience is thus a curious concept when taking into account CTI's perspective of the four layers or frames of identity enactment and the phenomena of context collapse germane to social media platforms. While the four layers of identity are conceptualized as being interpenetrating and inseparable, Hecht (1993) suggests that the

understandings of identity may shift among and between these various layers and contexts. The possibility of multiple and dynamic identities existing within an individual is thus further complicated on social media platforms. One may pose the question of not only whether identity gaps exist, but also how users navigate through the challenges of identity management amidst a virtual environment with no clear delineation as to who exactly is in the audience. In order for us to get a better understanding of how these processes work, we need to incorporate a social media affordances framework, which will be discussed in the following section.

Social Media Affordances and Identity Performance

As discussed earlier in this chapter, CMC has long been asserted as a popular contextual conduit for identity expression and this is partly due to CMC's technological properties and users' perception thereof. In the study of social media, for example, scholars have turned to an *affordance*-based approach to describe and explain the role social media technologies has on day-to-day identity expression, including self-presentation and impression management behavior (Ellison & Vitak, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Based on an ecology psychological perspective of affordances introduced by Gibson (1979; 1986), the term "affordance" has been applied to social media in reference to *action capabilities available in an environment* (Treem & Leonardi, 2012); in other words, affordances represent the particular ways actors perceive and use objects, including technology. Faraj and Azad (2012) further defined affordances as *the mutuality of actor intentions and technology capabilities that provide the potential for a particular action.* While an affordances perspective does not fulfill the qualifications of a theory (Craig, 2013; Sutton & Staw, 1995), it is considered a very useful process concept that allows researchers to systematically discuss and compare communication phenomena across social media platforms (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017; Evans et al., 2017).

An affordance-based framework is particularly appropriate in examining identity work across multiple social media sites, as it allows us to take into account not only the situational

factors (i.e., technological properties, Schlenker, 2003) broadly influencing self-presentation and impression management processes, but most importantly, the individual users' personality variables, as well as their online experience, underlying the way they perceive action capabilities of various technological platforms and in turn adopt them. Since technological platforms differ in their attributes and users vary widely in their perceptions of channel affordances, particularly in new media environments, social media use carries distinct social implications (Fox & McEwan, 2017). One of such implications pertains to identity performance.

Scholars have noted various affordances of social media that are relevant to identity processes. DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock (2017), for instance, have developed a useful taxonomy of social media affordances pertaining to self-presentation. These authors began by dividing perceived social media affordances into three broad categories based on the unique challenges each poses to conventional understanding of *offline* self-presentation, and based on these categories, noted how social media platforms challenge the way 1) the individual self is being presented (i.e., The Self), 2) the role other actors hold in an individual's self-presentations (i.e., Other Actors), and 3) the way the audience is perceived within each platform (i.e., The Audience) (DeVito, et al., 2017).

In earlier works, social media's communicative affordances of *visibility*, referring to whether a piece of information can be located and the relative ease of locating this information, and *persistence*, which refers to durability of information, pose a particularly unique context for mediated identity performance (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The affordances of visibility and persistence combined render *identity as being always online* (Cover, 2016). Traces of our identity performance can be found scattered across the internet, such as SNS profiles, blogs, microblogging sites, and other platforms. Since SNSs function as a virtual collection of shareable user profiles, these elements of our identity remain accessible in relatively the same

form as they were originally devised, even after actors have "finished" enacting their "performance" (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hughes et al., 2012) by moving away from the platform or logging off. Identity and its online rendition are therefore not something we can necessarily "turn off" or detach from our everyday practices of existing (Cover, 2016).

Interestingly, while the performance of identity in FtF context is a necessary aspect of social participation and belonging, this performance translates into our behavior online as well through the ways we articulate ourselves that ranges from the creation and maintenance of profiles on SNSs, the act of blogging and discursively commenting on virtual forums, to the editing and distributions of *selfies* or self-images (Fullwood & Attrill-Smith, 2018). This is arguably a notable evolution from early CMC research of the 1990s and 2000s as depicted in the observations of Turkle (1995), as well as Walther and Parks (2002), which conceptualizes online identity as one which can be disembodied—something we enact, perform, engage with, or represent differently from our offline performance. Nevertheless, more recent studies (e.g., DeVito, et al., 2017; Fox & McEwan, 2017) provide a more nuanced but conceptually enriching framework in studying social media affordances for self-presentation.

Affordances for Identity Expression and Performance

To clearly specify those affordances that may affect the presentation and enactment of "*Muslimness*" online, I review and define three categories of affordances offered by DeVito et al. (2017). The first category of affordances, called "The Self," contains three aspects related to the creation and persistence of self-relevant information, namely *presentation flexibility*, *content persistence*, and *identity persistence*. A second category of affordances related to "Other Actors," is comprised of *content association* and *feedback directness*. The third relevant category of "Audience-Related" affordances pertains to *audience transparency* and *visibility control.* I describe each one briefly below.

Affordances of "The Self"

Presentation flexibility. This refers to *the extent to which a platform affords the ability to present oneself using a variety of content formats and styles* (DeVito, et al., 2017, p. 3). Examples of this include various features embedded in social media profiles, such as structured profile fields for demographics and taste preferences, photo-uploading and editing features, and textual content.

Content persistence. This pertains to *the extent to which a platform affords the continued availability of content over time* (DeVito, et al., 2017, p. 3), such as traces of self-relevant information on social media profiles and update feeds, which varies according to the platform. This affordance is also tied to that of data permanence and *ephemerality* or *the temporality of social or self-relevant information* (boyd, 2011; Culnan & Markus, 1987; DeVito, et al., 2017). In effect, this is associated with the ability for users to view or search for previously-shared social information to organize, document, remember or simply scrutinize identity-relevant experiences from the past (Ozkul & Humphreys, 2015).

Identity persistence. Directly related to the above, this affordance refers to *the extent to which a platform affords the identification of content with an individual persona over time* (DeVito, et al., 2017, p. 3). As explained by DeVito et al. (2017), this pertains to either the stability of an online identity over time or the ability to link an online identity with a known individual. According to self-presentation scholars, identity persistence may restrict the ability of an individual to perform an identity online (e.g., Tufekci, 2008).

Affordances of "Other Actors"

Content association. This affordance allows other actors to link a particular social information or self-relevant content with an individual's persona. A particular feature that allows this is *tagging* or *mentioning*, which associates a named person with a particular content such as a comment or photograph (Birnholtz, Burke, & Steele, 2017; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Lang & Barton, 2015). According to Birnholtz, Burke, and Steele (2017), tagging is

particularly important in online self-presentation as it allows others to contribute content to a user's profile—expanding thereby the role of other users in the co-creation of a user's identity performance.

Feedback directness. In a way, this relates to content interactivity or *the extent to which a platform allows direct responses to featured content* from other platform users (DeVito et al., 2017, p. 4). This relates to the various platform-specific features, such as (one-to-many) replies and comments, the "thumbs-up" and other emotive responses on Facebook, or "@" replies and the "favorite" button on Twitter. In self-presentation terms, feedback directness is related to the vetting or corroboration of content, a process that functions according to information warranting theory and principles (Walther & Parks, 2002; DeAndrea, 2014). The implications of this may include increasing the credibility or trustworthiness of user-generated content (e.g., Litt et al., 2014; Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008), as well as providing users with an indication of a disconnect of or inconsistency with the impression they seek to project (e.g., Litt, 2012; McLaughlin & Vitak, 2012).

Audience-Related Affordances

Audience transparency. Related to a previous discussion on the role of the imagined audience and audience-related cues, this affordance refers to the extent to which a social network platform enables user awareness of the specificity of those in the audience (DeVito et al., 2017). As indicated by Bazarova and Choi (2014), as well as Vitak (2012), audience transparency is directly tied to the particularity of self-presentation strategies as differential conceptualizations of one's audience may influence the specific content that one self-presents regarding their own identity.

Visibility control. Similarly related to the above affordance, visibility control pertains to the flexibility a platform affords users as to controlling who sees what and when, which may influence their self-presentation content and strategies (Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Vitak, 2012).

Taken together, using an affordances-based framework, the aforementioned discussion suggests how social media platforms, such as social network sites, pose an entirely new set of challenges to self-presentation and impression management processes that broadly make up identity performance (DeVito et al., 2017; Fox & McEwan, 2017). As DeVito et al.'s (2017) taxonomy indicates, there is a clear set of social media affordances pertaining to self-presentation that users may or may not be aware of in their day-to-day engagement of the platforms. Since an affordance-based framework helps explain the varying online self-presentation strategies users may opt for, any examination of online identity performance would therefore need to take into account these affordances and users' awareness of them as well.

Social Media Affordances, the Big Five, Motivations, and Sociodemographic Factors

The utility of an affordances-based framework is similarly evident when considering how self-presentation is influenced by personality, situational-, as well as audience-related factors (Schlenker, 1985; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; Schlenker, 2003). As suggested by DeVito et al. (2017), affordances rely on user perceptions and awareness, which in turn may be influenced by individual difference factors such as personality traits, user experience, goals and motivations. There is a small but growing body of literature suggesting the influence of personality traits and online behavior (e.g., Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Wang, 2013). To this effect, previous studies have established three personality traits—which also correspond with the two metatraits of Plasticity and Stability—central to social media use: Extraversion, Neuroticism or Emotional Stability, and Openness to new experiences, with contemporary research demonstrating those who are higher in each of these traits exhibiting greater SNS use (Amichai-Hamburger, 2002; Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Ross et al., 2009; Zywica & Danowski, 2008).

These patterns, which appear to reflect a reversal in correlation between personality traits and the types of internet use studied in earlier research, are thought to mirror certain shifts in platform attributes and affordances, such as greater restrictions on anonymity (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuniga, 2010). Additionally, users' motivations and goals of social media use increasingly reflect a pattern of interaction wherein users primarily engage people they already know as opposed to complete strangers. Lenhart (2009), for example, found that nearly 90% of SNS users engage the platform to keep in touch with those on their existing social networks. As such, contrary to earlier findings that had established introverts as frequent users of the internet, contemporary research provides evidence that people who are more extraverted are more likely to use social media and they do so more frequently (e.g., Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuniga, 2010).

Other scholars, such as Gangadharbatla (2008) and Leary et al. (2006), found some associations between lower-order narrow personality trait facets (e.g., Need for Cognition and Sociability) and favorable attitudes toward social media and SNS engagement. Hughes et al. (2012), for example, found that personality traits were not only linked to certain motivational uses of social media, such as social and informational, they also found some associations between traits and preferences for specific platform use, such as Facebook or Twitter. Here, those who rate themselves higher in Sociability (i.e., a narrow personality facet corresponding to propensity to enjoy conversation, social interaction, and being the center of attention; Lee & Ashton, 2004), Extraversion, and Neuroticism were found to prefer Facebook over Twitter. Twitter, on the other hand, attracts those who rated themselves higher in Need for Cognition, which is another narrow personality facet corresponding with an individual's propensity to seek out cognitive stimulation (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Hughes et al., 2012; Verplanken, 1993). Further, the use of Twitter to socialize significantly corresponds with

Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Sociability, while only Sociability and Neuroticism were found to significantly correlate with the use of Facebook to socialize (Hughes et al., 2012).

In addition to personality traits as being a factor in social media use, people's needs, goals, and desires, have similarly been associated with preferences for certain social media platforms (e.g. Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), as well as Seidman (2013), for example, suggested that Facebook use is motivated by the dual needs of belonging (i.e., communicating with and learning about others) and need to self-present (i.e., posting photographs, updating profile information, and wall content; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008). Further, those who rated higher in Extraversion and Agreeableness were likely to engage in self-presentation of their *authentic* or *actual* self (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, Seidman (2013) also found Neuroticism to positively correlate with general self-disclosure, emotional disclosure, and self-presentation of actual, ideal, as well as hidden self-aspects, which was consistent with Amichai-Hamburger et al.'s (2002) study.

Due to people's needs and motivations being a factor in their use and engagement of social media as demonstrated above, much of current internet and social media research is guided by uses-and-gratifications approach as a way of identifying and interpreting usage behavior (UGT; Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Papacharissi, 2008). Despite its status as being both one of the most-often used and most-often criticized theoretical frameworks, UGT's appeal lies in how it takes into consideration people's psychosocial individual differences, motivations, and understanding of media use (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). The theory is premised on five major assumptions, including the assumption that people are active and goal-oriented consumers of media and technology; that media and technology use fulfills certain gratification of needs; and that people are fully aware of their interests, motivations, and expectations of media and technology use (Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Referring back to the previous discussion on personality theory, UGT

therefore corresponds with level 1 and level 2 personality analyses as proposed by McAdams (2001), as well as McAdams and Pals (2006). As such, UGT can be seen as a theoretical framework that help expounds on the behavioral implications of people's characteristic adaptations (McAdams, 2006), particularly when media and technology use is involved.

More recent studies have further demonstrated the influence of sociodemographic factors affecting personality correlates and social media use (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuniga, 2010; Bogg, 2017). Correa, Hinsley, and de Zuniga (2010), for example, have found age and gender to interact with personality such that Extraversion is the primary personality predictor of social media use among young adult cohort, while Extraversion and Openness to experience were both positively related to frequency of social media use among women but not men. Further, in a more recent investigation of a representative sample of U.S. adults, Bogg (2017) found Extraversion, education level, and age to be independent predictors of social media engagement. Taking into account the growing literature investigating the interactions between personality traits, sociodemographic factors, and social media use, this dissertation similarly examines participants' personality variables, sociodemographic background, and social media experience, in addition to religious and cultural identification, further elaboration of which will be provided in the next chapter.

Muslim Identity, Intersectionality, and the 'Hypertextual' Self

Despite the ubiquity of social technologies, empirical research on the lived experience of North America's Muslims and their overall engagement with digital media, particularly within the context of identity work, has been surprisingly sparse. Rather than exploring the use of social media, particularly social network sites, on the micro- or individual level of the U.S. (and Canada) Muslim population which is arguably necessary, much of existing literature has instead focused on the collective experience of Muslims as a group, mostly examining the role of social media in mobilizing local and global public dissent and civic actions in Muslim-

majority countries, i.e., the Arab Spring (Howard, 2011; Herrera & Sakr, 2013; Salvatore, 2013). Other studies looking at representations of Muslim identities tend to focus on broader contexts of the Muslim American experience that is not necessarily limited to social media engagement (e.g., Abraham, Howell, & Shyrock, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007). Those studies that have been narrower in their foci still examine group-level identities, such as the Black Muslim experience and women's Muslim fashion industry (e.g., Abdul Khabeer, 2016; Kavakci & Kraeplin, 2017), or the experiences of Muslim diaspora communities in other predominantly non-Muslim societies (e.g., Eckert & Chadha, 2013; Johns, 2014; Midden & Ponzanesi, 2013).

While existing research on Muslim identity has helped illuminate the existence of the Muslim experience, much of these studies have by and large failed to move away from essentialist notions of it being an exclusively religious identity. It is therefore imperative for us to acknowledge, understand, and take into account the inherently heterogeneous nature of the Muslim experience writ-large. As previewed in Chapter 2, Muslims in both the U.S. and Canada, for example, comprise an extremely diverse group with multiple coordinates of identities interwoven through an intricate tapestry of demographics, cultures, genders, generations, national origins, and even religiosity (Abraham, Howell, & Shyrock, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Pew Research, 2017). The label "Muslim American", in this sense, is therefore arguably not only tenuous, but may also reflect certain prevalent tendencies and deep-seated notions of Orientalist thinking (Said, 1978) within academia and academic research, particularly vis-à-vis a population of individuals whose constellation of personal and social identities happens to include "being Muslim".

Building on the understanding that Muslims in the U.S. and Canada are extremely diverse, the degree to which each ethnoracial group has been subjected to and experience prejudice and marginalization due to their Muslim identity also varies and warrants careful investigation. Contemporary Metro-Detroit, for example, is home to America's oldest and

largest Arab populations of Lebanese, Yemeni, Iraqi, and Palestinian origins, who have established powerful institutions and considerable political and economic clout in both local and national politics (Abraham, Howell, & Shyrock, 2011). In addition to housing the largest Arab Muslim populations in North America, Detroit is also home to one of the country's oldest Muslim communities of African American background (Howell, 2014).

Contemporary identity research scholars have suggested various ways as to avoiding reductionist and essentialist assumptions. One strategy is by challenging certain epistemologies, which may have—in some form or another—facilitated further entrenchment of Orientalist sociopolitical binaries and tropes pitting Muslim populations and individuals on one hand against an imagined, monolithic entity of Western cultures on the other hand. Davis (2008), for example, talks about intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Collins, 2000) and how it is rooted in challenging positivist epistemology and assumptions that dominant knowledge is somehow "neutral" and "scientific" rather than a reflection of prevailing political and cultural hierarchies, and systems of subordination (Rahman, 2017).

Adopting an intersectional approach to the study of Muslims includes subscribing to a heightened awareness and understanding of the complexities, variations, and intersecting nature of Muslim identities. An intersectional understanding of Muslim identities may further allow us to understand the implications of other identity markers, such as race and ethnicity, gender, social class, immigration status, and so forth, on the way people define and express themselves in their everyday conduct and engagement of social media. Another approach in avoiding reductionist assumptions is to try to decenter religion in one's examination as best as one could, while leaving room for the possibility that "Muslimness" itself may not be de-centered by participants who center their religious identity as a core identity (Pennington, 2015; 2018; Pennington, Bozdağ, & Odağ, 2018). In any case, the second-half of this dissertation research (i.e., Study 2), which is qualitatively-driven—the details of which are elaborated in

Chapter 6 below, participants of the study are given the opportunity to describe their identity in their own terms so as to allow me to explore the extent to which Muslim identity is or is not intertwined with other collective or social identities.

To focus on particular social media platforms for this investigation on hypertextualized Muslim identities, I turn to findings by Pew Research, which has consistently suggested Facebook and Twitter as being two of the most popular platforms among Millennial-aged social media users in the U.S. and Canada within recent years (e.g., Smith & Anderson, 2018). While baseline information about social media platforms and usage among Muslims in America were collected through self-report data during the first phase of the dissertation (i.e., Study 1), the results of which are elaborated in Chapter 5 below, it is important to note how existing literature do indicate similar usage trends of Facebook and Twitter among my population of interest. In the following chapter, I will provide an overview of the research methodology for this dissertation research (i.e., the sequential explanatory mixed methods design; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As this dissertation follows a mixed methods research paradigm where each phase of the research process/study follow either a quantitative or qualitative research design, the methodological details are elaborated in the respective chapters of each study (i.e., Chapter 5 for Study 1, and Chapter 6 for Study 2).

CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Design

In an increasingly globalized and technologically-mediated world, understanding diverse human experiences has never been more important. Typically, research involving culturally-diverse populations would exclusively adopt either quantitative or qualitative methods, thus limiting the generalizability or cultural relativity of resulting findings. Nevertheless, mixed methodology, defined as "*research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry*" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4), has gained popularity in social sciences of recent years. Mixed methods design is considered particularly appropriate and useful in investigating diverse populations across cultures since it allows for cross-cultural (i.e., *etic*), as well as cultural (i.e., *emic*) examinations of social phenomena (Robinson, David, & Hill, 2015). Bazeley (2018) further notes that mixed methods research not only engages multiple sources and types of data, and approaches to analyses of such data, but it also engages the integration of data and analyses prior to drawing final conclusions regarding the research topic, thereby establishing *purposeful interdependence* between the different sources, methods, and approaches that are employed in research.

A mixed methods research design is thus relevant within the context of my dissertation research on the internet-mediated identity performance of Muslims in North America, which is a highly ethnoracially and culturally diverse subpopulation, as Chapter 2 suggested. Since I am interested in parsing out the interactions between (social) identity salience (in this case, focusing on both religious and ethnoracial), as well as personality traits in identity performance through social media, a mixed methods design would allow me to combine both nomothetic and idiographic approaches, thus resulting in a more comprehensive and holistic understanding

of the communication behavior of individual members of the population and their lived realities. The purposeful interdependence (Bazeley, 2018) nature of my dissertation research is reflected in the two-way exchange of information and inferences envisioned between the first and second phases of research as the research questions were formulated. Driven by the mixed methods paradigm of wanting to "holistically understand" a social and behavioral phenomenon, I had early on envisioned that I would collect both numeric and textual data in hope of addressing the overall research purpose of attaining a holistic understanding of social media use for identity work among my population of interest. Further, as the aforementioned chapters suggest, the current research topic does not quite lend itself to a single methodological orthodoxy. In measuring religious identity as a variable, for example, scholars have increasingly demonstrated the utility of triangulating quantitative self-report data with qualitative interviews (e.g., Hill, Pargament, & Piedmont, 2008; Mohamed, 2011). Similarly, in personality research, scholars have more recently adopted a combination of quantitative self-report personality traits and characteristic adaptations data with qualitative life narratives (e.g., Syed, 2017).

While the underlying mixed methods philosophy employed in my dissertation is an integrated mixed methods design (Bazeley, 2018), for logistical reasons, I had conducted data collection following the sequential explanatory model but with equal emphasis on both data (QUAN → QUAL) as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011). Here, the sequential explanatory aspect of the research method pertains to the order in which numeric and textual data were collected. In the sequential explanatory model and specifically for the purpose of this dissertation, the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data were staggered. The need for baseline information on basic social media use had rendered necessary the collection of large-scale quantitative data (survey instruments) to take place in the first phase (i.e., Study 1) aimed at informing the collection of qualitative data in the second phase (i.e.,

Study 2). Study 1 was used to purposively sample for Study 2. Further, in addition to its use as a sampling tool, Study 1 was particularly necessary so as to attain a better understanding of the population of interest, particularly in terms of exploring and establishing social media use as a communication phenomenon within the population. The extent to which the findings of the two data collection phases (i.e., Study 1 and 2) converge and diverge (i.e., integration) provides for a nuanced interpretation of the participants' overall experiences.

The online self-report data constitutes the entirety of Study 1 data collection. Considering how most personality research today treats personality traits as the bedrock and basic unit of psychological individuality and how dispositional traits are typically assessed via self-report questionnaires, participants were asked to complete a series of online survey questions enumerated in the following section, starting from sociodemographic, the 44-Item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), the 10-Item Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10), the 6-Item Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identification Measure (MEIM-R) for religious and ethnoracial identities, respectively, the 10-Item Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) measuring global social media use, and a 23-Item Social Media Use Measure that is specifically adapted from previous studies to assess more focused uses and engagement of social media. This survey data was collected entirely online through Qualtrics, a web-based surveying software, through Wayne State University's subscription. Once the surveys were completed, participants were asked if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview study. If willing, they were asked to give their contact information (i.e., name, email address) for continued participation in Study 2. If not, the survey would have completed. All data collected were collected anonymously.

Study 2, which is qualitatively-driven, began after preliminary results from Study 1 had been analyzed. The results of my Study 1 quantitative analyses had helped dictate my initial selection of participants for the interviews conducted for the qualitative phase of this project.

While Study 2 qualitative data were used to further explore and provide context to Study 1 quantitative findings, it is important to note that each phase is meant to provide different aspects to the investigation and are therefore meant to be of equal weight and mutually inform. As previously mentioned, Study 1 data were used to collect baseline information of social media behavior, including identifying participants who were active social media users, as well as identifying the most popular social media platforms within the population of interest. These details were further probed during the Study 2 interviews. The details of the methodology for phase 1 and 2 of this dissertation research, i.e., Study 1 and Study 2 of Muslim Social Media Research (MSMR), are provided in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, accordingly.

CHAPTER 5: MUSLIM SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH (MSMR) STUDY 1 - A QUANTITATIVE EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR IDENTITY WORK

Introduction

The goal of Study 1 was to examine the associations between individual personality, cultural and religious identity, and social media use among Muslim adults living in North America. Social media has been defined as "internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content" (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 49). A specific type of social media is social network sites (SNSs). According to Ellison and boyd (2013, p. 158), SNS is "a networked communication platform in which participants (1) have uniquely identifiable profiles consisting of user-generated content and/or system-level data; (2) can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and (3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-supplied content provided by their connections on the site." While the two are theoretically related but different concepts, for the purpose of Study 1, social media and SNSs are used interchangeably.

Study 1 consisted of quantitative data that was collected through an online structured survey comprising a series of sociodemographic, psychometric, cultural identification, and social media use measures through Qualtrics.com. Taken together, Study 1 is the initial step toward the overall process of sensemaking to help formulate specific research questions and further probes for Study 2, which is conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. While the objective of Study 1 is to provide a broad picture of social media use and SNS engagement within the Muslim population at the group level, Study 2 is aimed at further identifying and explicating facets of individual experiences, including cultural identity, that matter in social media behavior by way of capturing users' self-construals, sensemaking processes, and narratives in their own words. Below, I provide a brief review of the existing

social media use surveys, followed by the specific hypotheses examined and tested in Study 1.

I then report the specific sampling design and survey procedure used in Study 1, and a detailed

discussion of analysis and results is provided right after. Lastly, some implications of Study 1

findings and how these findings inform Study 2 are discussed.

Defining Social Media Use and Social Network Site (SNS) Engagement

Several large-scale surveys examining social media use have operationalized it broadly

as users' *overall self-reported time or duration* spent on social computing platforms (Liu &

Campbell, 2017), and *frequency* of social media use, including frequency of specific activities,

such as instant messaging (de Zuniga, Diehl, Huber, & Liu, 2017). Other studies have

examined social media use and SNS engagement even more broadly. Bogg (2017), for

example, had operationalized it as *overall platform membership*, namely the likelihood of

having a social media account, in addition to measuring the frequency of profile updating and

internet browsing behaviors.

More recently, however, researchers have begun to define social media use and SNS

engagement in more granular ways. Instead of general measures of time or frequency of use,

researchers have increasingly focused on the psychological aspects of social media and SNS

engagement by developing and testing specific scales (Sigerson & Cheng, 2018), such as the

Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013).

Other scholars have examined even more specific and focused uses of social media and SNSs,

such as self-presentation, impression management, and emotional disclosures (e.g., Rui &

Stefanone, 2013).

Studies investigating social media use and SNS engagement have also expanded to

include particular psychosocial and cultural outcomes, such as examining social media use as

a coping strategy for people experiencing social identity threat (e.g., Schmalz, Colistra, &

Evans, 2015), culture-specific uses of social media (Fuchs, 2017; Uski & Lampinen, 2016),

and gender differences in platform activity (e.g., Lin, Featherman, & Sarker, 2017; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). In addition to this, researchers have also looked more closely into individual difference variables, such as users' sociodemographic background (i.e., demographic and socioeconomic resource factors) and personality traits, and how these variables relate to focused social media use, such as self-presentation and impression management (e.g., DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013; Leiner et al., 2018).

Study 1 is particularly unique not only in its attempt to investigate the overall use of social media and SNS engagement through psychometric scales, but also in examining specific dimensions of uses vis-à-vis identity work, such as self-presentation, impression management, and emotional self-disclosures. Further, while extant large-scale survey studies have typically either been cross-sectional of the general American population (Bogg, 2017; Liu & Campbell, 2017) or use university samples and predominantly Caucasian populations (e.g., Zhang & Leung, 2014), Study 1 specifically explores social media use and SNS engagement among a minority population that is underresearched, specifically in North America, namely Muslim social media users.

Considering the current sociopolitical climate where Muslims as a collective have increasingly been targeted in anti-Muslim prejudice (Schmuck, Matthes, & Paul, 2017), hate crimes and bullying, or subjected to damaging media and cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations (Bleich, Nisar, & Vazquez, 2018), as well as divisive political campaigns (Doucerain, Amiot, Thomas & Louis, 2018)—online and offline—exploring how social media and SNSs factor into their processes of identity expression and management in everyday life may provide unique insights into how individuals with marginalized or stigmatized identities communicate about themselves to others. Amidst a sociopolitical and cultural milieu where certain members of the Muslim population may feel disadvantaged, internet-mediated

platforms, such as social media and SNSs, may serve as third-spaces for identity exploration, management, and interaction among users who are of minority or marginalized backgrounds (Pennington, 2015; 2018; Pennington, Bozdağ, & Odağ, 2018). In this sense, individuals who self-identify as belonging to the Islamic faith may be particularly likely to use social media and SNS to strategically communicate aspects of their identity to a larger public audience on the internet in response. In effect, within this peculiar minority population, the Muslim identity may (or may not) intersect with social computing technologies in the form of *hypertextual selves*.

In Study 1, I explore how both overall and specific uses of social media and SNS engagement are related to users' sociodemographic background, personality traits, and cultural identification. All three categories of variables are expected to be associated with (a) the overall amount of social media use and SNS engagement and (b) specific uses of social media and SNS for identity work. Therefore, in Study 1, *overall social media use* is defined as a function of (a) aggregate score capturing the integration of participants' favorite social media platform into their social routines and their emotional connection thereof and is operationalized through SMUIS measure. *Focused social media use for identity work,* on the other hand, is defined as a function of four specific communication functions of *self-presentation, impression management,* and *emotional self-disclosure*; both *positive* and *negative* (see **Measures** section for details).

Conceptualizing Social Media Platforms: Affordance-based Framework

To understand how individual social media users employ the different features of multiple social media channels in identity work, I turn to an *affordance*-based approach to describe and explain the role social media and SNSs play in day-to-day identity expression (Ellison & Vitak, 2015; Schrock, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Based on an ecology psychological perspective of affordances introduced by Gibson (1979; 1986), the term

"affordance" has been applied to social media in reference to *action capabilities available in an environment* (Treem & Leonardi, 2012); in other words, affordances represent the particular ways actors perceive and use objects, including technology. Faraj and Azad (2012) further defined affordances as *the mutuality of actor intentions and technology capabilities that provide the potential for a particular action.*

Many scholars have used an affordances perspective in the study of social media and mobile applications. Schrock (2015), for example, had developed a taxonomy of communicative affordances particular to mobile media, such as portability/mobility, availability, locatability, and multimediality. Other scholars have noted various affordances of social media that are particularly relevant to identity processes. DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock (2017), for instance, have developed a useful taxonomy of social media affordances pertaining to *self-presentation*. These authors began by dividing perceived social media affordances into three broad categories based on the unique challenges each poses to conventional understanding of *offline* self-presentation, and based on these categories, noted how social media platforms challenge the way (1) the individual self is being presented (i.e., The Self), (2) the role other actors hold in an individual's self-presentations (i.e., Other Actors), and (3) the way the audience is perceived within each platform (i.e., The Audience) (DeVito, et al., 2017).

In earlier works, social media's communicative affordances of *visibility*, referring to whether a piece of information can be located, including the relative ease of locating this information, as well as *persistence*, which refers to information durability, pose a particularly unique context for mediated identity performance (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The affordances of visibility and persistence combined render identity as being always online (Cover, 2016). Traces of our identity performance can be found scattered across the internet, such as SNS profiles, blogs, microblogging sites, and other platforms. Since SNS functions as a virtual

collection of shareable user profiles, these elements of our identity remain accessible in relatively the same form as they were originally displayed, even after actors have finished enacting their "performance" (Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hughes et al., 2012).

Identity and its online rendition are therefore not something we can necessarily "turn off" or detach from our everyday practices of existing (Cover, 2016). Interestingly, while the performance of identity in face-to-face context is a necessary aspect of social participation and belonging, this performance translates into our behavior online as well through the ways we articulate ourselves that ranges from the choices of social media platforms we use, the creation and maintenance of profiles on SNSs, the act of blogging and discursively commenting on virtual forums, to the editing and distributions of *selfies* or self-images (Fullwood & Attrill-Smith, 2018). Social media platforms, such as SNSs, therefore pose an entirely new set of challenges to self-presentation and impression management processes that broadly make up identity performance (DeVito et al., 2017; Fox & McEwan, 2017). Additionally, the existence of various endogenous and exogenous factors to the individual user of social media and SNSs, such as sociodemographic, personality traits, and cultural identity (including religious identity), further complicates mediated-self-presentation and impression management processes.

Factors Associated with Social Media Use

As noted above, the three specific factors of sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, and culture form a trifecta of individual difference variables thought to explain human behavior (Hogan & Bond, 2009). Below, I review relevant research associated with each specific factor and discuss how it relates to the current context of identity work among Muslim social media users.

Sociodemographic Factors

Specifically, sociodemographic factors represent life contexts and social circumstances, which (in tandem with personality traits) affects behavioral outcomes by influencing individuals' self-processes, such as cognition, affect, needs, and motivations (DeYoung, 2015; Taber & Whittaker, 2018). As such, within the context of social media use and SNS engagement, sociodemographic variables may not only impede or facilitate the adoption of social computing technologies, but also influence specific patterns of uses and engagement thereof. A corpus of previous research has demonstrated substantially different usage patterns of social media and SNSs engagement across age groups (boyd, 2013; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012; Murthy, Goss, & Pensavalle, 2016), genders (Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, & Buxmann, 2017; Quinn, Chen, & Mulvenna, 2011), relationship status (Bogg, 2017; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012), as well as race and ethnicities (boyd, 2011; Gonzales, 2017; Hargittai, 2015; Hargittai & Litt, 2011; Perrin, 2015).

Age has traditionally been considered a prominent factor in understanding social media adoption given that younger individuals, particularly teens, are historically earlier adopters and heavier users of social media than older adults (boyd, 2013). For example, Murthy, Gross, and Pensavalle's (2016) exploratory study of Twitter use in major American cities found that younger Twitter users would tweet more often. Similarly, using an international sample of Facebook users, McAndrew and Jeong (2012) found that those who are younger in age were more likely to actively use the platform.

Krasnova, Veltri, Eling, and Buxmann (2017) have also found *gender* differences in SNS use such that women's platform engagement is driven more by relational uses, such as maintaining close ties and attaining social information across their social networks; whereas men's engagement was motivated more by general information-seeking behavior. This is why studies have also found female users to have larger Facebook social networks than their male counterpart (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). Additionally, gender differences on Twitter

were also found to be influential such that the average user is more likely to be male than female, even though female Twitter users tweet more frequently than their male counterpart (Murthy, Gross, & Pensavalle, 2016). Alhabash and Ma (2017) have similarly found gender variance in platform preferences, such that female users preferred Facebook and Instagram, while male users reported higher use intensity of Twitter. Gender differences in Facebook profile photos were also noted by Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz (2014), who argued that female users were more likely to post photos accentuating family ties (i.e., family photos) and emotional expression (i.e., eye contact and smiles). Rambaree, Knez, and Ma's (2017) study on the effects of gender and ethnicity on Facebook engagement in Mauritius further demonstrated that men frequented the platform more often than women, which is the opposite of Herring and Kapidzic's (2015) findings on Facebook use in America. Further, women were more likely to claim their Facebook selves to be more similar to their offline selves than men, with Muslim users specifically reporting a stronger Facebook identity than others (Rambaree, Knez, & Ma, 2017).

Additionally, Murthy, Gross, and Pensavalle (2016) have found platform specific patterns of uses based on *race and ethnicity*, where African Americans were more likely to use Twitter, particularly in densely-populated urban areas where African Americans constitute the majority population, reinforcing Brock's (2012) argument for a phenomenon of 'Black Twitter'. Similarly, in examining the diffusion of Twitter, Hargittai and Litt (2011) demonstrated that in addition to internet skills, Twitter's adoption rates varied by race and ethnicity. Echoing studies that provide evidence of intersections between urban location, demographics, and Twitter activity, boyd's (2011) study on teen users' adoption of Myspace and Facebook also highlighted how platform adoption patterns reflected not only race, but also class-based social divisions existing within broader American society.

Overall, this growing body of research looking at sociodemographic factors and social media use seems to suggest that within multicultural societies, individuals belonging to minority and socio-economic and politically disadvantaged populations show greater motivation to engage internet-mediated communication, including social media and SNSs, as a way to build and bridge social capital while circumventing offline segregations and challenges (Gonzales, 2017; Kang, 2000; Mesch, 2012).

Users' *relationship status* (e.g., romantically single vs. partnered) has also been correlated with social media use in previous work. McAndrew and Jeong (2012), for example, found men who were not in a relationship to have spent more time in photo activity (i.e., posting, tagging/untagging, and commenting on photos) for impression management on social media sites than other users. Bogg (2017), on the other hand, found an interaction effect between specific dimensions of the Big Five and relationship status such that individuals who are higher in extraversion and romantically single are more likely to use social media. Users who are single and are actively seeking romantic relationships were also found to disclose more personal information on social media than those who are not (Nosco, Wood, & Molema, 2010).

Hargittai (2015) also found that those who are more *educated* and belong to *higher income brackets* were more likely to be members of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, compared to those who are less educated. This is consistent with Duggan et al.'s (2015) findings based on national survey data, establishing similar associations between factors such as education level, employment status, and internet access, and social media membership. These socioeconomic factors were also found to influence social media adoption in other countries as well, such as the United Kingdom (U.K.) (Blank & Lutz, 2017) and Finland (Koiranen & Rasanen, 2017).

Finally, as the current sample was obtained from both the U.S. and Canada, *country of residence* was further added as a variable in order to identify particular identity work-related

patterns of uses that may manifest due to differences in geography and sociopolitical environments. Similar to race and ethnic differences, geopolitical context may influence users' motivations in using social media as a tool to build and bridge social capital (Gonzales, 2017; Kang, 2000; Mesch, 2012), as well as their self-perceptions and expectations in using social media for self-presentation and impression management purposes (Hogan, 2010). While the Muslim population in the West have by and large faced discrimination, prejudice, and media misrepresentation (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012; Sirin et al., 2008), these challenges have manifested differently according to different geopolitical contexts. For example, researchers have noted how Muslims in the U.S. have been targeted by a great deal of divisive political rhetoric during the 2016 presidential campaigns (Doucerain et al., 2018)—a particular context that does not apply to Muslims in Canada (e.g., Nakhai, 2018). As such, the use of social media for identity work may prove different among U.S. Muslims and Muslims who reside in Canada.

Considering the research reviewed above, Study 1 looks at key sociodemographic variables, namely age, gender, race and ethnicity, relationship status (married vs. single), income, education, and country of residence. In seeking to understand how sociodemographic variables influence both *overall* and *identity work-related uses* of social media, the following research questions are asked:

RQ1: How do users' sociodemographic factors influence general social media use (as measured by SMUIS)?

RQ2: How do users' sociodemographic factors influence identity work-related uses (i.e., (a) self-presentation, (b) impression management, (c) positive- and (d) negative disclosure) of social media?

Personality Factors: The Big Five

The second influential factor of individual difference variables that influences human behavior is personality traits. Scholars have used personality traits as a way of organizing and

categorizing individuals to predict certain behavioral outcomes (DeYoung, 2015). Research in personality psychology within the last three decades has demonstrated how individual differences in basic personality traits are relatively stable over time, substantially heritable, and highly predictive of important cognitive, emotional, and behavioral trends aggregated across different situations (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018). By the early 1990s, the Big Five had emerged as a unifying framework of personality traits through which individuals are classified based on the broad dimensions of Openness to new experience/intellect, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN) (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990).

While *openness to new experiences* juxtaposes individuals who are explorative or imaginative to those who are conservative or habitual in their behavior, *conscientiousness* is displayed through self-control and goal-setting behavior (Taber & Whitaker, 2018). Additionally, *extraversion* is a dimension juxtaposing those who prefer social interaction to those who prefer solitary activities and is often displayed by a desire to interact with others (Digman, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992). *Neuroticism*, on the other hand, contrasts people who are anxious/nervous in their conduct to those who are emotionally stable, which is often displayed through how controlled one's negative emotions are. Finally, *agreeableness* is a personality factor that examines how friendly people are and it is typically displayed through behavior characterized as altruistic, cooperative, and demonstrative of trust.

The Big Five is known for its predictive power in capturing the five most rudimentary aspects of personality, as well as predicting a range of important behavioral implications, such as subjective wellbeing (Anglim & Grant, 2016; Steel, Schmidt, & Schultz, 2008; Sun, Kaufman, & Smillie, 2017), academic and job performance (e.g., Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Komarraju, Karau, & Schmeck, 2009), political attitudes (e.g., Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010), romance (e.g., Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005), online behaviors (e.g., Wang, 2013), and even mortality (Bogg & Roberts, 2004). Scholars

have also taken into account personality traits in various investigations of communication processes, including social media use (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Bogg, 2017; Liu & Campbell, 2017; Pentina & Zhang, 2017; Taber & Whittaker, 2018).

As reviewed above, personality traits have been shown to correlate with various facets of general social media use: For example, highly extraverted individuals have been characterized by higher levels of overall social media activity, such as frequency and duration of use (e.g., Blackwell, Leaman, Tramposch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017) and have greater numbers of friends and followers (e.g., Kosinski, Bachrach, Kohli, Stillwell, & Graepel, 2014) than less-extraverted individuals. Greater neuroticism, on the other hand, is associated with the use of social media as a social surveillance tool (Seidman, 2013), and is thought to manifest in the degree of users' fixation on content association by other actors (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017). The Big Five dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism were also found to influence social media platform preferences, such that those who are higher in extraversion and neuroticism are more likely to prefer Facebook over other platforms, such as Twitter (Hughes et al., 2012). This curious pattern of platform preference is believed to have been influenced by specific platform affordances. Facebook, for example, is widely thought to be very useful in building weak ties that would help integrate one into a community through features such as messages, posts, and comments (Burke et al., 2011; Burke & Kraut, 2014; Taber & Whitaker, 2018). As such, those who are high in extraversion and seek out social interactions may in effect prefer Facebook. The relative ease of controlling self-generated content on Facebook by way of editing and deleting content, controlling privacy settings, as well as Facebook's positivity bias, may similarly allay concerns that neurotic users typically have.

Finally, with regard to self-presentation, users who score higher in extraversion is believed to engage more in self-disclosure as part of their socially- active and adaptable, and interpersonally interactive nature (Digman, 1990). Extraverted individuals were also found to

engage more in online self-promotion (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011). Meanwhile, users who score higher in neuroticism are more likely to self-disclose hidden aspects of themselves and use more negative words in their social media posts or updates (Schwartz et al., 2013), in addition to an increase likelihood of engaging in ideal and false self-presentation (Michikyan, Subrahmanyam, & Dennis, 2014). Additionally, DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock (2017) found that personality factors influence users' preferences for particular social media platforms based on their perception of self-presentation related platform affordances, such as identity persistence, content association, and audience awareness. For example, users' perception of identity persistence is positively associated with conscientiousness, while neuroticism is associated with content association (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017). DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock's (2017) findings further suggest considerable variance between social media platforms on these varying levels of perceptions. Taber and Whitaker's (2018) study has even suggested that people's self-perception of personality traits differ according to social media platforms, such that on Facebook and Snapchat, the anxiety over audience judgments leads users to curate posts to appear less neurotic than they actually are. Taken together, variance across platforms would need to be factored into any exploration of social media use among users.

Due to its relative stability and predictive ability, similar patterns and associations are predicted among Muslims' personality traits and their social media use across both general and specific identity focused uses.

H1-H5: First, it is expected that North America's Muslims' personality and overall social media use (SMUIS) are related such that *extraversion* (H1) *neuroticism* (H2) *agreeableness* (H3), and *openness to new experiences* (H4) will be *positively* associated with general social media use, and *conscientiousness* (H5) will be *negatively* associated with general social media use.

Regarding users' personality traits and their use of social media for identity work, the following hypotheses are presented:

> H6-H10: North America's Muslims' personality and use of social media for identity work (i.e., self-presentation, impression management, and emotional disclosure are related such that *extraversion* (H6), *neuroticism* (H7), and *openness to new experiences* (H8) will be positively associated with use of social media for identity work, whereas *conscientiousness* (H9) and *agreeableness* (H10) will be negatively associated with use of social media for identity work.

Cultural Identity Factors

Culture, here broadly defined as a *complex and diverse system of shared knowledge, practices, and signifiers of a society, providing structure and significance to groups within that society and an individual's experience of his or her social world* (Halloran & Kashima, 2006, p. 138), forms the third trifecta of human behavior (Hogan & Bond, 2009). Mental representations of culture—also known as *cultural knowledge*—are part of the building blocks constituting one's sense of self and self-representation (Halloran & Kashima, 2006). People's identification of belonging and affiliation to particular cultural groups, such as race and ethnicity, as well as religion, inevitably influences how they behave in various life contexts (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010).

Increasingly, researchers such as Chen and Marcus (2012), Ardi and Maison (2014), and Bolton et al. (2013) have emphasized the role cultural contexts play in influencing social media use and SNS engagement. Chen and Marcus' study (2012), for example, demonstrated how users' independent and interdependent self-construals (i.e., *idiocentrism* vs. *allocentricism*); in tandem with their personality traits, influence self-presentation through the types of information shared on social media and SNSs. Ardi and Maison's (2014) study on Indonesian and Polish Facebook users, on the other hand, highlighted how particular cultural

contexts affects users' practices of online self-disclosure, such as the types and amount of information disclosed. Further, gender, which in some studies is defined as cultural role expectations of behavior based on biological sex (e.g., Eagly, 1987), is thought to influence online communication behavior as well, including motivations of social media uses and patterns of self-presentation thereof. Since this dissertation research is invested in examining the experience of social media use and SNS engagement in identity work among individuals who identify as belonging to the Islamic faith (i.e., Muslim), there are three important cultural identity factors to consider more closely: *ethnoracial identity, religious identity*, and *religiosity*.

Ethnoracial identity. Ethnoracial identity is a multifaceted construct capturing various aspects of how individuals make personal sense of their own race and ethnicity (Douglass, Wang, & Yip, 2015; Umana-Tayor et al., 2014). It is a particularly important aspect of cultural identity for Muslim populations considering the latter's heterogenous makeup—it is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse populations in North America. In the current study, ethnoracial identity is operationalized as *ethnoracial ingroup identification*, which refers to the extent of one's involvement, commitment, and social integration into the traditions and practice of one's racial and ethnic group, as well as the degree of positive attitudes and thoughts about one's racial aand ethnic group (Lukwago, Kreuter, Buxholtz, Holt, & Clark, 2001).

Religious identity. Considering how religion forms the tie that binds the Muslim population together, religious identity becomes another important cultural identity variable to examine more in-depth. Defined as the extent of one's involvement, commitment, and social integration into the traditions and practice of one's religious affiliation, as well as the degree of positive attitudes and thoughts about one's religious group (Lukwago, Kreuter, Buxholtz, Holt, & Clark, 2001), religious identity is a salient factor that may influence people's online identity expression. For example, developmental psychologists, such as Erikson (1968), believe that one's sense of social belonging and affective pride towards one's religious group

(Tajfel, 1982) becomes a relatively stable marker of identity once one transitions from adolescence to adulthood.

As an aspect of one's self-concept, religious identity plays not only an important personal identity role, but also an important social role—an identity capital (Bourdieu, 1997)—influencing an individual's specific communication behaviors and their overall participation in society more broadly. Religious identity thus becomes a construct that is enacted, accomplished, and managed during one's daily interactions (Brekhus, 2008; Verkuyten, 2016). As such, for stigmatized populations in particular, such as Muslims in North America, the stigmatized Muslim status becomes part and parcel of individual members' identity work. In this way, religious identity may be a crucial factor influencing how Muslims manage their stigmatized status via strategically crafted presentation of the self in everyday (online) life (Goffman, 1959; Cross, Jr. et al., 2017).

Religiosity. Religious commitment or *religiosity* refers to the extent of one's "adherence to prescribed beliefs and ritual practices associated with the worship of God or a system of gods" (Mattis & Watson, 2008, p. 92). As "the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living" (Worthington et al., 2003, p. 85), religiosity as a construct in Study 1 specifically refers to the *intrapersonal* dimension of religious identity. Previous work examining religiosity has found that among African Americans, religious commitment not only provides a vital avenue by which ethnoracial identity is consolidated, it is also an important component in the positive psychological functioning of people of color (Ajibade, Hook, Utsey, Davis, & Van Tongeren, 2015; Mattis & Grayman-Simpson, 2013). As scholars, such as Van Tongeren et al. (2011), have pointed out, religion may provide adherents with a sense of purpose and significance in life, specifically in moderating the effects of ethnoracial and religious discriminations and prejudice in society (Ajibade et al., 2015; Williams, Chapman, Wong, & Turkheimer, 2012).

Relatedly, religiosity may prove to be a vital avenue for consolidating one's ethnoracial and religious identity among self-identifying Muslims, with various implications for identity work and related social media use. As such, the following research questions are presented:

RQ3: How do users' cultural identity (a) ethnoracial, (b) religious ingroup, and (c) religiosity influence overall social media use (as measured by SMUIS)?

RQ4: How do users' cultural identity (a) ethnoracial, (b) religious ingroup, and (c) religiosity influence identity work uses of social media?

The results of Study 1 are presented following the discussion on specific measures that were used in the study. Study 1 findings are discussed in the same order as the research questions and hypotheses as outlined above.

Study 1 Method

Procedure

All data were collected between July and November 2018. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of Study 1 variables. Participants were self-identifying Muslims, who were at least 18 years old, and currently residing in the U.S. or Canada. They were recruited through (a) Qualtrics panel ($n = 263$) and (b) community-based channels, including the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS) and social media platforms, such as Facebook groups and Twitter ($n = 172$). The anonymous survey was hosted on Qualtrics.com.

A total of 467 respondents completed the survey at least partially, with 23 eliminated due to failing one of two quality control/attention check questions and incomplete survey responses (i.e., less than 50% of the survey items). Controlling for multivariate outliers by evaluating the Mahalanobis distance, an additional 9 entries were removed, resulting in a total sample of 435.

Sample

Study 1 participants included 303 (69.7%) females and 132 (30.3%) males, whose ages ranged from 18 to 72 (*M*=32.34, *SD*=0.46), residing either in the U.S. (62.8%) or Canada (37.2%). All of the participants self-identified as Muslim. In terms of religious observance, 43% reported as being highly religious (i.e., RCI-10 score of above 38) within a Muslim population comprising of 75.9% people who specified as having been born into a Muslim family. About 32.4% of participants identified as South and Central Asian, followed by 20.2% Arab/Middle Eastern, 16.6% Caucasian/White, 9.9% African American/Black, 3.2% Hispanic and Native American, while the rest identified as Bi- or Multiracial and Other (14.7%).

While 46.7% of participants reported as being married, 44.6% said they were single. Additionally, 49% of participants reported working full-time, 19.5% reported being unemployed, while 12.4% indicated Other as their employment status. There is a range of education attainment and income levels across the population, most of which reported as having a bachelor's degree (45.7%) and 29.2% possess a graduate degree, while 23.4% reported an annual income of $25,000-$49,000 and 21.6% said they made over $100,000 annually.

Table 1. **Descriptive statistics for study variables (*n* = 435)**

Study variable	Mean (SD) or %
Sex (% female; 0 = male, 1 = female)	69.7%
Age (years, 18-76)	32.34
Race and ethnicity	32.4% South Asian, 20.2% Arab/Middle Eastern 16.6% White/European, 9.9% African/Black 3.2% Hispanic; Native American 3.0% East Asian 14.7% Bi- or Multiracial and Other
Education (% baccalaureate, 1 = high school, 3 = graduate)	45.7%

Household income (% $25,000-$49,000, 1 = <$25,000, 5 = $100,000 or greater)	23.4%
Employment (% full-time, 1 = full-time, 4 = other)	49.0%
Marital status (% married, 1 = single, 4 = other)	46.7%
Muslim conversion status (% born Muslim, 1 = born Muslim, 2 = convert)	75.9%
Country (% USA, 1 = USA, 2 = Canada)	62.8%
Residence (% urban, 1 = urban, 3 = rural)	48.7%
Extraversion (1-5)	3.18 (0.80)
Neuroticism (1-5)	2.88 (0.80)
Conscientiousness (1-5)	3.59 (0.68)
Agreeableness (1-5)	3.85 (0.63)
Openness (1-5)	3.75 (0.55)
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure Revised (MEIM-R Ethnic, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	3.79 (0.88)
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure Revised for Religion (MEIM-R Religion, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	3.93 (0.89)
Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10, 1 = not at all true of me, 5 = totally true of me)	34.65 (10.83)
Social media engagement (SMUIS, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	3.39 (0.75)
Social media activity (frequency of posting, 1 = weekly or less, 6 = multiple times an hour)	2.80 (0.79)
Platform use frequency (cross-platform use, 1 = weekly or less, 5 = multiple times an hour)	
Facebook	2.49 (1.54)
Instagram	1.85 (1.69)
Twitter	1.18 (1.53)
LinkedIn	0.47 (0.95)
Snapchat	1.15 (1.55)
Other	0.83 (1.46)
Self-presentation (disclosing self-relevant information, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	3.39 (0.86)

Impression management (awareness of audience, 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)	3.07 (1.05)
Positive disclosure (willingness to update social media profile when feeling positive, 1 = not at all willing, 5 = totally willing)	3.25 (1.10)
Negative disclosure (willingness to update social media profile when feeling negative, 1 = not at all willing, 5 = totally willing)	2.30 (1.03)

Measures

To answer the above research questions and proposed hypotheses, a structured survey consisting of a 99-item inventory comprising sociodemographic questions, psychometric subscales, such as the BFI-44, in addition to subscales measuring cultural identity and social media use, was designed and hosted on Qualtrics.com through Wayne State University's account. Below is an overview of the measures used in the survey.

Sociodemographic background variables. Participants are asked about their biological sex, age, ethnoracial background, location of residence (USA vs. Canada; urban vs. rural), marital status, education, and household income.

Personality traits. Personality traits are assessed quantitatively using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), which is well-validated in assessing the five broad domains of personality traits and has been used in cross-cultural research (Rammstedt & John, 2007). The BFI-44 asks participants how much they agree with different statements about their personality on a scale of 1 to 5. Responses are then coded and rated according to the five main personality factors (i.e., OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism). Each item is scored ranging from a 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The Extraversion subscale consisted of 8 items (Cronbach's α = .84), the Agreeableness subscale comprised 9 items (Cronbach's α = .77), the Conscientiousness subscale contained 9 items (Cronbach's α = .80), while the Neuroticism (Cronbach's α = .81) and Openness

(Cronbach's α = .70) subscales consisted of 8 and 9 items, accordingly. All five subscales were found to be sufficiently reliable.

Overall, for extraversion, *M* = 3.18, *SD* = 0.81, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.06 (*SE* = 0.13) and -0.48 (*SE* = 0.26), accordingly. For agreeableness, *M* = 3.85, with *SD* = 0.63, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.38 (*SE* = 0.13) and – 0.10 (*SE* = 0.25), accordingly. For conscientiousness, *M* = 3.59, *SD* = 0.69, and a skewness of 0.06 (*SE*=0.13) and kurtosis of -0.68 (*SE*=0.26), accordingly. And for neuroticism *M* = 2.86, *SD* 0.78, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.07 (*SE* = 0.13) and -0.23 (*SE* = 0.26), accordingly. Lastly, for openness *M*= 3.75, *SD* = 0.56, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.13 (*SE* = 0.13) and -0.36 (*SE* = 0.25), accordingly. While the distribution of scores indicate slight negative skewness, the overall distribution of all Big Five traits was approximately normal.

Racial and ethnic identity. Ethnoracial identity is measured with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-E; Phinney & Ong, 2007), which consists of 6 items. While 3 of these items measure an individual's propensity for identity exploration (i.e., efforts to learn more about one's racial and ethnic background, including participation in cultural practices), the remaining three assessed an individual's identity commitment, which reflects positive affirmation of and sense of commitment to one's racial and ethnic group. Each item is scored ranging from a 1 (strongly disagree) to a 5 (strongly agree). Higher MEIM-E scores indicate overall strength of ethnoracial identity. The MEIM-E scale was found to be reliable (Cronbach's α = .89). Overall, for MEIM-E, *M* = 3.18 with *SD* = 0.81, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.662 (*SE*=0.117) and .051 (*SE*=0.234), accordingly. High scores suggest higher levels of ingroup identification along racial and ethnic lines.

Religious identity. Similar to ethnoracial identity, religious identity refers to one's sense of belonging and affective esteem towards one's religious group. Religious identity is a unique aspect of religiosity that is separate from one's actual observance and participation (i.e.,

religious commitment; Davis III & Kiang, 2016). Following ethnoracial identity, religious identity is similarly measured with the 6-item MEIM-R scale (Phinney & Ong, 2007) that has been revised to assess religious ingroup identification with each item being scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher MEIM-R scores indicate overall strength of Muslim ingroup identity. The MEIM-R scale was found to be sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's α = .89). Overall, for MEIM-R, M = 3.93 with SD = 0.89, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.93 (SE=0.117) and 0.64 (SE=0.234), accordingly. High scores suggest higher levels of ingroup identification along Muslim identity.

Religiosity. For Study 1, religiosity refers to an individual's institutional commitment to and practice of Islam as a religion. This is measured with an intrapersonal and interpersonal 10-item Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington et al., 2012). Each item is additively scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all true of me to 5 = totally true of me. Some items of the RCI-10 were modified to make them more suitable for Muslim participants. Scores have previously reported to range from 10 to 50, with scores of 38 or higher suggesting an individual is highly religious (Elgohail, 2017). Worthington et al. (2012) reported that the RCI-10 has been found to have strong estimated internal consistency, test-retest reliability, construct validity, and discriminant validity.

The RCI-10 was found to be highly reliable for this population (Cronbach's α = .93). Overall, for RCI-10, M = 34.65 with SD = 10.83, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.52 (SE = 0.117) and -0.67 (SE = 0.234), accordingly. While the distribution of scores indicate slight negative skewness, the overall distribution was approximately normal. High scores, which is indicated by a total score of 38 and above, suggest high religiosity. Of the 435 respondents who completed the measure, 43% (n = 187) self-reported as being highly religious, while 57% did not.

Social media use and SNS engagement. As discussed earlier in this chapter, studies looking at social media use and social network engagement using large-scale surveys have typically utilized a single-item measure for assessment, such as the intensity or duration of use (de Zuniga, Diehl, Huber, & Liu, 2017; Liu & Campbell, 2017). Since Study 1 looks at social media use and SNS engagement pertaining to both *overall* use and *identity work-related* uses, a series of survey items assessing both *overall* social media use, using a 10-item Social Media Use Integration scale (SMUIS), and *specific identity-related* uses (i.e., self-presentation, impression management, positive- and negative disclosures), using a series of measures adapted from Alhabash and Ma's (2017) study were used.

Overall social media use. *Overall* social media use and SNS engagement was operationalized using the 10-item Social Media Use Integration (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013), which contains items adapted from the Facebook Intensity scale (FBI; Ellison et al., 2007) and Facebook questionnaire (Ross et al., 2009). The SMUIS assesses participants' engaged use of social media, or "the degree to which social media is integrated into the social behavior and daily routines of users, and the importance of and emotional connection to this use" (p. 39). This scale is designed to capture *two factors*: (1) integration into social routines and (2) social integration and emotional connection, and *three facets of* social network site (SNS) *engagement*: (a) action and participation, (b) positive experiences, and (c) social context. The SMUIS was reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.88). Overall, for SMUIS, *M* = 3.39 with *SD* = 0.75, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.32 (*SE*=0.12) and 0.27 (*SE*=0.23), accordingly. High scores suggest higher levels of emotional engagement and social integration of social media use, as well as higher levels of SNS engagement.

Specific Use of Social Media for Identity Work

In addition to using measures aimed at assessing participants' *overall* use of social media and engagement of SNS, Study 1 also looks at four specific *identity work-related* social

media uses and SNS engagement: (1) self-presentation, (2) impression management, as well as (3) positive- and (4) negative emotional self-disclosures.

Self-presentation. This 5-item measure adapted from Alhabash and Ma (2017) represents a composite of participants' average score in specific uses of social media and SNS platforms relevant to identity performance, including using the platform to "share information about myself (i.e., my views, opinions, moral values)", "express who I really am", and "inform others about my interests". Each item is scored from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The self-presentation subscale was found to be sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.84). Overall, for participants' self-presentation M = 3.39 with SD = 0.86, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.73 (SE=0.12) and 0.32 (SE=0.23), accordingly. The distribution of scores is slightly negatively-skewed. High scores indicate higher levels of platform use for the sharing of identity expression and self-relevant information, such as one's views, opinions, interests, and moral values.

Impression management. This 3-item measure adapted from Alhabash and Ma (2017) assessed participants' audience awareness—a key construct in impression management—such as being "concerned about the way I present myself on __", "I am concerned about conveying a desirable impression on __, "I am concerned about how other people think of me on __". Each item is scored ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items were found to be sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.85), M = 3.07 with SD = 1.05, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.15 (SE=0.12) and -0.84 (SE=0.23), accordingly, indicating normality. High scores indicate higher levels of individual concerns in maintaining a favorable impression on social media and SNS, particularly vis-à-vis awareness of the audience.

Positive emotional disclosure. This measure was adapted from Pentina and Zhang (2017) and assessed participants' likelihood of updating their social media and SNS account(s) when feeling a range of positive emotions, such as "happy" and "calm". Each item was scored

ranging from 1 = not at all willing to 5 = totally willing. Participants' average scores in likelihood of updating their social media and SNS accounts with positive valence contents were measured using 8 items that were found to be sufficiently reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.93). Overall, for positive disclosure, M = 3.25 with SD = 1.00, and a skewness and kurtosis of -0.71 (SE=0.12) and -0.18 (SE=0.23), accordingly, indicating a negatively-skewed distribution. High scores indicate higher likelihood of positive emotional disclosure on social media platforms and SNSs.

Negative emotional disclosure. This 8-item measure adapted from Pentina and Zhang (2017) assessed participants' likelihood of updating their social media and SNS account(s) when feeling a range of negative emotions, such as "envious" and "troubled". Each item was scored ranging from 1 = not at all willing to 5 = totally willing. The scale was reliable (Cronbach's α = 0.93). Overall, for negative disclosure, M = 2.30 with SD = 1.00, and a skewness and kurtosis of 0.40 (SE = 0.12) and -0.64 (SE = 0.23), accordingly, indicating normality. High scores suggest higher likelihood of negative emotional disclosure on social media platforms and SNSs.

Study 1 Results

The data were statistically analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics computer software program, version 25.0. Preliminary descriptive analyses were conducted to provide a detailed cross-sectional snapshot on participants' sociodemographic and primary study variables. Following the examination of assumptions, statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate hypotheses using a combination of exploratory correlational tests and simple linear regressions. The data are presented in table format or by means of charts and other graphics, to provide an indication of scores and percentages according to related categories in order to provide readers with a clear outline of the particular grouping of sample data. Additionally, the visual presentation of data (tables, charts, and graphics) in numbers and percentages enabled the

researcher to offer an analytical description and interpretation of data by means of descriptive statistical procedures.

Preliminary Analyses: Basic Correlational Findings

This section provides a complete overview of correlations between key independent and dependent variables for Study 1. As indicated by Table 2 below, several key sociodemographic factors vary in association with *overall* and *identity work-related social media uses*. Statistically significant associations between sociodemographic, the Big Five, and cultural identity variables, and overall social media use (i.e., SMUIS) will first be reported, followed by a discussion of significant correlations between key independent variables and identity work-related social media uses (i.e., self-presentation, impression management, positive- and negative disclosure). Since the scales that were used to measure identity-focused uses of social media were based on participants' most frequently-used platform, this variable is thus collapsed. Further, since the category for those who chose "Other" as their most frequently-used platform comprised only *n* = 14 individuals, it was eliminated from further analyses.

Table 2. Correlations among study variables for Study 1.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1. Age	—																		
2. Sex	-.093	—																	
3. Country	.031	.102*	—																
4. Marital Status	.450**	.072	.122*	—															
5. Income	.145**	-.039	.039	.076	—														
6. Education	.312**	.017	.069	.221**	.320**	—													
7. Extraversion	.078	.019	.017	.102*	.149**	.080	—												
8. Neuroticism	-.316**	.070	.013	-.151**	-.197**	-.189**	-.329**	—											
9. Agreeableness	.104*	.217**	.050	.074	.097*	.104*	.212**	-.416**	—										
10. Openness	.261**	.203**	-.011	.115*	.169**	.172**	.280**	-.511**	.504**	—									
11. Conscientiousness	.005	.101*	.101*	.059	.008	.098*	.329**	-.088	.208**	.233**	—								
12. Ethnoracial ingroup	-.080	.099*	.116*	-.085	.039	.056	.134**	-.120*	.183**	.212**	.206**	—							
13. Religious ingroup	-.120*	.106*	.178**	-.025	.018	-.025	.190**	-.175**	.189**	.108*	.184**	.491**	—						
14. Religiosity	-.051	.081	.153**	.059	.036	.065	.160**	-.210**	.201**	.151**	.143**	.449**	.714**	—					
15. SMUIS	-.063	.086	-.152**	-.029	.041	-.171**	.081	.032	.041	.088	.058	.075	.092	.039	—				
16. Self-presentation	.094	.036	-.072	-.071	-.038	-.090	.152**	.020	.006	.101*	.247**	.148**	.119*	.117*	.631**	—			
17. Impression management	-.040	.007	.000	-.025	-.062	-.026	-.031	.153**	-.032	-.047	.097*	.077	.122*	.077	.300**	.243**	—		
18. Positive disclosure	-.074	.008	.024	-.063	-.047	-.081	.126**	-.039	.055	.169**	.110*	.169**	.079	.069	.478**	.578**	.177**	—	
19. Negative disclosure	.052	-.165**	-.052	-.066	-.108*	-.088	.059	.060	-.209**	-.081	.082	.070	.035	.021	.314**	.411**	.127**	.532**	—

Correlation below the dashed line were computed based on the data from the complete sample (n=435). *p = .05 level, ** p = .01 (2-tailed).

Exploring the associations between sociodemographic, personality, and cultural identity variables and *overall social media* use, which is operationalized as Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS) scores, two key sociodemographic variables stand out: country of residence and level of education. The coding of the country of residence variable suggests that Muslims who *reside in the U.S. are less likely* to engage in general social media use. Participants' education background is negatively associated with SMUIS, $r(433) = -.171$, p <0.01, with Muslim users of higher education levels being less likely to use social media overall. Neither the Big Five nor any of the three cultural identity variables (i.e., ethnoracial ingroup, Muslim ingroup, and religiosity) appear to significantly correlate with SMUIS.

Additional exploration of the associations between sociodemographic, personality, and cultural identity variables and across the four dimensions of *social media use for identity work* was conducted. As far as *self-presentation* is concerned, the only sociodemographic variable that it is significantly associated with is *marital status*, such that Muslims who identify as romantically *single* are more likely to use social media for self-presentation. For the Big Five and *self-presentation*, there is a significant positive relationship between participants' *extraversion* scores, r (433) = 0.15, p = 0.02, as well as their *openness to new experiences* scores, r (433) = 0.25, $p < 0.01$, and self-presentation. Regarding relationships between *cultural identity* and *self-presentation*, participants' *ethnoracial ingroup* identification (MEIM-E) and *religious ingroup* identification (MEIM-R) are positively correlated with *self-presentation*, r (433) = 0.15, p = 0.02 and r (433) = 0.12, p = 0.02, accordingly. Additionally, participants' *religiosity* scores are also positively associated with self-presentation, r (433) = 0.12, p = 0.02.

None of the sociodemographic factors appears to significantly associate with impression management*;* however, two dimensions of the Big Five, namely *neuroticism*, r (433) = 0.15, $p < 0.01$, and *openness to new experiences*, r (433) = 0.10, p = 0.04, are positively associated with *impression management*. Meanwhile, participants' *religious ingroup*

identification (MEIM-R) is the only cultural identity variable that is positively associated with *impression management*, r (433) = 0.12, p = 0.01.

None of the sociodemographic factors significantly influence *positive emotional disclosure* on social media and SNSs. However, three dimensions of the Big Five are positively associated with *positive disclosure*, namely *extraversion*, r(433) = 0.13, p = 0.01, *conscientiousness*, r(433) = 0.10, p = 0.04, and *openness to new experiences*, r(433) = 0.17, p < 0.01. In other words, participants who score higher in extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to new experience are more likely to engage social media for positive disclosure. On the other hand, only participants' *ethnoracial ingroup identification* is positively associated with *positive disclosure*, r(433) = 0.11, p = 0.02. This means that participants who identify more with their ethnoracial ingroup are more likely to engage social media and SNSs for positive emotional disclosure.

Finally, two sociodemographic variables show relationships with social media *negative emotional disclosure*—Muslim females and those reporting higher income brackets are less likely to use social media for negative disclosure. Further, regarding personality, participants' *agreeableness* is negatively associated with *negative disclosure*, r (433) = -.21, p < 0.01. No cultural identity variables are significantly correlated with negative disclosure.

Basic Trends in Social Media Use by Muslims in North America

According to the Pew Research Center report, approximately 3.45 million Americans are Muslim (roughly 1.1% of total U.S. population). A preliminary analysis of the total sample was conducted to obtain a holistic picture of social media use. A basic frequency analysis indicated that the top social media platforms that participants reported using were Facebook (n = 223), Instagram (n = 104), Twitter (n = 49), Snapchat (n = 32), and LinkedIn (n = 13). The remaining 14 respondents indicated other forms of social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Tumblr, YouTube). Among the participants surveyed, 42.3% reported being connected to

approximately 200 users/followers or less, while 26.6% reported an audience of over 500 people. Further, on their most frequently used social media platform, participants reported that, on average, they spend between 30 minutes to an hour daily on the platform.

For participants who chose Facebook as their most frequently used social media platform, 23.77% reported that wall posts were their favorite Facebook feature, followed by 17.4% who preferred the platform's status update feature, and 17.04% who chose Facebook's instant messenger. Among Instagram users, 56.73% reported photos as their most favorite platform feature, while 23.08% preferred Instagram stories, and 10.58% preferred the platform's global feed. For Twitter users, 57.14% and 28.57 % reported tweets and retweets as their favorite platform feature, accordingly, with only 14.29% selecting hashtag as their preferred feature.

To explore the patterns of social media use and SNS engagement across various racial and ethnic groups comprising North America's Muslim population, the race and ethnicity variable was condensed into five broad categories representing the main ethnoracial groups comprising the Muslim population in North America (Ajrouch, 2017). According to a survey by Pew Research Center, for the Muslim population living in the U.S., Arab/Middle Eastern (37%), South and Central Asian (32%), and African/Black descent (20%) together, make up more than three-quarters of the adult U.S. Muslim population (Ajrouch, 2017; Howell, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2017). In Canada, 3.4% of the population are Muslims (Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018), with people of South and Central Asian descent (36%) comprising more than a third of the Canadian Muslim population (McCoy, Kirova, & Knight, 2016). Meanwhile, Muslims of Arab/Middle Eastern heritage comprises a quarter (25%) of Canadian Muslims, while those who identify as Caucasian/White and African/Black make up 13% and 9% of the population, accordingly (Hamdani, 2015; Rahnema, 2008). Since there are considerable overlaps of ethnoracial patterns between the Muslim population in U.S. and Canada, current

sample followed these categories, with one notable exception—since the East Asian category consists of only $n = 13$ individuals, it was collapsed into the Other group in further analyses.

A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to determine differences in average scores of *overall* social media use, (i.e., SMUIS), as well as *identity work-related* social media use (i.e., self-presentation, impression management, positive disclosure, and negative disclosure) based on participants' race and ethnicity. The main effect of race and ethnicity was significant only for *positive emotional disclosure*, $F(4, 430) = 2.935$, $p = .021$. Tukey multiple comparisons performed at a 0.05 significance level found that for positive emotional disclosure, the average score for participants identifying as Arab/Middle Eastern ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.18$) was lower than that of Caucasian/White background ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.09$) (see Table 3).

Table 3. **Means (possible range 1-5), Standard Deviation and ANOVA results of overall and identity work-related social media use and SNS engagement across 5 racial and ethnic groups ($n = 435$)**

	South Asian ($n=141$)		Arab/Middle Eastern ($n=88$)		African /Black ($n=43$)		Caucasian/ White/ European ($n=72$)		Other ($n=91$)		ANOVA		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*F*	*Sig*
SMUIS	3.38	0.84	3.31	0.70	3.32	0.75	3.51	0.77	3.42	0.64	430	0.877	.477
Self-presentation	3.29	0.94	3.42	0.79	3.39	0.87	3.49	0.83	3.44	0.83	430	0.825	.510
Impression management	3.05	1.03	2.99	0.99	3.13	1.10	3.20	1.04	3.03	1.10	430	0.501	.735
Positive disclosure	3.19	1.09	2.97	1.18	3.32	1.13	3.49	1.09	3.40	0.96	430	2.935	.021
Negative disclosure	2.22	1.08	2.19	0.98	2.40	0.93	2.32	1.06	2.45	1.00	430	1.079	.366

Further, a series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to determine whether there is a difference in *average frequency of platform use* (1 = weekly or less, 5 = multiple times an hour) across participants' top four social media platforms and SNSs, namely Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, based on participants' race and ethnicity (*n* = 421). See Table 4. The main effect of race and ethnicity was significant for Instagram, *F* (4, 413) = 2.516, *p* = .041, and Snapchat, *F* (4, 411) = 3.801, *p* = .005. Tukey multiple comparisons performed at a 0.05 significance level found that the average frequency of use scores for Instagram users of Caucasian/White descent (*M* = 1.45, *SD* = 1.52) were significantly lower than those of Arab/Middle Eastern background (*M* = 2.26, *SD* = 1.62). Meanwhile, on Snapchat, the average frequency score for users of Arab/Middle Eastern descent (*M* = 1.70, *SD* = 1.77) differs significantly from those of Caucasian/White background (*M* = 0.79, *SD* = 1.38). While 70 out of 71 participants of Caucasian/White background indicated they use Snapchat, Muslim Snapchat users of Caucasian/White background do not appear to regularly use the platform.

Table 4. **Means, Standard Deviation, and ANOVA results of average frequency of use across top four social media platforms (1 = weekly or less, 6 = multiple times an hour) and ethnoracial groups (*n* = 421)**

	South and Central Asian		Arab/Middle Eastern		African /Black		Caucasian/ White/		Other		ANOVA		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*F*	*Sig*
Facebook	2.54	1.53	2.60	1.43	2.53	1.67	2.71	1.50	2.10	1.61	415	1.156	.330
Instagram	1.82	1.80	2.24	1.61	2.09	1.78	1.43	1.52	1.73	1.58	413	2.516	.041
Twitter	1.20	1.53	0.99	0.33	1.12	1.47	1.10	1.40	1.42	1.73	413	1.325	.260
Snapchat	1.12	1.50	1.69	1.76	1.02	1.50	0.77	1.38	1.03	1.43	411	3.809	.005

Main Analyses: Research Questions and Hypotheses Tests

To test RQ1-RQ4 and H1-H10, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used. Analyses followed the theoretical trifecta of identity, in which identity consists of three key

facets—sociodemographic categories, personality, and culture. In keeping with this theoretical model, sociodemographic factors, the Big Five, and cultural identity were simultaneously regressed onto the specific dependent variables. For ease, the analyses examining general social media use (SMUIS) are presented first, followed by each of the four dimensions of the social media identity work variables (self-presentation, impression management, positive- and negative emotional disclosure). Please see Table 5 below for a visual summary of the OLS regressions with sociodemographic, personality traits, and cultural factors entered as independent variables, and overall- (i.e., SMUIS), as well as identity work-related uses of social media (i.e. self-presentation, impression management, positive- and negative emotional disclosure) entered as criterions. Additionally, please see Table 6 for a summary of findings relationships between the Big Five and social media use (i.e., H1-H12).

Table 5. **OLS regression models showing effects of sociodemographic, personality, and cultural factors on overall and identity work-related uses of social media (*n* = 421)**

	SMUIS	Self-Presentation	Impression Management	Positive Disclosure	Negative Disclosure
Intercept (LS Grand Mean)	3.39	3.41	3.07	3.28	2.31
Sex	0.06	0.02	-0.03	-0.04	-0.12*
Age	-0.02	-0.02	0.05	-0.09	0.14**
Country	-0.18***	-0.10*	-0.03	0.02	-0.06
Income	0.03	0.01	-0.03	-0.06	-0.08
Education	-0.20***	-0.09	-0.00	-0.09	-0.07
Partner status	-0.07	0.08	0.02	-0.05	0.07
Extraversion	0.06	0.09	-0.03	0.07	0.08
Neuroticism	0.09	0.06	0.20***	-0.03	0.04
Agreeableness	-0.02	-0.09	-0.01	-0.01	-0.23**
Openness	0.04	0.21***	0.10	0.13*	0.09*
Conscientiousness	0.11	0.10	0.03	0.08	0.01
Religious ingroup	0.12	-0.01	0.15*	0.00	0.04
Ethnoracial ingroup	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.06	0.10
RSexeligiosity	-0.05	0.08	0.01	0.01	0.02

*Notes: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. β coefficients are standardized.*

Table 6. **Summary of the hypotheses testing results for the Big Five and sex (*n* = 421)**

Hypothesis		Results
H1:	Extraversion → SMUIS (+)	Rejected
H2:	Neuroticism → SMUIS (+)	Rejected
H3:	Agreeableness → SMUIS (+)	Rejected
H4:	Openness to new experience → SMUIS (+)	Rejected
H5:	Conscientiousness → SMUIS (-)	Rejected
H6:	Extraversion → Identity work (+)	Rejected
H7:	Neuroticism → Identity work (+)	Supported
H8:	Openness to new experiences → Identity work (+)	Supported
H9:	Conscientiousness → Identity work (-)	Rejected
H10:	Agreeableness → Identity work (-)	Supported
Post-Hoc 1:	Sex → Cultural identity (+)	Partially Supported
Post-Hoc 2:	Sex → Identity work (+)	Partially Supported

General social media use (SMUIS). To examine how identity influenced general social media use, participants' SMUIS scores were entered as the criterion variables in the regression model with identity measures entered simultaneously as the independent variables. All assumptions were examined and satisfied. The risk for multicollinearity was assessed for the model and was deemed acceptable, as tolerance scores ranged from .420 to .934 and variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged between 1.07 and 2.34.

Results indicated that country of residence, b = -.272, p < .001, and education level, b = -.209, p < .001, were negatively related to participants' general social media use, suggesting that Muslim users who reside in the U.S. and are of a higher educational background are less likely to use social media overall.

Social media for self-presentation. Following the same analytic strategy, the three dimensions of identity were entered as independent variables with self-presentation as the criterion variable. All assumptions were examined and satisfied. The risk for multicollinearity was assessed for the model and was deemed acceptable. Tolerance scores ranged from .420 to .934 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged between 1.07 and 2.38. Results indicated that country of residence, b = -.173, p = .042, was again negatively related to participants'

social media use for self-presentation, while participants' openness scores were positively related to self-presentation use of social media, $b = .330$, $p < .001$. Muslim social media users who reside in the U.S. were less likely to use social media for general self-disclosure (i.e., "share information about my views, opinions, moral values", "express who I really am", and "inform others about my interests"). On the other hand, Muslim users who are higher in openness scores are more likely to use social media in self-presentation.

Social media for impression management. Replicating the same analytic strategy as above, the three dimensions of identity were entered as independent variables with impression formation as the criterion variable. All assumptions were examined and satisfied. The risk for multicollinearity was assessed for the model and was deemed acceptable. Tolerance scores ranged from .420 to .934 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged between 1.07 and 2.38. Results indicated that neuroticism, $b = .262$, $p = .002$, and religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R), $b = .178$, $p = .042$, were positively associated with participants' social media use for impression management. Muslim social media users who are more neurotic and identify more with their Muslim ingroup are more concerned about creating a favorable impression on social media.

Social media for positive emotional disclosure. Following the same analytic strategy as above, the three dimensions of identity were entered as independent variables with positive emotional disclosure as the criterion variable. All assumptions were examined and satisfied. The risk for multicollinearity was assessed for the model and was deemed acceptable. Tolerance scores ranged from .420 to .934 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged between 1.07 and 2.38. Results indicated that openness, $b = .252$, $p = .016$, was positively related to participants' social media use for positive emotional disclosure. Muslim social media users who are higher in the openness trait are more likely to share positive valence content on social media.

Social media for negative emotional disclosure. Finally, the three dimensions of identity were entered as independent variables with negative emotional disclosure as the criterion variable. All assumptions were examined and satisfied. The risk for multicollinearity was assessed for the model and was deemed acceptable. Tolerance scores ranged from .420 to .934 and the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged between 1.07 and 2.38. Results indicated that age, $b = .014$, $p = .011$, is positively related, while sex, $b = -.271$, $p = .018$, and agreeableness, $b = -.378$, $p < .001$, were negatively associated with participants' social media use for negative emotional disclosure. Muslim social media users who are older are more likely to share self-relevant negative emotional content on social media, while those who identify as female and those who are more agreeable are less likely to do so.

Additional Analyses: Sex & Gender

Though there were no specific associations between sex and social media use as determined above, additional analyses were conducted to see if Muslim males and females differed on other key characteristics of identity. Prior studies have documented how sex predicts differences in religious involvement such that females are more likely than males to find religion a mainstay in their lives, as demonstrated by women's higher frequency of church/mosque/temple attendance (e.g., Cornwall, 1989; Mogahed & Chouhoud, 2017; Mohamed & Smith, 2017; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Taylor et al. 2003, 2014). In this respect, the life course perspective explains the gender gap in religiosity as a function of gender labor division in the family, such as marriage and parenthood (Ahzi & Ehrenberg, 1975; Roth & Kroll, 2007; Sherkat, 1998). Jamal's (2005) study on collective identity and Arab American Muslims, for example, found Muslim women to be more actively involved in mosques and ethnic associations, as well as Arab ethnic advocacy initiatives, than Muslim men.

These patterns, Jamal (2005) argued, are consistent with women's overall role as communal guardians, which other scholars elsewhere have posited to be a response to life

stressors and challenges (Ennis, Kelly, & Lambert, 2001; Ferraro & Kelley-Moore, 2000). Based on this pattern, the following hypotheses are therefore presented for additional analyses:

Post-Hoc 1: Muslim women in North America are more likely than Muslim men to demonstrate higher levels of cultural identity (ethnoracial, religious ingroup, and religiosity).

Post-Hoc 2: Sex has an indirect effect on social media use for identity work such that Muslim females who have stronger *cultural identity* than males are therefore more likely to use social media and social network sites for (a) self-presentation, (b) impression management, (c) positive- and (d) negative disclosure.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted for the first additional analysis. Results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two sexes in religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R) scores, $F (1, 419) = 5.660$, $p = 0.02$, with female respondents having reported a higher average MEIM-R score ($M = 3.98$) than their male counterpart ($M = 3.76$). Further, while Muslim females have also reported greater average ethnoracial ingroup identification (MEIM-E) scores ($M = 3.85$) than their male counterpart ($M = 3.67$), the differences were only marginally significant, $F (1, 419) = 3.602$, $p = 0.06$. Finally, there is no statistically significant differences between the two sexes in religiosity (RCI-10) scores, $F (1, 419) = 2.859$, $p = 0.09$. Taken together, Muslim females residing in North America were found to demonstrate higher identification with the Muslim community than their male counterpart, but they did not differ along the ethnoracial ingroup and religiosity dimensions.

The second post-hoc analysis examined the predicted indirect effect of sex on social media use for identity work such that compared to males, female respondents who have stronger *cultural identity* (i.e., MEIM-E, MEIM-R, and RCI-10 scores) would be more likely to use social media and social network sites for (a) self-presentation, (b) impression management, (c) positive- and (d) negative disclosure. Four separate mediation analyses were

conducted using conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2017; PROCESS Macro v. 3.1, model

4). Figure 1 shows the conceptual model.
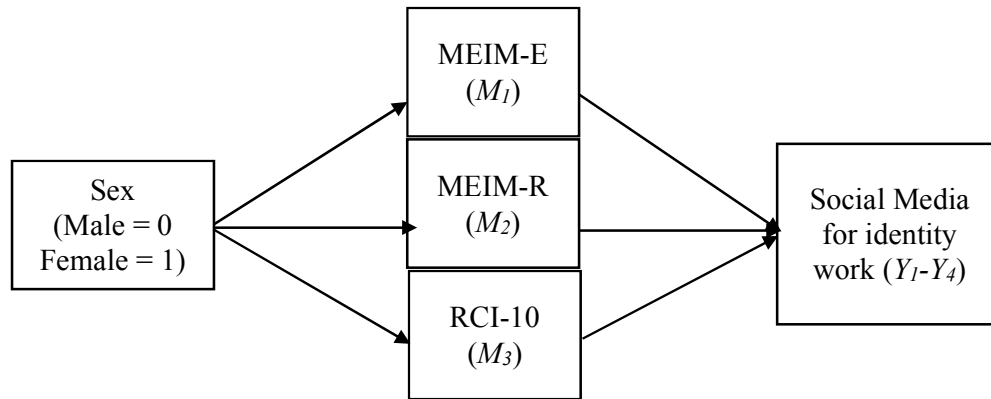
Figure 1. **Conceptual model for mediation analysis**.

While Study 1 did not focus on sex effects, post-hoc analyses found some evidence of

differences between Muslim social media users who identify as male and those who identify

as female. In post-hoc 1, for example, Muslim female respondents demonstrated higher

religious ingroup identification overall, but no significant differences were found along the

other two dimensions of cultural identity (i.e., ethnoracial ingroup and religiosity). However,

for post-hoc 2, while results of the mediation analysis indicated that sex effects were trending

towards significance through the M_2 (MEIM-R) path, they had failed to reach the statistically

significance threshold. The null findings for the two post-hoc analyses above may be further

illuminated through future research, particularly Study 2's in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Discussion

The objective of Study 1 was to examine the associations between individual identity

and social media use among Muslim adults living in the U.S. and Canada. Study 1 was designed

and launched as a structured online survey study as a way to (1) fill a lacuna where basic

sociodemographic trends and descriptive patterns of social media use were missing for users

who identify as Muslim or belonging to the Islamic faith, (2) provide data that would allow us

to perform comparative observations across broader populations (of social media users) in

North America, and (3) provide important baseline information upon which Study 2 (which looks at the individual level of social media uses) will be subsequently launched.

Further, Study 1 was designed following identity scholarship positing that sociodemographic characteristics, personality traits, and culture form a trifecta of individual difference variables responsible for human behavior (Hogan & Bond, 2009). According to this perspective, while personality traits operate as an internal pressure on individual behavior (through goal-seeking behavior, cognitive activity, emotional reactions, and communicative behavior), culture functions as an external force on the individual through normative socialization (LeVine, 2007). Similar to culture, sociodemographic factors exert external pressure on the individual through life contexts and social circumstances influencing individuals' self-processes, such as cognition, affect, needs, and motivations (DeYoung, 2015; Taber & Whittaker, 2018). To this effect, and as demonstrated in the discussions that follow, Study 1 findings highlight the utility of the trifecta model of human behavior. Most notably, individuals' social media use patterns were found to have roots in personality traits, sociodemographic characteristics, and cultural identification—thereby extending past work on identity and social media research.

Additionally, instead of relying on a single measure of social media use to assess overall engagement, Study 1 examined more focused uses of social media, namely for identity work, which was assessed through multiple measures. This strategy allows us to attain a relatively more granular, detailed understanding of social media behavior. In the following section, I will discuss some of the important findings of Study 1 along with its implications on the three aforementioned objectives. First, a discussion on descriptive data of social media use within the Muslim population will be presented. An overview of important highlights of sociodemographic factors, personality traits, and cultural identity vis-à-vis social media use

will then follow. This section will then conclude with an overview of Study 1 implications for future research, specifically Study 2's in-depth semi-structured interviews.

Descriptive Trends with Social Media Use Among North America's Muslims

In the current sample, four of five major social media platforms were shown to be popular among Muslim users in Study 1: (1) Facebook (52.7%), (2) Instagram (24.9%), (3) Twitter (11.6%), and (4) Snapchat (7.6%). These patterns are consistent with social media use within the broader American adult population, where Facebook has been the primary platform for most people across a wide range of demographic groups and has been so for years (Smith & Anderson, 2018). These current trends also resonate with the patterns of social media use among the Canadian adult population more broadly (Gruzd, Jacobson, Mai & Dubois, 2017). Facebook's popularity across demographic and geographic lines may be a function of market saturation. Additionally, Instagram's ranking second among Muslim users seems to correspond with broader trends in usership of the platform overall. Pew Research Social Media, for example, reported a notable increase in the number of Instagram users where 35% of American adults now claim to use the platform in 2018, which is a 7% increase from 2016 (Smith & Anderson, 2018; Stanley, 2015). Duncan (2016), Lang (2015), and Matthews (2014) have further suggested that younger users are migrating from Facebook to Instagram and Snapchat. Rather curiously, however, the overall patterns of social media usership appear to diverge in Canada, where even though 84% of the adult population still use Facebook, YouTube is the second most popular platform (59%), with Twitter (42%) and Instagram (37%) ranking fourth and sixth, accordingly (Gruzd et al., 2017).

Similarly, consistent with broader social media use patterns in the U.S., Muslim social media users in this sample most often reported actively maintaining three social media accounts (29.7%), while others indicated they maintain four (23.9%) and two accounts (19.8%). According to Smith and Anderson (2018), these trends follow broader patterns—with the

typical American between the ages of 30 and 49 using three social media platforms, and those between 18 and 29 typically using four platforms. Hence, within the Muslim population of social media users, age seems to be a predictive factor as far as social media membership goes, with those who are younger in age (i.e., digital natives) being more likely to use multiple social media platforms. Considering how 35% of the Muslim American population are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Mohammed, 2017), the patterns we see among Study 1 participants (*Median* age = 31) are therefore largely consistent.

On their most frequently-used social media platform, Study 1 participants reported having spent a daily average of between 45 minutes to over an hour of use. In a recent study using a sample of university students in the Midwest ($N = 396$), Alhabash and Ma (2017) found that participants (*M* age = 22 years) had spent the greatest amount of time on Instagram ($M = 108.73$ minutes, $SD = 101.55$), followed by Facebook ($M = 106.35$ minutes, $SD = 94.65$), and Twitter ($M = 88.92$ minutes, $SD = 104.14$). For Study 1 participants, however, Facebook remains the top platform where users reported having spent the greatest amount of time on a daily basis (~ 60 minutes), followed by Twitter (~ 45 minutes), and Instagram (~ 30 minutes). These trends are to some extent similar to the duration patterns among Canadian users (43% of which are between the ages of 18 and 44 years), where Facebook was reported to have had the highest percentage (79%) of daily users (Gruzd, et al., 2017).

Of the surveyed participants who reported using Facebook, 52.7% say they access their accounts daily, which is less than the reported use frequency of Facebook users within the broader population of American (74%) and Canadian (79%) adults (Guzd et al., 2017; Smith & Anderson, 2018). Similarly, 37.5% of the Muslim sample reported daily usage of Instagram, which is significantly less frequent than the frequency reported for Instagram users within the broader American (60%) and Canadian (61%) populations (Guzd et al., 2017; Smith & Anderson, 2018). While 46% of Americans and 45% of Canadians who use Twitter claimed

they access their accounts daily (Guzd et al., 2017; Smith & Anderson, 2018), only 21.6% of Muslim Twitter users reported daily usage of the platform.

Overall, the microblogging platform Twitter does not appear to be as popular nor the most preferred platform for Muslim users that were surveyed in Study 1, which is similar to Bahfen's (2018) findings in her qualitative study of social media use among Muslims in the U.S, and Australia, where only 22% of those interviewed reported using Twitter. Considering how social media platforms vary in features and affordances, specifically in levels of privacy and publicness, as well as modalities of content they encourage (Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2018), it is possible that Twitter attracts particular personality types among Muslim users as it does for the population at large. As a platform, Twitter is largely considered a public one where nonreciprocal following is facilitated (Marwick & boyd, 2011) and is therefore more likely to contain weak ties (i.e., acquaintances, casual contacts, and strangers, Haythornthwaite, 2005) than strong ones.

The more public and anonymous nature of Twitter as a platform may also exacerbate the frequency of anti-Muslim harassments online, which may account for its lower rates of use among U.S. Muslims. Awan (2014), for example, has not only argued that anti-Muslim hate, prejudice, discrimination, and threats were increasingly common on Twitter, but has also come up with a typology of Islamophobic rhetoric on the platform. Further, in a study exploring the impacts of Islamophobia for Muslims in Southeast Michigan, Eckert, Wallace, Metzger-Riftkin, and Kolhoff (2018) found that participants, particularly women, were wary of Twitter due to the increasingly political nature of contents circulated on the platform. Awan and Zempi (2016) have moreover argued that for those who have been subjected to anti-Muslim hostility, isolating online threats from offline intimidation and harassment have proven to be difficult. In effect, Muslims who live as an underrepresented population and are often *Other*-ed in the

West, may end up living in a state of perpetual fear, which can also translate into their social media platform preferences and related behavioral patterns of usage and adoption rates.

Additionally, Twitter's 280-character limit per text message seems to have facilitated its evolution into a platform that is popular for users' more immediate and short commentaries on personal and contemporary affairs as they happen in real-time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012). Liu, Cheung, and Lee (2010) have additionally found that Twitter users are primarily motivated to use the platform by the affordances it offers for information sharing and social interaction, while Park (2013) posited that mobilization and public expression are the main motivations for Twitter users who are opinion leaders. Other scholars, such as Naveed et al. (2011) and Thelwall et al. (2011), have further argued that the particular characteristics of Twitter have influenced the emotional valence of content on the platform such that Twitter contents are more negative overall. Interestingly, the average neuroticism score among Study 1 participants who have indicated Twitter as their most frequently-used social media platform is significantly higher ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.82$) than those who chose Facebook ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.79$) or Instagram ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.70$). This suggests that as a platform, Twitter appeals more to Muslim social media users who are trait-wise more neurotic.

As far as specific social media activity goes, 42% of respondents reported that they post new content on a weekly basis or less, while 4.8% say they update their accounts hourly. Additionally, 40.9% of users reported they comment on other users' account updates and public threads on a daily basis. Similarly, on their most frequently-used social media platforms, a significant portion of Muslim social media users (75.2%) engage in lurking behavior and use their social media accounts to send (43.5%) and receive messages (49.3%) daily, as well as use social media as a form of entertainment (54.8%). While a significant portion of the population of Muslim users engage social media as a form of social surveillance, they are also using social media platforms for communication and social interaction, in addition to entertainment

purposes. Taken together, these numbers suggest that the trends and patterns of social media use among Muslim social media users do not significantly depart from the broader adult population of social media users in North America. Results also appear to further confirm the influence of sociodemographic background factors, such as age, in shaping patterns of social media use more broadly—a discussion to which we now turn.

Sociodemographic Factors and Social Media Use

The most interesting finding with regard to sociodemographic factors was the relationship between country of residence and overall social media use (SMUIS), with U.S. Muslims displaying less intensity of social media use compared to their Canadian counterpart. One possible explanation for this difference in social media use is Islamophobia, particularly *cyber*-Islamophobia, which corresponds to internet-mediated speech acts that perpetuate irrational fear of Islam and Muslims (Eckert, et al., 2018; Aguilera-Carnerero & Azeez, 2016). Despite Islamophobia's long history in the U.S., many have argued it has reached unprecedented heights following the 2016 presidential elections with 6% of reported incidents of harassments logged by the Southern Poverty Law Center within the first 10 days following the election were anti-Muslim—not few invoking Republican president Donald Trump's name (Eckert et al., 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Further, Eckert et al. (2018) have noted not only a high number of anti-Muslim messages but also an increasingly ubiquitous Islamophobic rhetoric being circulated online across platforms. As such, the increasingly hostile sociopolitical climate writ-large, and online more specifically, may lead U.S. Muslims to avoid more extensive engagement of social media and SNSs—perhaps as a way of coping or managing a threatened identity.

Additionally, sex was another sociodemographic factor associated with negative emotional disclosure, which is an aspect of social media use for identity work. Muslim females in this sample were less likely to use social media and SNSs for negative disclosure regardless

of platform types. These effects may be influenced by gender-related social norms: According to a study by Chen (2015), women's use of social media more generally is motivated by a desire for recreation, which is commonly associated with positive emotions. Further, in a recent study exploring social norms of emotional expression in social media among Dutch users, compared to men, women were more likely to express positive emotions in more public social media channels (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and reserve negative emotional disclosure for more private social media platforms like Whatsapp (Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter & Valkenburg, 2018). Consistent with Waterloo et al. (2018), it is quite possible that among Muslim users in Study 1, female respondents did not consider negative emotional disclosure to be normatively appropriate on social media channels that are more public in nature.

Finally, race and ethnicity appear to be an additional demographic factor influencing the use of social media for identity work, specifically positive emotional disclosure. For example, Muslim users who are of Caucasian/White background appear more likely to use social media for positive emotional disclosure than users of Arab/Middle Eastern background. Compared to other racial and ethnic groups within the Muslim population, Arab/Middle Eastern cultural descent social media users are less likely to use social media for positive emotional disclosure. One possible explanation to this is the commonly held cultural belief in *malicious or destructive envy*, particularly among Arab/Middle Eastern populations (Khan & Ghani, 2018). According to Khan and Ghani (2018), malicious envy is personal discontentment and extreme hatred that arises upon seeing someone else who is better off (e.g., in fortune, health, and looks), which many believe can attract the malevolent glare (i.e., *the evil eye*) of the envier that may be harmful and even destructive to those who are envied. Lambert, Passmore, and Joshanloo (2018) have also noted how within certain Muslim cultures, the expression of happiness is widely considered an attempt to entice fate and invite *the evil eye*. Hence, Muslim social media users of Arab/Middle Eastern background may intentionally avoid

disclosing positive emotions on social media as a way of averting jealousy from others and potential harm to themselves.

Personality Traits and Social Media Use

Overall, Study 1 participants who use social media and SNSs are considerably higher in openness to new experiences ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.55$), appear to be more extraverted ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.80$), more agreeable ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.63$), and more neurotic ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.80$), but less conscientious ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 0.68$) than the broader U.S. population of social media users surveyed in previous studies (Bogg, 2017). Rather surprisingly, none of the Big Five dimensions were significantly associated with Study 1 participants' *overall* use of social media (SMUIS). These findings are somewhat of a departure from previous studies (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Bogg, 2017; Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuñiga, 2010; Gosling et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2009), which have found some considerable independent and interdependent associations between specific dimensions of the Big Five, such as extraversion, openness to new experiences, and neuroticism scores, and their use of social media and SNSs. Bogg (2017) and Gosling et al. (2011), for example, have found the extraversion trait to be independently predictive of social media membership, specifically Facebook and frequency of use. Correa, Hinsley, and de Zuñiga (2010), on the other hand, have found the openness trait to correlate with greater social media use. For Study 1 participants, neither of the Big Five were predictive of SMUIS.

A number of factors may influence the current findings among Study 1 participants, one of which appears to correspond with SMUIS as a behavioral measurement scale for overall social media use. While SMUIS (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013) was specifically developed as an answer to the call for measurements assessing not only basic descriptive estimates of uses (e.g., frequency/intensity) but also capturing the integration of social media into one's social behavior and routines, as well as one's emotional connection to the media

thereof (i.e., Ellison et al., 2007), social media integration may either be a separate construct from behavioral frequency of use altogether or that behavioral measures may be a weaker means of operationalizing social media use and its integration (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013, p. 47). As a reminder, SMUIS is a 10-item scale assessing *engaged social media usage*, the *emotional attachment of using social media*, and *how integrated social media is in users' social habits* with questions, such as, "I prefer to communicate with others mainly through social networking websites", "I enjoy checking my social media accounts", and "I respond to contents others share on social media" on a 5-item Likert scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Additionally, it is possible that for Study 1 participants, personality traits are not sufficient in and of themselves as independent predictors of overall social media use as measured by SMUIS. For SMUIS in particular, it may be necessary to look at personality traits in conjunction with sociodemographic and cultural identity variables.

Additionally, Muslim social media users' elevated scores in *openness to new experiences* were found to influence more focused uses of social media and SNSs, such as self-presentation ($b = .330$, $SE_b = .080$, $p < 0.001$), impression management ($b = .189$, $SE_b = .102$, $p = 0.064$), and both positive- ($b = .252$, $SE_b = .104$, $p = 0.016$) and negative emotional disclosures ($b = .173$, $SE_b = .096$, $p = 0.074$). Considering how within Bogg's (2017) study, *openness to new experiences* was not found to independently predict social media membership, the patterns we are seeing with respect to identity-focused social media use within the Muslim population suggest that when a finer measure of social media use is employed, results can unveil more specific associations between identity and online behavior. Study 1 findings on the role of the openness trait appear to approximate previous studies that examine more focused social media use such as Ryan and Xenos' study (2011) that revealed some correlation between the openness trait and the use of social media for news and information. Further, it is possible that previous studies have failed to identify significant independent and interdependent

associations between the openness trait and social media use as a result of the latter's operationalization. Within the context of Study 1, participants' openness scores appear to correspond with *focused* social media use for identity work, with no significant associations found between the trait and *overall* social media use (SMUIS).

Furthermore, previous studies have found that individuals high in the *openness* trait experience less worry and stress due to perceiving their surrounding environment as being novel and exciting instead of threatening (e.g., Williams et al., 2009). Additionally, *openness* correlates with "the extent people perceive a situation to contain intellectual engagement, cognitive demands, deep reflection, and the display of intellectual prowess" (Rauthmann et al., 2014, p. 704), suggesting that *openness* is related to deeper reflection of one's larger context or environment. As such, while [*cyber-*] Islamophobia may be a threatening context for some Muslim social media users, it is also plausible that such contexts are construed more as an opportunity to engage and educate hostile others. As Eckert et al.'s (2018) study highlights, over two-thirds of Muslim male and female participants have indicated they engage in the *act of educating* (i.e., "correcting" Islamophobic rhetoric and "inviting" aggressors to learn about Islam) as a response to and a way of coping with Islamophobia online.

The *openness* trait has largely been associated with curiosity, spontaneity, and a desire to enhance the breadth and depth of experienced ideas and views (Chorley, Whitaker, & Allen, 2015). It has also been associated with the tendency to be more flexible in cognition and behavior (Feist, 2018), as well as emotional flexibility (Lambie, 2014). Previous studies have also found some correlations between more open individuals and their tendency to effectively manage their emotions and minimize worry and concern (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2015; Spink, Green & Jorgensen, 2014; Williams et al., 2009). This suggests that higher scores in *openness* among Muslim users may render their approach toward the social media arena as being more

optimistic than those who are less open to new experiences—finding greater flexibility in their use of social media for identity expression online thereby.

Lastly, among Study 1 participants, the openness trait is significantly correlated with number of friends and followers that participants are connected to on their most frequently-used platform. Within this sample, *extraversion* is similarly associated with the size of social network one has on social media, which aligns with Kosinski et al.'s (2014) study. Muslim social media users who are more open and extraverted appear to have a larger network of friends and followers. These findings appear to approximate not only previous research on personality traits and people's network size on social media more generally (e.g., Blackwell, Leaman, Tramposch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017; Quercia et al., 2012; Seidman, 2013; Selden & Goodie, 2018), but also hints at the advantages of the cybernetic Big Two model of personality (Feist, 2018) as an explanatory framework of both *overall* and *focused* social media behavior.

As Feist (2018) posited, the cybernetic Big Two model operates on the idea of two broad clusters of higher-order personality traits, namely openness and extraversion (i.e., *Plasticity*) on one end, and neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (i.e., *Stability*) on the other. Lin, Lee, Jin, and Gilbraith (2017), for example, found that participants' extraversion and openness influence their motivations for using Facebook and Pinterest pertaining to socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information seeking. Since existing personality and social media research have largely explored the role of the cybernetic Big Five in examining approach and avoidance behavior, Study 1 findings appear to suggest the need for future studies to engage higher-order personality trait models, such as the Big Two, in their investigations.

In addition to the openness trait, neuroticism was also found to significantly predict the use of social media for impression management, while agreeableness was significantly predictive of negative disclosure. Muslim social media users who are more neurotic are more

likely to use social media for impression management, while those who are more agreeable are less likely to use social media for negative emotional disclosure. This set of findings appears to approximate previous studies on personality traits and social media use (Lin et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2013; Seidman, 2013). Neuroticism, which is a subcomponent of stability, has been associated with low tolerance to worry and stress (Costa & McCrae, 1992), self-consciousness and impulsiveness (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997), and high sensitivity to threat and rejection (Bansal & Gefen, 2010; Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). In terms of online behavior, high neuroticism translates into the tendency to self-disclose hidden aspects of the self and social media use for surveillance purposes (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, & Fox, 2002; Seidman, 2013), as well as the use of more negative words in status and content updates (Schwartz et al., 2013). Further, neurotic individuals are concerned and anxious about self-presentation (Seidman, 2013; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). The combination of high neuroticism and low self-esteem, for example, have been found to correlate with individuals' motivation to maintain a positive self-presentation on social media (Lin et al., 2017). As such, the association found between neuroticism and impression management for Muslim social media users appears consistent with existing research.

Agreeableness, on the other hand, has been associated with the extent to which individuals are altruistic, cooperative, sympathetic, forgiving, and trustful (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). It has also been found to correlate with traits indicative of politeness, such as pleasantness and nurturance—both of which are associated with tendencies of respecting and pleasing others (Hirsch, DeYoung, Xu, & Peterson, 2010). Further, Rauthmann et al. (2014) found a significant and positive correlation between agreeableness and *sociality* behavioral correlates, which concerns the extent to which individuals perceive an environment as containing elements of socializing, communicating, pleasant interaction, interpersonal warmth, relationship formation, and reassurance.

While some researchers have failed to find any association between the agreeableness trait and overall online social network uses (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), others have argued that these characteristics translate online into focused social media uses and motivations, such as self-presentation and social interaction (Moore & McElroy, 2012; Zhang, Feng, & Chen, 2018). For example, *agreeableness* has been found to positively correlate with self-presentation (e.g., emotional disclosure) and social interaction (e.g., forming and maintaining relationships), with highly agreeable individuals demonstrating a greater need for social interaction than self-presentation (Zhang, Feng, & Chen, 2018). On the other hand, Moore and McElroy (2012) found that highly agreeable individuals express greater levels of regret regarding inappropriate contents they may have posted on Facebook and were found to more frequently express positive emotions in their social media posts (Schwartz et al., 2013), in addition to posting more pictures expressing positive moods (Liu, Preotiuc-Pietro, Samani, Moghaddam, & Ungar, 2016).

Furthermore, it may be worthwhile to note at this point of Bazarova, Taft, Choi, and Cosley's (2013), as well as Bazarova et al.'s (2015) study, both of which highlighted the intrinsic value people attach to positive emotional content and the resulting positivity bias of self-disclosure on particular social media platforms, such as Facebook. In other words, as much as individual differences may influence self-disclosure and social media uses (e.g., Zhang, Feng, & Chen, 2018), social norms may equally dictate particular types of self-disclosure on social media platforms, specifically emotional self-disclosures (e.g., Bazarova et al., 2015). Taking into consideration behavioral correlates of agreeable individuals, which include a greater need to belong and an elevated drive for social interactions (e.g., Zhang, Feng, & Chen, 2018), social media users who are more agreeable may be more sensitive to the norms governing emotional disclosures on social media. As such, within the context of Study 1,

participants who are more agreeable may be less likely to disclose negative emotional contents as a way of conforming to existing social norms of social media use.

Taken together, the openness to new experiences trait appears to be driving much of social media and SNS use for Study 1 participants, with other Big Five dimensions, such as extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism influencing certain outcomes to varying extents. While some of Study 1 findings are by and large consistent with existing corpus of personality and social media use literature, the curious role of the openness trait in driving more focused uses of social media within the population of Muslim users is an important theoretical contribution in personality, communication, and sociological research. Additionally, by looking at *identity work*-related uses of social media, such as impression management and negative emotional disclosure, Study 1 findings have not only highlighted the utility of the Big Five personality model but have also suggested the need for future research to examine social media engagement using a higher-order personality model, such as the Big Two. Moving forward, studies exploring personality traits and social media use would need to examine the phenomena in more granular ways.

Cultural identity and social media use

While scholarship exploring the impact of sociodemographic factors and personality traits on social media and SNS use is growing, Study 1 has been a modest attempt at expanding our examination of social media and SNSs use to include cultural identity variables alongside demographic and social resource factors, and the Big Five personality traits. The results, however, have been mixed. For *overall* social media and SNS use, none of the cultural identity variables (i.e., MEIM-E, MEIM-R, & RCI-10) were associated with SMUIS scores. For *focused* uses of social media and SNS, however, certain cultural identity variables are more influential than others. Even though none of the cultural identity variables were related to self-

presentation and positive emotional disclosure, religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R) is significantly associated with impression management.

Participants' religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R) appears to be the only cultural variable that is predictive of social media and SNS use for impression management. These findings seem to provide further support for previous studies on the impacts of Islamophobia, such as by Eckert et al. (2018). The sustained prejudice and discrimination against Muslims (as well as the longstanding misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims in the West, more broadly) appears to have impacted individual members of the Muslim population so much so that as a collective, Muslim social media users leave behavioral traces suggesting that they carry the burden of *respectable self [re-]presentation*. Respectability politics (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993) refers to a spectrum of attitudes, behaviors, and strategies adopted by subordinated groups as a way of countering negative stereotypes and a tool of social mobility (Wolcott, 2013).

In introducing the concept of "politics of respectability", Higginbotham (1993) argued that for much of the 20th century, African American women had engaged in the act of strategic self-presentation by presenting themselves as being respectful and sexually modest to push back against the negative portrayals that the White middle class had espoused vis-à-vis African American women, such as immorality and sexual promiscuity. Harris (2003, p. 213) further posited that in the context of African Americans, respectability politics were targeted towards two main audiences: African Americans, "who were encouraged to be respectable", and Caucasians, "who needed to be shown that African Americans could be respectable". Pitcan, Marwick, and boyd (2018) further extended the application of respectability politics to the digital realm as they investigated the use of social media as an upward mobility tool among young New Yorkers of low socio-economic status. Considering the relatively low social status of the Muslim identity in the West, specifically in the U.S., the performance of respectability

among Muslims in non-mediated contexts—what Eckert et al. (2018) had highlighted as an act of being "the best damn representation of Islam"—appears to also manifest in online behavior through their engagement of social media and SNSs.

Implications for Study 2

Study 1 has provided us with a broad illustration of patterns and trends of social media and SNS use among a population of adult Muslim users in North America upon which Study 2 is built to explore even further. Of the demographic and socioeconomic resource factors that were found to be influential in social media use for identity work, age, sex, country of residence, race and ethnicity, and education level were found to be especially salient. As far as the Big Five dimensions are concerned, openness to new experiences, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were important traits driving identity work-related social media use. For cultural identity variables, religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R) was the most influential factor in identity work-related social media and SNS use and worthy of more detailed examination.

Readers should particularly take note of how Study 1 findings highlight the intersectional nature of identity, particularly among North America's Muslim population. Contrary to popular rhetoric and media depictions of Muslims as a monolithic *Other*, the Muslim population more widely, and Muslim social media users more specifically, are inherently diverse and heterogenous, with varying behavioral patterns largely approximating the broader adult population of social media users in North America. Moving forward, a qualitative examination employing an intersectional approach to identity (Crenshaw, 1995; Collins, 2000) that further explores the intersectional nature of Muslim identity and how it manifests in social media use within this population is pertinent and becomes the underlying motivation for Study 2, the findings of which are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: MUSLIM SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH (MSMR) STUDY 2 - A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR IDENTITY WORK

Introduction

The goal of Study 2 was to explore the associations between sociodemographic factors, individual personality, cultural and religious identity, and social media use in identity work among Muslim adults in North America, specifically by further expounding on the findings of Study 1. In this chapter, I will present the findings of Study 2, which is a qualitative exploration of individual Muslim users of social media platforms using in-depth semi-structured interviews. First, I will briefly discuss my positionality as a researcher before reviewing the three major theoretical frameworks and highlighting some of the important findings of Study 1, all of which informs this study as sensitizing frameworks. Second, the method and findings of the interview analysis will be presented. Third, I will discuss the implications of Study 2 in light of existing literature and scholarship on identity and social media use, as well as previous Study 1 findings. Finally, the study limitations and recommendations for future research will be presented.

Positionality as Qualitative Researcher

The goal of qualitative research is to understand participants' lived experience *from their perspective*. As such, as a researcher, I must reflect on my positionality, biases and impositions, research design, actions, and interpretations throughout all stages of my research, particularly for Phase II of my dissertation research, which is Study 2. In order for me to do this, I have closely followed Tracy's (2013) detailed process of iterative qualitative data analysis, such as writing analytic memos and loose analysis outlines from the moment data collection for Study 2 took place. Additionally, considering my population of interest's underrepresented and marginalized status in American society today, care was especially taken to ensure that my participants are equally involved in the research process. This was done,

among others, by sharing my interview summaries and initial interpretations with them for clarity and for their feedback—a process that is also known more broadly in qualitative data analysis as *member-checking* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

As with all research in social sciences, ethics are paramount. However, it is arguably more so in qualitative research since researchers—as data collection tools—are heavily engaged with their community participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Marecek, 2003). Since Study 2 is qualitative in nature, issues of consent, deception, and invasion of privacy permeated the data collection process even more so (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). As such, data security, storage, and management for this project was crucial, particularly when engaging members of groups that have been sociopolitically and historically misrepresented and marginalized in society, including by researchers (Nagata, Suzuki, & Kohn-Wood, 2012). With respect to data security, I made sure to employ data- sampling, collection, and storage tools that are secure, including those incorporating end-to-end encryption technology, which are often only available through paid services.

As part of my effort in being transparent with my research motivations, aims, and objectives as a doctoral student and dissertation researcher with respect to members of the Muslim community in both the U.S. and Canada, I have set up a dedicated research blog hosted on secure servers and publicly accessible through the following link http://www.muslimsocialmediaresearch.online. Additionally, I have also created several dedicated research accounts on two social media and SNS sites, namely a Facebook page (www.facebook.com/MuslimSocialMediaResearch, Instagram (@MuslimSocialMediaResearch) and Twitter (@MuslimSocMedRes). My online presence through the research blog and social media accounts has been a means for me to not only recruit participants for both of my studies, but also to share various updates pertaining to Study 1

findings, as well as updates from Study 2 data collection and analysis, including pertinent preliminary findings.

Additionally, other ethical considerations in research involving marginalized and misrepresented populations include the issues of communication, power, authority, voice and accountability (Griffin & Bengry-Howell, 2008). As such, scholars have called upon themselves to engage in critical self-reflection and reflexive processes to keep vested personal interests, biases, and assumptions in check throughout the research process (Nagata, Suzuki, & Kohn-Wood, 2012), all of which I have observed to the furthest extent possible throughout the dissertation research and writing process. For example, early in the data collection phase (i.e., sampling), I fielded questions from the public, including community leaders and prospective interview participants, and have been actively engaged in ongoing public discourse within the Muslim community on the issue of academic research that either engage Muslim participants or address issues that are relevant to Islam and Muslims. This critical self-reflection and reflexive exercise have been quintessential in keeping my personal interests and biases in check, in addition to providing invaluable insights throughout my own journey as a self-identifying Muslim and member of the global Muslim community. Further, upon realizing my limited knowledge and understanding of Muslims in Canada, I dedicated significant time to familiarize myself with existing literature on the population, including personally traveling to Toronto to attend an academic symposium on Black Muslims in Canada in March this year. While certainly not exhaustive, these examples demonstrated important efforts for me as far as accountability as a doctoral student and academic researcher is concerned.

Literature Review

As previously discussed in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, the goal of this dissertation research is to explore the everyday communication praxis of "Muslimness" or "being Muslim" in relation to individual Muslim users' use and engagement of social media

for *identity work*, which I have previously defined as the creation, articulation, negotiation, performance, and management of individual identities in everyday life. Further, this is an exploration that takes into account such uses amidst the broader sociopolitical and historical climate of rising anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia. In following the understanding and approach of previous scholars in examining human behavior, this study approaches communication behavior through a trifecta of personality, social interaction, and culture (Hogan & Bond, 2009). In terms of examining the use of social media in communication behavior specifically, scholars have turned to the cybernetic Big Five theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2015) in conjunction with an affordances framework (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017) as a way of making sense of and also predicting people's social media behavior. As far as examining identity and communication goes, scholars have resorted to the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993) as a theoretical lens. Below, I will briefly review these three theories and cognitive models that have been influential as sensitizing frameworks for Study 2.

Personality Traits and the Cybernetic Big Five Theory (CB5T)

As previously discussed, the CB5T (DeYoung, 2015) is a theoretical model on personality that seeks to provide a systematic and comprehensive explanation of human behavior, including communicative acts and social media use. The approach is premised on the understanding that people's behavior is driven by complex goal-oriented and reactive processes guided by the behavioral parameters of the Big Five personality traits, i.e., Openness to new experiences, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990)—traits that are considered relatively stable across human lifespan (Anglim & O'Connor, 2018; Liu & Campbell, 2017; DeYoung, 2015). The Big Five traits have previously been found to influence various forms of communication processes, including social media use (e.g., Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Bogg, 2017; Liu & Campbell, 2017; Pentina & Zhang,

2017; Taber & Whittaker, 2018). Individual social media users who are higher in extraversion and neuroticism, for example, were found to prefer particular platforms seen to *afford* or facilitate more social interactions and control over privacy, accordingly, such as Facebook (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017; Hughes et al., 2012; Taber & Whitaker, 2018). Additionally, scholars have previously found extraverted individuals to engage in self-disclosure and self-promotion online (Digman, 1990; Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011).

Social Media Use and the Affordances Framework

Drawing on an ecology psychological perspective (Gibson, 1979; 1986), scholars have used the affordance-based framework in the study of social media as a way of understanding how people use and engage various platforms. Within the context of social media, the premise of an affordance-based perspective is people's perception of [technological] features and the *action capabilities* that platform features extend to individual users. For example, mobile communication technology's affordance of *availability* enables people to make direct and frequent social interactions with one another regardless of time and space (Ling, 2004; Schrock, 2015). With respect to internet-mediated self-presentation and impression formation, particular social media affordances, such as *visibility* and *persistence*, render the "performance" of identity as being a constant thanks to the availability of social media profiles and content updates that persist even when its authors have disconnected from the platforms (Cover, 2016; Fullwood & Attrill-Smith, 2018; Goffman, 1959; 1967; Hughes et al., 2012; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Further, as platform affordances is as much a matter of built-in technological features as it is of its users' perception, individual difference factors, such as personality traits, become an influential discriminant. Social media users who are higher in neuroticism, for example, may display a heightened sense of awareness of particular social media affordances, such as *content association* and *social surveillance*, over other personality

types, which may affect their preferences for and engagement of particular platforms (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017; Seidman, 2013).

Praxis of "Muslimness" and the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI)

Drawing on identity theory (Cooley, 1920; Goffman, 1967) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), CTI (Hecht, 1993; Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005) is built on the premise of identity being formed, shaped, and crystalized by communication through acts such as self-presentation and impression management, i.e., the construction and management of one's own identity (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 1995)—two dominant aspects of *identity work.* Howard (2000), as well as Tracy and Robles (2013), further posited that the inextricable link between communication and identity is made evident through language. As part of a group of emerging theories on identity that treats it as a processual and layered concept, CTI is notable for (1) proposing communication as an element that is part and parcel of identity instead of it being a mere product of identity (Hecht & Choi, 2012) and (2) its layered perspective on identity where identity is conceptualized as being experienced as multiple interpenetrative layers that reflect the individual (i.e., *self* or *personal identity*), communication (i.e., *enacted identity*), relationship (i.e., *relational identity*), and community (i.e., *communal identity*) (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005; Hecht & Yu, 2014). Another notable contribution of CTI to identity research is the concept of identity gap, which refers to the existence of inconsistencies and discrepancies between the four layers of identity that may be problematic when dissonance leads to stressful tensions and anxieties (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2004; Hecht & Choi, 2012)

Taken together, the above theoretical perspectives suggest that people's sense of self, such as their personality, sociodemographic background, and their social identity, such as cultural and religious identifications, may influence people's behavior in using social media and social network sites (SNSs) as they create, articulate, negotiate, perform, and manage their identities in everyday life, specifically within a broader sociopolitical and historical climate

that may prove antagonistic for certain identities. In this respect, CTI's concept of identity gap, specifically, may be particularly useful when exploring the behavior of individuals who are members of underrepresented and marginalized populations, while the CB5T and affordances framework; combined, may influence the particularities of internet-mediated communication processes. Specifically, within the context of this dissertation research on Muslims in North America, the challenging sociopolitical climate of rising anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia may provide a peculiar context wherein Muslim individuals may experience added tensions between the various layers of identity, which in effect may influence their communication behavior, including their use and engagement of social media and SNSs.

Review of Study 1 Findings: Sociodemographic factors, The Big Five, "Muslimness", and Social Media Use among Muslims in North America

The results of the first phase of this dissertation research, which was conducted as a cross-sectional quantitative exploration of social media use among 435 self-identifying Muslims residing in the U.S. and Canada using structured online survey, largely confirms the utility of the trifecta model of human behavior (Hogan & Bond, 2009). Within this curiously diverse sample of social media users, sociodemographic variables, personality traits, and cultural identification, were found to influence social media use and SNS engagement to varying degrees. The sociodemographic factors of age and country of residence, for example, appeared to have been influential in Study 1 participants' adoption of particular social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as overall social media use, which was measured using the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013).

The relatively young sample (*M* age = 32.34 years) seems to prefer Facebook and Instagram over Twitter and other platforms, while Canada's Muslims had higher average SMUIS scores and displayed more intensity in overall social media use compared to their U.S. counterparts. Sex was another sociodemographic factor proven influential in the use of social

media for negative emotional disclosure—Muslim females were less likely to engage social media to share self-relevant negative life events and emotions. Finally, race and ethnicity are another sociodemographic factor affecting the use of social media for positive emotional disclosure—Muslim users of Caucasian/White descent were more likely to disclose self-relevant positive life events and emotions on social media than users of Arab/Middle Eastern background.

Personality traits-wise, while none of the Big Five were predictive of SMUIS scores, Muslim users' scores in openness to new experiences were associated with more focused usage of social media, i.e., in identity work, namely self-presentation, impression management, positive-, and negative emotional disclosures. Other notably influential personality traits within this sample of social media users include neuroticism and agreeableness, each of which is associated with impression management and negative emotional disclosure, accordingly. More neurotic Muslims were found to display a higher likelihood in using social media for impression management, while those who are more agreeable are less likely to use social media for negative emotional disclosure. As far as cultural identification goes, while none of the cultural identity variables (i.e., MEIM-E, MEIM-R, & RCI-10) were predictive of *overall* social media use (i.e., SMUIS), Muslim users' religious ingroup identification (MEIM-R) scores were significantly predictive of more *focused* uses of social media, namely impression management.

Taken together, the results of Study 1 along with the theoretical frameworks reviewed above suggest a need to further explore the phenomenon of social media use for identity work among Muslim users from a more granular perspective and a more detailed orientation in order for us to be able to capture the complexity of identity and communicative behavior. This need is even more evident when taking into account the Muslim population's inherently diverse and heterogenous sociodemographic and cultural backgrounds that Study 1 results demonstrated.

In an attempt to further investigate the implications of social media use for identity work among Muslims in North America, Phase 2 of this dissertation research employs a qualitative research design using in-depth semi-structured interviews to address the following research questions:

RQ5: How do individual members of North America's Muslim population make sense of their self-concept and praxis of Muslim identity, specifically amidst a sociopolitically contentious environment?

RQ6: How does social media use function in the above process of identity work?

RQ7: To what extent does identity intersectionality translate into social media use among North America's Muslim population?

Study 2 Research Approach

Overview

Considering the sequential explanatory mixed methods design of this dissertation research, Study 2 has been emergent in nature and was broadly designed to expound on the general findings of Study 1 survey data by employing in-depth, semi-structured interviews as a data collection method. The iterative qualitative research design (Tracy, 2013) of Study 2 is appropriate as I am particularly interested in exploring the actual lived experiences and tapping into individual sensemaking processes and narrative accounts of Muslim social media users. Moreover, Study 2 was designed to explore three research questions aimed at not only (1) explaining, triangulating, and enhancing the data collected in Study 1, but also (2) extending contemporary identity scholarship to a new context of Muslims in North America with respect to social media use, and (3) interrogating, among others, the utility of (a) sequential explanatory mixed methods approach and (b) CTI (Hecht, 1993) in illuminating our understanding of identity work and social media use more broadly.

In order to help address the above research questions, I formulated a semi-structured interview guide largely focusing on exploring the content and themes related to (1) the

dimensions of identity and (2) social media use. This interview protocol, comprising 23 open-ended questions and 28 probes altogether, can be found in Appendix I. In order to ensure a workable degree of consistency across the sample of participants, this interview guide was closely followed during each session with occasional latitude given for emerging issues stemming from individual nuances and lived experiences. Additionally, during the interviews and following their verbal consent, participants were asked to verbally describe their most recent three to five social media activities on their most-frequently used social media platform, which included Facebook status updates, Twitter updates (i.e., Tweets & Retweets), Instagram posts and stories, as well as Snapchat snaps. Such narrative recollections were used to help triangulate and enhance the interview data. In addition to conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, I have also relied on my personal experience as a Muslim and active social media user and have collected over 30 hours of notes as a participant-observer engaged in daily observation of Muslim Social Media as the data collection for Study 2 took place.

Participant Recruitment

Following the completion of Study 1, I purposively sampled from participants' responses and generated an initial sampling frame of 95 individuals who had expressed interest in participating for Study 2 interviews. These individuals provided their contact information for a follow-up in Study 2 and were forwarded a weblink to the recruitment/intake survey to ensure that the participants (a) meet the inclusion criteria and (b) consent to be scheduled for an interview. The inclusion criteria for Study 2 was (1) regular users of social media platforms (i.e., daily user), who identify as Muslim or belonging to the Islamic faith, ages 18 and over, who currently reside in North America (U.S. and Canada).

In addition to recruiting participants from this sampling frame, a snowball sampling method was also employed by asking participants to suggest a family member, friend, or colleague who fit the inclusion criteria. Additionally, participant recruitment also took place

following a community-based sampling design through flyers that were distributed virtually through the research blog (www.muslimsocialmediaresearch.online) and social media accounts (https://www.facebook.com/MuslimSocialMediaResearch, @MuslimSocMedRes on Twitter, and @MuslimSocialMediaResearch on Instagram), as well as the listservs of the Muslim Students Association (MSA) of Wayne State University and other Muslim community initiatives, namely the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), Association of Muslim Professionals Detroit (AMPDetroit), and the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative (MuslimARC). Participants were similarly recruited *offline* through flyers that were distributed on public bulletin boards across university campuses in Detroit and Toronto.

Individuals who had indicated a willingness to participate in Study 2 were eventually contacted for interview scheduling. In addition to making sure that participants met the inclusion criteria prior to scheduling, I had also made sure to diversify my sample and recruit participants based on sociodemographic variables, i.e., sex, race and ethnicity, and country of residence, as well as social media use, i.e., representative of popular social media platforms as reported in Study 1 (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat). Tracy (2013, p. 135) refers to this type of sampling as *maximum variation sampling* where the researcher accesses "a wide range of data or participants who will represent wide variations of the phenomena under study". While Morse's (1994) sample size recommendation for phenomenological research, ethnographies, and grounded theory studies is between 30 to 50 interviews and/or observations, recruitment flexibility, feasibility, as well as data saturation for maximum variation were taken into account. A total of 31 individuals were eventually scheduled for the interviews and while I was approaching data saturation following the 18th participant, I continued to interview 11 more individuals for further confirmation of preliminary findings. All in all, a total of 29 interviews were conducted for Study 2. Please refer to Appendix G for the list of participants interviewed (with pseudonyms) and their basic demographics.

Study 2 Procedure

Prior to scheduling the interviews, individuals who had shared their contact details for Study 2 were forwarded a link to an online intake survey containing an IRB-approved online information sheet further explicating the goals of my research, the potential benefits and risks involved, and the voluntary nature of participating, as well as a series of questions assessing their sociodemographic background and social media use history. Please refer to Appendix H for the online intake questionnaire. Participants' consent was not only recorded by clicking through the main survey page of the online intake questionnaire, but it was also verbally solicited prior to commencing with the interview questions on the day of the interview itself. At the beginning of each interview, participants were again briefed about my identity as a doctoral student and academic research and the nature of the dissertation research, particularly Study 2, before I obtained their verbal consent for participation and for audio-recording the interview. Further, at the end of each interview session, I had inquired each participant about their willingness to be contacted for member checking purposes after the interviews have been transcribed. Following the interviews and the distribution of the full interview transcripts to all 29 participants, at least five participants have reached out to further clarify aspects of their narratives.

Data collection for Study 2 took place between March and April 2019. The interviews were scheduled using online appointment booking platform www.SimplyBook.me and were conducted online using audiovisual virtual conferencing platform Zoom Conference, as well as by phone using mobile recording app TapeACall Pro. The interview sessions ranged from 49 minutes to 3 hours and 12 minutes, averaging 1 hour and 30 minutes in length. Approximately 2,672 minutes' or 44.5 hours' worth of audio recordings were stored on password-protected cloud servers. All of the 29 interview recordings were then transcribed

using professional transcription services GoTranscript and Rev.com. The interview transcripts amounted to 615 pages of single-spaced data of approximately 270,046 words altogether.

Study 2 Participants

Study 2 participants consisted of 29 individuals ages 18 – 52. The average age of the sample is 31.45 years old. The group comprised of 9 individuals who identified as Arab/Middle Eastern, 4 of which are of Levantine background (i.e., Palestinian, Iraqi, Lebanese), 3 individuals reported being of North African (i.e., Algerian, Egyptian, Tunisian), and 2 participants are of Gulf Arab (i.e., Saudi) parentage. A total of 6 participants indicated they were South Asians: 2 participants are Pakistani, 3 participants are Indian, and 1 participant is of Afghan descent. Five participants indicated they were Caucasian/White, 4 participants were African American/Black, 3 participants were Hispanic and Latinx (i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican), 1 participant is West African (i.e., Senegal), and 1 participant identified as of Iranian parentage. In terms of gender composition, 16 participants self-identified as women, 11 participants self-identified as men, 1 participant self-identified as transgender in process of transitioning as a woman, and 1 participant identified as queer.

While 19 participants said they were born into Muslim families, 10 participants reported they had converted to Islam. The majority of the group indicated they were Sunni Muslims and at least 1 participant self-identified as Shia. In terms of country of residence, 18 participants indicated they reside in the U.S., while 11 participants said they live in Canada. In terms of marital status, 19 participants said they were single or separated/divorced and 10 participants indicated they were married. In terms of education, 14 participants reported having completed graduate level education, 9 participants reported having a bachelor's degree, and 6 participants indicated they are working on completing their Bachelor's.

In terms of household income, the group consisted of 5 participants who reported an annual household income of less than $25,000, 7 participants who reported $25,000 - $50,000,

5 participants who reported $50,000-$75,000, 5 participants who reported making $75,000-
$100,000, while 7 participants reported their household make over $100,000 annually. In terms
of social media use, 16 participants reported Facebook as their most frequently-used social
media platform, 8 participants reported Twitter, 4 participants reported Instagram, and 1
participant reported Snapchat—to some extent reflecting MSMR Study 1 findings, albeit Study
2 participants had reported more frequent usage of Twitter than Instagram, which is in contrast
to Study 1 participants. On their most frequently-used platform, 19 participants reported
spending at least an hour of daily usage, 6 participants reported spending at least 30 minutes,
while 4 participants said they spent less than 15 minutes of social media use and engagement
daily.

Study 2 Analytical Procedure

The interviews were collected, transcribed, and analyzed simultaneously using iterative
qualitative analysis (Tracy, 2013), which allows both *emic* and *etic* readings of the data.
Iterative qualitative analysis provided me with the opportunity to examine my research
questions not only as they pertain to existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks (i.e.,
sensitizing concepts), but also allowing space for data to organically emerge (Tracy, 2013). An
iterative qualitative research design further allowed me to identify and determine when
saturation has occurred and when no new themes would emerge from the data. It is also
important to note here that following iterative qualitative analysis, the collection and analyses
of Study 2 data took place concurrently, beginning as early as the completion of the first
interview session.

While data analysis and interpretation were largely guided by CTI (Hecht, 1993), other
theoretical frameworks, such as the CB5T and affordances perspective (DeVito et al., 2017),
were equally referred to as sensitizing frameworks while examining participants' recollections
and lived experiences with respect to social media use. The iterative nature of qualitative

analysis also provided space for me to refer to other theoretical approaches not specifically mentioned in the earlier phases of the dissertation, such as critical communication theories (e.g., Co-Cultural Theory; Orbe, 1998; Orbe & Batten, 2017) and feminist cultural and media theories (e.g., Butler, 1997; Crenshaw, 1995; Harding, 1987), in the process of attaining a holistic understanding of the phenomenon while analyzing the data. One particular theoretical framework that had emerged following analyses of Study 1 data, which was equally influential in contextualizing Study 2 findings, is the notion of *respectability politics* (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Wolcott, 2013).

After reviewing the professionally-transcribed interview transcripts for accuracy and member checking with interview participants, the documents were imported into computer-aided qualitative data analysis software NVivo12 for Mac. Using Nvivo12 for Mac, I carefully reviewed the transcripts to identify emerging themes and similarities between the transcribed texts using two levels of coding (Saldaña, 2016), namely: (1) combing through the texts to identify emerging individual codes (e.g., processes, actions, assumptions, consequences, as well as metaphors and repetitions within and across informants) and marking portions of the transcript with these codes, which is in line with a more grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990), and (2) iterative process of developing a thematic codebook by grouping the first-level categories into smaller units of concepts, categories, and themes with the aim of forming a broader snapshot of the configuration, i.e., themes identification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Following Saldaña's (2016) coding method, I had categorized the conceptual categories into *process codes*, which refers to labels for conceptual action in the data, (e.g., "IDENTITY SENSEMAKING"), *descriptive codes*, which refers to labels for summary words or short phrases (e.g., "NEGOTIATING THE WORLD AND ONE'S PLACE"), and *in-vivo codes*, which refers to labels that use phrases or terms from participants' own language (e.g., "THE

#METOO MOVEMENT"). During the second level of coding, a thematic codebook listing each theme and subtheme with detailed description, inclusion and exclusion, as well as exemplars or typical text examples, were generated. After going through several revisions, the finalized thematic codebook was used in subsequent analyses of Study 2 data. Please refer to Appendix J for a condensed version of the coding scheme.

In analyzing Study 2 data, I had independently reviewed all 29 interview transcripts line-by-line for initial categories and themes, which had amounted to 175 pages of first cycle conceptual codes. Using NVivo12 for Mac, I then compared and condensed the emerging categories, organizing them into broader categories of meaning. In the process of condensing these categories into broader themes, I referred to my analytic notes and existing literature. These themes were identified based on the following criteria: (1) frequent recurrence within the account of a single interview respondent, (2) prevalence of the theme across interview respondents, or (3) intensity with which interview respondents discussed this theme (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Please refer to Appendix J for a condensed version of the coding manual.

Study 2 Findings

Overview of Study 2 Findings

As previously discussed, Study 2 is guided by three broad research questions. In the following section, I will discuss the findings generated through the above interview analysis by first giving an overview summary of findings prior to elaborating on detailed thematic analyses in subsequent sections. Research Question 5 asks: *How do individual members of North America's Muslim population make sense of their self-concept and praxis of Muslim identity, specifically amidst a sociopolitically contentious environment?* Based on my analysis for Research Question 5, several conclusions can be made about Study 2 participants' self-concept, their understanding and praxis of Muslim identity, as well as their hostility sensemaking in the context of contemporary politics. First, participants' narratives not only

emphasize the heterogeneity of individual self-concept and identity salience, including the praxis of "being Muslim" and "being Muslim convert", but such narratives also highlight the relevance of the notion of respectability with respect to Muslim identity work in North America, especially in the post-9/11 and War on Terror era. Further, echoing the works of identity scholars, such as Wetherell (2010), the lived experiences and stories of Study 2 respondents underline the notion of identity as being agentic, as involving group-level affiliations, and as embodying sociopolitical implications. The lived narratives also reflect the nature of identity as being psychosocial, multifaceted and fluid, and interactional, with social media playing a considerable role in the process (Cover, 2016). Second, Study 2 reinforces our understanding about the intersectional nature of Muslim identity where race and gender are important identity coordinates through which the lived experience of "being Muslim" is experienced, particularly in the context of identity threat, such as anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia. While the intersectional nature of identity is to a certain extent influenced by the way individuals draw upon multiple social identities, as Wetherell and Edley (2014) had posited, the lived experiences of visibly Muslim women in the public sphere with respect to anti-Muslim hostility specifically demonstrated how gender can be a particularly important component in the marginalization of Muslim bodies. Finally, expounding on some of Study 1 results on respectability self-[re]presentation, Study 2 further suggests that the notion of respectability is inherent to the concept of Muslim identity, which in effect influences the identity work of Muslim individuals, whether in face-to-face settings or internet-mediated contexts. Similar to the multipronged strategy of respectability politics that African American women had espoused during the Interwar years and much of the 20th century (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Richardson, 2019; Wolcott, 2013), respectability Muslim identity work is also targeted at multiple audiences, namely fellow Muslims and non-Muslim others.

First, Study 2 unveils the heterogeneity of participants' identity sensemaking, specifically their understanding of religious identity as well as their practice of Islam. As far as definition of "being Muslim" is concerned, participants' narratives highlight varying aspects of understanding, ranging from the act of subscribing to specific Islamic tenets of faith and establishing a personal relationship with God, to the way one interacts with others regardless of color and creed. For many individuals I spoke with, the essence of "being Muslim" is living with a higher sense of purpose and intentionality, as well as a sense of accountability. Several participants have also expressed the centrality of Islam in their personal journey of becoming better versions of themselves where "Muslimness" is a philosophy of living. These accounts reflect how religious identities are indeed representations about the self and the social, about a sense of origin and destination, a sense of belonging and direction in life—shaped by stories, rituals, and life experiences, as Korte and van Liere (2017) suggested. While there is a tangible core to the "being Muslim" lived experience, Study 2 also unveils the range of religious praxis (i.e., the lived experience of practicing Islam) among Muslims. In this respect, the role of race and gender in shaping the individual experience of "living Islam" is clear, the Muslim identity is racialized and gendered.

In terms of praxis of "Muslimness", Study 2 highlights an important aspect often glossed over or ignored in academic discourses is the discriminant between having been born into a Muslim family and having converted to Islam at some point in life. The interview responses illustrate not only the extent to which Muslim identity is racialized and gendered, but also the extent to which an individual's Islamic praxis is influenced by their conversion status. For Muslim converts, internet use and social media engagement can be paramount at various stages of the "being Muslim" conversion process, which may begin as early as the attempt to seek out information about Islam and Muslims, to the process of managing close relationships and social ties following religious conversion. Further, among Study 2

participants whose conversion to Islam is relatively recent, social media use can be influential in the process of "coming out" as Muslim to family members, friends, and colleagues at work. As Islam and Muslims continue to be among the fastest growing religions and religious populations in North America (e.g., Lipka, 2017), highlighting the lived experience of Muslim converts, particularly the challenges they face, may be pertinent to community-based efforts aimed at facilitating a smooth transition and fostering individual wellbeing.

Second, Muslim identity—or the concept of "being Muslim"—is inherently intersectional. Muslim identity lies at the intersection of both race and gender, influencing the way the praxis of Islam and "Muslimness" is experienced by Muslim individuals. The intersectional nature of Muslim identity; in effect, influences how Muslim individuals perceive and respond to the surrounding sociopolitical milieu, including perceptions and responses to identity threats. In terms of hostility sensemaking, for example, the racial and gender identity of Muslim individuals are influential such that two broad identity sensemaking and communication strategies appear to emerge and diverge between Black and non-Black Muslims, as well as between Muslim men and those who identify as female and queer. Analyses of the interviews reveal that individuals who identified as African American/Black, and to some extent among women and queer Muslims, were more likely to contextualize anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia as being part and parcel of broader systemic and structural issues, such as White Supremacy, imperialism—and to a lesser extent—patriarchy. As such, these two groups were less likely to approach anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia as simply being a matter of individual ignorance and prejudice, but rather reflecting the need for a concerted effort to address broader social justice concerns in society more broadly. This is reflected, among others, in how Muslim social media users utilize social media platforms to raise awareness for social justice causes and calls-to-actions—a theme that also addresses Research Questions 6 and 7 that will be discussed below.

Additionally, findings from the Study 2 interviews provide further insights into the CTI construct of "identity gaps" (Hecht, 1993: Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003), by expanding on some of the nuances of the concept and highlighting different contexts wherein identity gaps were particularly relevant for Muslim individuals. As the narratives of Study 2 participants reflect, identity gaps not only occur across the *personal-enacted*, *personal-relational*, as well as *personal-communal frames*, these gaps have also manifested across various contexts of social interactions, ranging from the personal to the professional, from intra-group contexts to inter-group settings. Just as identifying the influential factors underlying these gaps can be fascinating, observing how respondents reflect on past experiences and reason through personal accounts of dissonance can be equally informative and helpful in increasing our understanding of how identity—as a whole—functions.

Finally, in addressing Research Question 5, I conclude that the notion of respectability is an essential component of Muslim identity work, particularly following the 9/11 terror attacks and specifically within the context of North American Muslims. Due to the sustained onslaught of media misrepresentation and reporting, damaging political rhetoric, as well as anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia Muslims in the U.S. and Canada have continued to face since 9/11 and the War on Terror, Muslim individuals have had to engage in varying degrees of public and personal conciliatory efforts, particularly when interacting in predominantly non-Muslim spaces. Here, respectability [Muslim] identity work includes the act of availing oneself to inquisitive questions about certain Islamic rites and Muslim cultural practices, such as the daily prayers, the Ramadan fasting, abstaining from alcoholic beverages, and avoiding events where alcoholic drinks are served. Interestingly, counterintuitive to previous assumptions about the Trump administration, most of my interview respondents asserted that apart from the problematic "Muslim Ban", the current sociopolitical climate under the current administration has had minimum effects on the lived experience of most U.S.

Muslims, particularly in comparison to the broader immediate aftermath of 9/11. Here, Study 2 highlights the significance of the 9/11 terror attacks and War on Terror in the identity sensemaking processes of self-identifying Muslims or individuals belonging to the Islamic faith here in North America, as existing literatures and prior research have demonstrated (Abraham, Howell, & Shyrock, 2011; Beydoun, 2016; GhaneaBassiri, 2013; Kidd, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Nevertheless, while the rather lukewarm sentiment about the current administration is shared among Study 2 participants living in the U.S. regardless of their geographic location, those who identify as Canadian or reside in Canada have curiously expressed growing concerns over rising rightwing rhetoric, particularly anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, nationwide—a phenomenon Canadian media has dubbed as "the Trump effect" (e.g., Dangerfield, 2019). The phenomenon of rising rightwing rhetoric and anti-Muslim hostility appears to be more tangible for Canadian Muslims who reside in British Columbia. As the stories of Study 2 participants later on reflect, this heightened sense of awareness over rising anti-Muslim hostility in Canada may be a factor as to why Canadian participants in Study 1 were found to use and engage social media more than their U.S. counterparts.

Research Question 6 asks: *How does social media use function in the above process of identity work?* In exploring the ways Muslim individuals define and conceptualize Muslim identity and praxis thereof in this study and how all this translates into social media behavior, Study 2 reveals a particularly unique phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, such as "Muslim Facebook" and "#MuslimTwitter", or "#MT". This phenomenon is discernable; among others, through several aspects of social media engagement, ranging from the philosophy underlying social media use, motivations behind the creation and sharing of circulated contents, to the various ways of self-presentation and self-expression through visual content and built-in features of a particular platform, such as "bios", image captioning, and #hashtags. Study 2 also

reveals Muslim Social Media as a way for North American Muslims to contextualize local prejudice and hostility against the hardships Muslims have encountered in other parts of the world. As Study 2 data collection began shortly prior to the killings of Muslim worshipers in Christchurch, New Zealand, many participants were found to refer to the massacre while engaging in hostility sensemaking. Other contexts that were mentioned include the mistreatment of Muslims in India and Kashmir. The Muslim Social Media phenomenon appears to support prior research of scholars, such as Schmalz, Colistra, and Evans (2015), on the use of social media as a coping mechanism in the face of social identity threat, in addition to the phenomenon being a demonstration of culture-specific uses of social media (Fuchs, 2017; Uski & Lampinen, 2016).

Additionally, as mentioned earlier and expounding on Study 1 results on the association between Muslim ingroup identification scores (MEIM-R), impression formation, and respectability politics, Study 2 finds the notion of respectability to be innate to the Muslim identity such that individuals, whether born Muslim or have converted to Islam, would equally engage in respectability identity work in face-to-face settings and internet-mediated contexts. The most tangible manifestation of respectability identity work online is Muslim Social Media behavior, which includes the intentional act of circulating news articles, commentaries, and religious content on Islam and Muslim issues that are often tied to broader societal issues of social justice as part of a collective effort to increase literacy about the religion and its followers, as well as pushing back against negative stereotyping and damaging Islamophobic rhetoric. Curiously, Muslim Social Media is not exclusively targeted toward non-Muslim others, it is also engaged by Muslim users in their virtual interactions with other Muslims, somewhat paralleling the way respectability politics operated among African American women during the Interwar period of early 20th century (Higginbotham, 1993; Wolcott, 2013).

Research Question 7 asks: *To what extent does identity intersectionality translate into social media use among North America's Muslim population?* In addition to uncovering the role of cultural and religious identity in social media use through the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, Study 2 also highlights the role sociodemographic factors and personality traits play in shaping the adoption and engagement of particular social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. For example, Study 2 participants who are younger in age appear to prefer platforms that are less restrictive in terms of privacy settings, such as Instagram and Twitter. Further, those who are more extraverted and those displaying higher degrees of openness to new experiences, were found to not only prefer certain social media platforms, such as Instagram, but were also found to prefer particular platform features for identity work, such as Instagram Stories. Additionally, the analyses of Study 2 interviews also reveal the role of personality traits in influencing self-relevant disclosures online. For example, in exploring possible reasons behind participants' hesitancy in engaging negative emotional self-disclosure, I found that certain personality traits, such as introversion and conscientiousness, are just as influential as certain ethnoracial and cultural factors and concerns.

The implications of a Muslim social media user's ethnoracial background and gender identity are also evident in more focused uses of social media, such as positive- and negative emotional self-disclosure. Here, Study 2 findings provide further contextualization to prior Study 1 results indicating specific patterns of emotional disclosures among Muslim social media users of Arab/Middle Eastern background. Study 2 participants' narratives of daily use and engagement appear to not only confirm certain patterns of usage associated with particular racial and ethnic backgrounds as suggested above, such as belief in "the evil eye" or malevolent gaze, but also unveil related reservations shared by other racial groups and ethnicities within the sample. Further, Study 2 interviews suggests that the belief in "the evil eye" is a collective understanding among Muslim social media users across ethnoracial backgrounds and genders.

In other words, the reluctance to engage in positive emotional disclosures on social media out of fear of "the evil eye" is a Muslim-specific cultural norm. Moreover, Study 2 participants have also indicated other motivations against sharing positive life events and emotions on social media, which may be related to their personality traits, namely agreeableness and conscientiousness, which is reflected in the fear or concern of appearing boastful and arrogant. Participants' lived experiences and narratives with respect to the act of disclosing positive- and negative life events and emotions further suggest that such disclosures are far more nuanced than we had originally thought. The interviews reveal various ways through which participants have engaged in both positive- and negative emotional disclosures, including the act of avoiding sharing too detailed an information of particular events, and delaying the disclosures of self-relevant information—all of which are information that Study 1 survey items were unable to capture.

Additionally, through my conversations with Study 2 participants, I was able to probe and explore the ways in which Muslim social media users perceive and utilize platform features and affordances for identity work. Study 2 highlights the different ways in which participants perceive and also utilize specific built-in features and affordances to express and communicate their identities to other users on the platform. Participants have indicated the use of digital images, i.e., emojis, as well as specific platform features, such as "bios", Hashtags, Featured Photos and Story Highlights, as well as Alternative Names, for identity work, in addition to expressing and communicating their personality and identity through the disclosure of self-relevant information through textual and visual contents. As far as the types of self-relevant information disclosures on social media platforms are concerned, Study 2 participants have indicated that they have used platform features and affordances to communicate their ethnoracial background, their personality, as well as their professional-, religious-, and gender identities and praxes. Interestingly, the use of platform features and affordances for identity

work appear to take place more often among Study 2 participants who use platforms that are "more public" in nature, such as Instagram and Twitter. While several Facebook users have indicated some use of the "bio" section, profile pictures, and cover images for identity work, the fact that Facebook had largely emerged as a *social bonding* platform (vis-à-vis *social bridging*, as Twitter functions) among known and familiar others within the sample, participants' responses reflecting the use of built-in features and perceived affordances for identity work appeared less prominent than on other social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram.

Finally, in addressing RQ7, I had also probed and explored the concerns Muslim social media users have about their use and engagement of social media, whether it be regarding their overall use of social media or specific concerns about the use of particular social media platforms. Even though hateful rhetoric and bullying that occur online through social media platforms were of concern to Study 2 participants, the most commonly-reported source of anxiety is the idea of excessive and addictive social media use. Other types of concerns that emerged include the issues of data privacy, data mining and targeted advertising, as well as surveillance—all of which seem to reflect the concerns of broader society and populations of social media users overall. Taken together, in answering RQ7, the intersectional nature of identity appears to manifest in platform preferences, emotional self-disclosures, using platform features and affordances for identity work, and specific concerns related to social media- and particular platform uses. Having summarized the highlights of Study 2 findings above, I will now discuss in greater detail the results of the interview analyses below.

RQ5: **How do individual members of North America's Muslim population make sense of their self-concept and praxis of Muslim identity, specifically amidst a sociopolitically contentious environment?**

In an attempt to answer the above question, I designed an interview guide with specific probes aimed at tapping into individual sensemaking and narratives of the self, namely

participants' sense of individuality, before exploring their individual praxis of "Muslimness" or "being Muslim". This method of inquiry provided me with the opportunity to explore participants' responses in their own words by giving them freedom to describe themselves according to aspects of identity that were particularly salient to them. The following section elaborates on the findings of the interview analyses comprising two main themes: (1) self-concept and (2) understanding of "being Muslim" and praxis of Islam.

Self-Concept

In designing this dissertation research, I had expected religious identity to be an exceptionally salient identifier for participants when prompted with the question, "*How would you describe yourself as a person?*". My assumptions were based; among others, on the nature of the population, i.e., Muslim individuals, as well as prior research and existing literature on my population of interest. Following the interviews and analyses, I discovered that religious identity's salience within an individual's overall identity configuration had only applied to a handful of my respondents. Overall, participants' responses were incredibly diverse, demonstrating the prominence of other identity coordinates, such as sociodemographic background, personal values, social roles, and personality traits. Interview participants have described themselves along a relatively wide range of categories, as well as constellations, namely age, race and ethnicity, gender, profession, socioeconomic status, relational identity, personal values, as well as the Big Five, such as introversion, openness to new experiences, and agreeableness. Below are some examples of the diversity of participants' individuality narratives and sensemaking. While the order of mentioning and emphasis may differ between the participants, age, profession, ethnoracial background, and personality traits are among the most commonly disclosed identity coordinates, further suggesting that these coordinates are "activated" or salient for this particular group.

Age, profession, and personal interest. Hajar, who is Arab/Middle Eastern and resides on the East Coast, had described herself according to her age, her social role/profession, and her personal interest:

> My name is Hajar. Currently, I'm 22 years old. I am a computer science and data science student. I'm an undergrad. I'll graduate in December of 2019 with my degree. I am such a huge technologist. A huge technologist and entrepreneur. I've been into tech and coding since I was 13. I've done a couple of internships already in software engineering and realized that my bigger passion within technology was product management and really building products that are really driven by customer experiences. That's where I'm at right now.

Age, profession, and Muslim conversion. James, who is Caucasian/White and also resides in the U.S., similarly highlighted his age and profession, in addition to mentioning his social role and relational identity as a parent, as well as a Muslim convert:

> I am 36 years old. I am married and a father of three children. I work as a correctional chaplain in Wisconsin at Fox Lake Correctional Institution. I've been a Muslim for almost 17 years. I converted back in 2002.

Age, residence, profession, and personal values. Additionally, Deonte, who is African-American/Black, resides in the U.S., and self-identifies as queer, centered their personal values and what had motivated them to convert to Islam, in addition to mentioning their age, residence, and social role or profession:

> My name is Deonte. I'm 21 years old. I am a Florida native. I hail from Daytona Beach, best city in the world, right? I am currently a sociology undergrad, my minor's in political science and Africana studies. I'm really involved in my community's activism scene and organizing scene, particularly around issues of economic justice and the environmental justice, like food justice, land justice, things like that. Those things are honestly what led me to Islam.

Profession, ethnoracial identity, and personality. Another Muslim convert, Diego, 37, who is Mexican-American and lives in the Midwest, had similarly described himself along the lines of professional identity and personal interests before mentioning his religious and ethnoracial background, as well as his personality traits and how he uses social media:

I'm an academic librarian, currently work at Oberlin College, and I'm not focused on any of my passions yet, but if I could be a hip hop librarian, that's what I would be. And so, I'm currently liaising to the Hispanic Studies and English departments. So that's sort of who I am at the moment, but I also identify as, how do you say? Muslim and Mexican-American. I'm originally from Chicago and in some ways, not in some ways, in many ways I'm an introvert and I'm not sure where else to go with this, but definitely social media is where I go and get a lot of, not a lot, but most of my information. And mostly just trying to follow up on artists. I do enjoy the arts, and it's a way to just keep up to date with what they're doing and picking up a few things here and there from them.

Personality, ethnoracial identity, age, and profession. Ousmane, 25, who is originally from West Africa and currently resides in the U.S., reported that his personality is a salient identifier:

First of all, I'm very unpredictable. You'd never know what I'm going to come up with. According to what I've done, all my life—it's weird. I'm from Gambia. I'm 25. I study chemical engineering just for my parents to be happy, but I don't really care about it. I'm creative. I come up with a lot of ideas. I don't know if emotional describes me. I'm a little emotional according to some things that I've been through that made me realize that maybe I am—I don't want to say soft, but not soft—but you know what I mean, very emotional.

Personality and personal values. Banan, 30, who is Arab/Middle Eastern and also lives in the U.S., similarly spoke about herself along personality lines, in addition to mentioning certain personal values she shared:

I would say that I'm very energetic. I'm very social. I enjoy being around people, especially people that I know but I'm also very private. So, I'm not a huge sharer, especially on social media but I value my family, I value my friends, I value being around them. I think that's kind of how I would describe myself.

While age, ethnoracial identity, residence, as well as personality, have been among the most salient identity coordinates within the group, socioeconomic background, gender identity, relational identity, and nativity appear to have also been equally important identifiers for some participants, as demonstrated by the following accounts.

Socioeconomic background, religious identity, gender identity, and residence. In describing who she is, another participant, Sumaya, 24, who is Caucasian/White, resides in the West Coast and self-identifies as transgender, summarized her life-journey as follows:

There's not really much to tell. I was homeless a little bit before briefly going to the military when I was a teenager, I was homeless afterwards, I was taken in by a Latina family. They were the ones that pretty much raised me. When I found God again, I later converted to Islam in the spring of 2017, for various reasons. It's a beautiful religion, I agree with the Quran. They've been a lot nicer than Christians with the whole thing where I'm transgender. That's about it. Now I'm here in California trying to have the future that I couldn't have in Virginia because when I was in Virginia, they weren't as kind to transgender people and Muslims and stuff. Here in California, in Los Angeles, they are a lot better about that.

Age, residence, nativity, and socioeconomic background. Fiaz, who is South Asian and a medical resident, was careful to include not only his working-class background by highlighting his father's profession, but also his overall identity as a child of immigrants to the U.S.: "As a person. Let's see. I'm Fiaz. 24 years old. Currently a resident in El Paso, Texas. First generation immigrant to the States. My father is a security guard."

Ethnoracial identity, religious identity, gender identity, relational identity, and personal values. In addition to highlighting her race and religious identity, Aliyah, 40, an African American Muslim woman residing in the Midwest, had also mentioned her role as a wife and mother of two children, before talking about certain personal values: **"**I am an African-American Muslim female. I work full-time. I'm married for almost 20 years. I have two kids. They are almost 13 and a 7-year-old. I like to enjoy life and people and to learn and develop myself."

Relational identity, religious identity, and personal values. Within this group of respondents, the salience of Aliyah's relational identity is also echoed by several other participants across the border, such as Maryam, 52, a Muslim convert residing in Ontario, Canada:

I'm a mom, first of all. I have six children. *Al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: *All Praises be to God*]. I'm Muslim. I've been Muslim since 1985. I love my family and I love my Din [i.e., religion]. That's the short story, I guess, you can say, and I'm a grandmother too.

Age, relational identity, and ethnoracial identity. Another female participant from

Canada, Parisa, had also described herself along her identity as a wife and mother of three children:

> I'm 37 years old. I'm a mother of three children. I have three daughters. The oldest one is 18 years old and the second one is 12 and the youngest one, she is 10 years old. I live in Canada. In BC. I did my high school degree back home in Pakistan. I grew up in Pakistan. I'm originally from Afghanistan. I'm a full-time mom since I married. My daughter is 18, so yes, that's it.

Referring back to Chapter 2 of this dissertation on how identity is conceptualized in this research, the above self-concept accounts appear to provide support not only for a sociological and psychological approach to identity, but they also lend support for a communication perspective to identity. For example, Study 2 participants' responses; as reflected above, are in line with CTI (Hecht, 1993) in that one's understanding and perception of the self not only varies along the four identity layers/frames: personal, enactment, relational, and communal, but that the salience of each coordinate and how these coordinates may intersect with one another differs from one individual to the next. Participants' accounts also reflect the dialectical nature of identity (Korte & Van Liere, 2017) and how individuals draw upon multiple aspects of ingroup identifications (Hjelm, 2013; Wetherell & Edley, 2014). Further, in line with McAdams and Pals' (2006) five level-analytical model of personality, where level 1 pertains to one's traits and dispositions, level 2 refers to one's personal goals and projects, to level 5 that relates to culture, Study 2 participants' self-concept recollections demonstrates the significance of these varying levels of personality. For some individuals, levels 1, 2, and 3 are more prominent, while levels 1, 3, and 5 are particularly salient for others. These narratives appear to suggest a continued need for an interdisciplinary exploration of identity as a concept, in addition to reinforcing the need for researchers to employ multiple data collection methods in identity research.

"Being Muslim" and the Diverse Praxis of "Islam"

Just as the identity constellations among Study 2 participants were highly diverse, participants' sensemaking narratives with respect to their understanding of religious identity and practice of Islam were similarly heterogenous. Participants' narratives highlight varying aspects of understanding, ranging from the act of subscribing to specific Islamic tenets of faith and establishing a personal relationship with God, to the way one interacts with others regardless of color and creed. For many of the individuals I spoke with, the essence of "being Muslim" is living with a higher sense of purpose and intentionality in behavior, as well as a general sense of accountability. Several participants have also expressed the centrality of Islam in their personal journey of becoming better versions of themselves where "Muslimness" is a philosophy of living. These narratives are significant on several fronts: (1) they highlight the complexity of embodied religion, i.e., religious identity, and the importance of exploring the concept of praxis in identity research, and (2) they underline the inherently subjective and heterogenous nature of Muslim identity. These outcomes have significant implications for scholars conducting identity research, particularly research examining the concept of religious identity.

Believing in the tenets of faith. Four participants indicated that "being Muslim" is a matter of attesting and subscribing to the Islamic tenets of faith or the five pillars of Islam widely adopted by Muslims worldwide, namely the declaration of faith or the *shahada*, the five daily ritual prayers, giving charity, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. For example, James, who is 36-year-old Caucasian Muslim convert, said:

> Essentially, *Ash-hadu an laa ilaaha illa Allah Muhammadun rasool ullah* [translation: I testify there is no God but Allah; Muhammad is His Messenger]. I try to practice my faith both openly and in private. *Iman* [translation: faith or belief] and *Islam* [translation: submission to God], at least to some degree. I think that's the most important thing […] the idea of just I believe in Allah, I'm believing in His Messengers [peace and blessings be upon them], and I'm believing in the Quran, and the teachings of the religion and trying to follow them. That's what it means for me to be a Muslim.

This is echoed by another participant, Fiaz, a 24-year-old Muslim man of South Asian descent, who attested: "Of course, recognition of the *Kalima* [translation: the testification of faith]. Just recognizing that there is a Creator, and there were messages sent to us, and Muhammad as the Last Messenger. That's where it starts." Similarly, Hayat, a 23-year-old Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern descent, said that being Muslim is essentially performing all of the things known to be part of the religion. Further, she included a qualifier suggesting her own praxis of Islam:

> I believe in the five pillars of Islam. *Al-Hamdu lillah*, [translation: All Praises be to God] you could say that I don't know if you could call me strict because I'm not really a strict Muslim, I listen to music and stuff like that. Again, I do everything that makes someone a Muslim.

Sumaya, a 24-year-old Muslim convert who identifies as transgender, reported that "being Muslim" is also about believing in the idea of accountability of this life in the Hereafter:

> For me, what makes me Muslim: I believe in Quran, I believe in Jesus being a Prophet like all the other prophets […] the whole deal where it's like [you believe] in the *Shahada* [translation: the testification of faith], you believe in one God and that you believe that the message of the Prophets is true, the Day of Judgment will come and stuff. I do believe all that. That's what makes me Muslim.

Living with a sense of purpose: God-consciousness and accountability. Expounding on the above notion of believing in the Day of Judgment, some participants have outlined behaviors in line with living a God-conscious life and a sense of accountability as the act of seeking a balance between abstaining from the impermissible and performing what is considered religiously lawful. Fiaz, for example, said the following:

> Of course, it's living your life according to *Sharia* [translation: Islamic religious law] whatever is *halal* [translation: lawful]; enjoy it, and wherever the balance Allah has set, you abstain from it. So, meaning, I'm praying five times a day, avoiding *riba* [translation: usury], avoiding *zina* [translation: unlawful sexual intercourse], avoiding indecency, being honest, being excellent to parents, and seeking sustenance, and everything good in a *halal* [translation: Islamically permissible] manner.

Another participant, Asad, a 40-year-old Muslim man living in British Columbia, Canada, added that living with a sense of God-consciousness and accountability means referring to the

two as lenses through which everything else is seen and motivated by, including praiseworthy

traits and behavior in one's social interactions:

> The defining character is all the time in my mind, I am conscious of God, that if I—For example, if I am somewhat alone, I can do anything, but I have that subconscious mind that God is watching me. Every time when I go out, I have that in the back of my mind, I have consciousness about God that helps me to be kind, or whatever characteristics I have, it is because of that consciousness of God that helps me to be kind, to be helpful, and give charity, or be an interfaith peacemaker or whatever. […] I have some purpose in this life. I've not come into this world just for fun. I have some purpose in this life, so I had to work on that. Those things are by helping people, by doing these interfaith peacemaking errands around me, and other activities.

Halima, a 37-year-old African American Muslim woman, had a broader definition of "living

with a sense of purpose", which hinges on the concept of sincerity in one's relationship with

God, as well as being sincere with one's everyday actions:

> Like for me, when I analyzed the concept of sincerity, it means like being consistently like honest and truthful. And that means that starts with you and your relationship with the Creator of the Universe. I noticed that because I'm more honest with God, I don't play games with God. I'm much more comfortable speaking whatever I feel, and depending on who it is, like if it's like somebody who likes to argue, I'm not gonna [*sic*] spend a lot of time arguing with people. As a teacher, I'm trying to build community and not break community and I know some people are really sensitive. So, I would rather, like I would rather choose a smarter way, and I don't like to be like overly; like, diplomatic, because I think that kind of like fails in the area of sincerity.

Another Canadian Muslim participant, Maryam, who is a 40-year-old Caucasian/White

woman, expanded the concept of "being Muslim" as living with a sense of purpose to include

civic duties. She believed that "being Muslim" makes one a better citizen and member of

society:

> How can I explain this? I think it makes you a better person, I think, because you're aware of what's right and what's wrong, and that you have to obey laws and things like that. You can't be a traitor for your country, for example. I think that they're not mutually exclusive. I think you can be a good Canadian and a good Muslim. I think being one benefits the other and vice versa.

The idea of "being Muslim" as living a God-conscious and accountable lifestyle is also echoed

by Aliyah, who is a 40-year-old African American Muslim woman living in the American

Midwest:

I would say my belief in Allah and His Prophet are example, and an overall understanding of what our purpose here is. We're put on this earth to obey and serve [God] and to help one another. Those are things that I always try to keep in mind. "Is this pleasing to Allah? Is this something that's going to help me to get into *Jannah* [translation: Paradise]?

For Hakeem, a 29-year-old Muslim man of South Asian descent who works at Silicon Valley, his understanding and praxis of "being Muslim" revolves around what he does or does not engage at work:

In that sense, it's what you do and don't do. Are you taking breaks throughout the day and going to pray, or you're at a happy hour with co-workers? Are you drinking or you're not drinking? Are you having that BLT sandwich or are you not taking the bacon or are you having only *halal* [translation: Islamically permissible] food? On that spectrum I engage, I'm in the same activities, the only exception is that I won't drink [alcohol], and I don't eat pork. That becomes visible when I'm in those situations and folks might ask about it, but outside of that those are the big ones.

"Being Muslim" as intersection between Islam and daily social interactions. Other participants have expressed a perspective to "being Muslim" and living faith as manifesting in one's interactions with other people. For example, Diego, a 37-year-old Muslim man of Hispanic and Latinx background, defines his Muslim identity as being exhibited in the way he interacts with people:

I still have many thoughts. It's not the prayer, but I would say that if anything; it's the way that I carry myself. And I'm not trying to claim I'm most righteous or whatever, but I think that I, and I still think that I was this way even before, but I think that there was something about it [conversion to Islam] that made it feel a bit more complete […] I would say that what defines my Muslim-ness is just, again, how I interact with people. I try to respect them as much as possible. I try to keep an open mind. Just being open, being respectful, and just trying not to be judgmental.

Another participant, Irfan, a 26-year-old Muslim man of South Asian background, concurred: "Obviously, I think Islam shapes a lot of my views on things and the actions, and how I interact with people." Irfan also added that his understanding of "being Muslim" and his praxis of Islam intersect with the basic tenets of faith:

For me, I was going to say; fundamentally, it's a belief that there is a one God and then the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, is His Messenger. […] I just try to keep up with the obligatory actions in Islam. I obviously try to avoid certain actions or interactions and et cetera. That would be literally the only qualifier I would put on me

being Muslim. I'm like a practicing Muslim. I wouldn't consider myself a good Muslim in any meaning or word.

As reflected above, many participants have expressed how pervasive Islam is as a worldview. Alex, a 37-year-old Caucasian Muslim male convert, affirmed that: "Literally, it [Islam] informs every decision I make. Everything is weighed on that scale and in that lens. It's hard to even answer a question. It's entirely pervasive." For others, such as Hajar, a 22-year-old Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, the influence of Islam and "being Muslim" is significant enough that it influences one's personality and work ethos:

> That's [Islam's] really important to me because that's the stuff that really keeps me grounded in who I am. It's funny because people always ask me, my non-Muslim friends, they ask me like, "You're so empathetic. You're so career-driven. You're so passionate on what you do." I always get that question of like, "Why? How did you get this? Where did it come from?" It comes from my faith. It comes from my faith, mainly. It comes from my faith.

"Being Muslim" as a Racialized and Gendered Concept of Identity

For many participants in Study 2, race and gender were key aspects through which their praxis of Islam and "being Muslim" were experienced. Nowhere is this more evident than in the context of North America's contentious, polarizing sociopolitical environment, and rising anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia post-9/11. Across the narratives of respondents in the U.S. and Canada who have had personal experiences of dealing with anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobic microaggressions, being visibly Muslim, such as through the donning of the headscarf and modest clothing, has been influential in these incidents. For example, Zahra, a 24-year-old Muslim woman of South Asian descent, recalled some of the challenges she had faced while being visibly Muslim in high school. Curiously, the bullying Zahra had experienced were not only at the hands of other students, but also teachers as well:

> I went to a high school for two years, and then I did a Head Start program at a community college, just get your rest of your degree there and get an associate and your diploma at the same time. I left that high school environment, but I still felt like for the first year and college that I wear *hijab* [translation: headscarf], I still felt like, "I'm different because I'm wearing the *hijab*." In the first two years of high school which I was at a high school, I was called a terrorist everyday by people. That was definitely a

negative experience. Then, in middle school, I had this one gym teacher that would say the most inappropriate things. It's like hindsight that I'm looking back, and I'm saying, "You shouldn't say that to your student." He said that because I'm Muslim. He would say just really derogatory comments or inappropriate questions about my faith, about my role as a Muslim woman in my community. I'm like, "That is not okay to say that." It was pretty messed up. Things like that.

Other participants who are educators by profession have further attested to experiencing workplace microaggressions from their peers. For example, Sahar, who is a 35-year-old Muslim high school teacher of Arab/Middle Eastern background living in the Midwest, recalled an incident that had happened to her in school:

> […] I was in school, the teacher came to me, and she said, ... So, I work in Warren. There isn't a lot of Arab or Muslim teachers. I'm the only Muslim teacher wearing a *hijab* [translation: headscarf] there in my school. So, a teacher came and she's White and said, "Can I ask you something?" And she said, "Are you Muslim or are you Islamic?" I told her, "Well, I don't agree with this idea of Muslim and Islamic the terrorists took. The terrorists took this word and made it negative when it's not, it's not a negative thing." A lot of people are convinced that "Islamic" is a negative thing right now. So, when she asked me that question it's like, are you a moderate [Muslim] or are you a terrorist? If I was a terrorist, would I say, "Yes, I'm a terrorist?"

According to Sahar, gender is a component of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia because of certain perceptions people have about particular races and about women:

> […] even if he [a Muslim man] doesn't have a beard, some Arab features or Muslim features—you can tell that he's not American. So, they look at women [and consider them] more vulnerable than men... so whatever is said to a woman, they wouldn't dare say to a man because a man might punch him in the nose, and he knows that the girl would not punch him in the nose. Yeah. I think they look at women more vulnerable than men and they wouldn't dare say this stuff.

Another educator, Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim convert of Hispanic and Latinx background living on the West Coast, added that her experience in being visibly Muslim has not been mitigated by the fact that she resides in an area that is predominantly of people of color:

> Even though I work in a professional environment that is largely the same, that doesn't mean that their awareness or their education about Islam and Muslims and things like that is any better than people that are sheltered from exposure or communities of color. […] That even in professional spaces, where the majority of people are people of color, people from my culture and my cultural and racial background, I would describe it as— [sighs] When I enter spaces, I feel like a palpable fear or something, or a discomfort. I

remember this was true when I started working at the school that I started to work, and I felt like anytime I entered the teacher's lounge, people—I don't know—got really quiet or—I don't know. I really don't know how to explain it precisely, how to describe it precisely.

Selena further recalled a fairly recent incident while attending a professional development seminar:

Any teacher has to do a lot of continued professional development but especially as a new teacher, you have all of these other programs that you have to be a part of. Sometimes there are certain conferences that are mandatory for us to attend, and those are held by the County Office of Education. Usually they're held at the Office of Education of our County, and— This was just most recent, this was this year in January. I've literally gone to the last conference that was mandatory for us to attend. I sat there. Again, this is for all new teachers, only the new teachers had to attend this conference. It's teachers from many districts, because there are many school districts within one County. […] I just remember sitting somewhere which was close to the front of the speaker, because I always like to sit up front so I can ask questions or be able to hear better or whatever. I sat somewhere where a Latina woman was going to sit, or she was sitting. She had pulled out the chair, she had set her stuff on the table, and she started to almost bend to sit. I got a chair next to her, and as soon as she saw me, she just got all her stuff and left.

Amplifying the gendered aspect of Islamophobia, Maryam, a 52-year-old Canadian Muslim convert of Caucasian/White background, added that while she had not experienced overt anti-Muslim racism or Islamophobia after the Trump administration took office specifically, she recalled some of the hostility encountered post-9/11:

[In the present political climate] Not so much. After 9/11, yes, I did. I also didn't drive then. I walked everywhere and people would scream at me as I was walking down the street. Now I drive everywhere, and I don't take public transport anymore. I'm not out and about. I don't know why, but, I guess, maybe people are cowards, they see a lone woman walking down the street, so they figure, "Hey, she's fair game, let's go scream at her. She's an easy target."

Maryam further added that the hostility she experienced had lessen after she started wearing "western-style clothing":

I don't know. What had more to do with it was clothing. I used to wear *Jilbab*, I still wear hijab, Alhamdulillah, but I used to wear jilbab and people would scream at me, and shout at me, and say nasty things to me. Then, I think if I'd been a man walking down the street in a *thawb* [translation: ankle-length long-sleeved gownlike garment typically worn by men in the Gulf Arab region] and a *kufi* or turban or something, I think I probably wouldn't have gotten screamed at as much. Perhaps, if I'd been a man, maybe people wouldn't have gotten out of their car and actually tried to assault me. I

don't know. I'm not sure if gender has much of a role in it or not. I don't really know. I found when I started wearing more western-style clothing, that people didn't react as negatively towards me. I think jilbab is maybe just too foreign looking for some people's sentiments.

Taken together, the above stories suggest that "being Muslim" is an identity that is not only gendered, as evident in the context of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, it is also racialized even by other minorities of color. The implications of Muslim identity and the praxes of "being Muslim" being intersectional include the need for researchers to employ a critical race or intersectional approach to identity (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008) when studying this particular subpopulation of Americans and Canadians.

"Being Muslim" as a Process

The lived experience of Study 2 participants further unveils the essence of Muslim identity or "being Muslim" as being a process, a "spiritual journey", which not only supports existing research on religious identity (Korte & van Liere, 2017; Nguyen, 2017; Von Stuckrad, 2003), but also highlights the broader nature of identity as being (a) psychosocial, (b) fluid and multifaceted, as well as (c) interactional, as the Chapter 2 discussion emphasized. Moreover, seemingly going against the totalizing framing and stereotyping of Muslims as being a monolithic entity, Study 2 reinforces our understanding of the inherently diverse nature of understanding and practice of Islam. The narratives shared by my interview respondents underline how "Muslimness" is anything but a static concept—it is relatively fluid and, in some contexts, highly complex, despite the relative stability of the Islamic belief system. Study 2 participants of all races and ethnicities, genders, as well as cultural backgrounds, have indicated they have experienced some change or shift in their understanding and praxis of "being Muslim" at certain points in their lives. For example, Parisa, who is a 37-year-old Muslim woman of South Asian background living in British Columbia, Canada, indicated a change in the way she expresses her Muslim identity through the way she dresses:

> I started *niqab* [translation: face veil] like one year ago. At that time before that, I was not wearing *abaya* [translation: full-length outer garment typically worn by Muslim women in the Middle East]. I was not wearing a *niqab*, I was just wearing jeans and a shirt and a scarf. That's it.

Meanwhile, Ousmane, who is a 25-year-old Muslim man of West African background residing on the U.S. East Coast, reported that the shift he had experienced was one of philosophy, i.e., his spiritual understanding and practice:

> I'd say from birth to 10 years old, my parents taught me to learn [about Islam] and all that, but I didn't really know the meaning of what I was learning. I didn't really know what I was doing, so when I got into the United States and then I felt like there was something missing in me because I couldn't identify as American. I couldn't identify either as a typical African, so I was like I'm somewhere in between and I had to figure out my identity, who I am, [and make sense of] my life pretty much. That's what made me really get into religion because that gave me a lot of answers that I was asking myself. That's the moment I understand that what was missing really is the belief. From 20 to 25, I cannot say I'm a good Muslim, Allah knows who's good and bad, but I try the best that I can just leave what I'm not supposed to do as a Muslim and do most of what I'm supposed to do. Like praying on time and all that, Mecca and all the things I'm supposed to do, and stay away from everything that's *haram* [translation: Islamically impermissible].

While the previous two examples may demonstrate an "upward" shift in religiosity, other participants have shared their religious struggles where they have ended up becoming "less practicing". For example, Halima, a 37-year-old African American Muslim woman living in the Midwest, shared some of the challenges she experienced being a Muslim child raised in a predominantly non-Muslim environment:

> […] growing up, those [moments of being in school] are very difficult places to be for a kid. Just to say that I'm normal, and then I'm outside my home, and then suddenly I'm not normal. And then at the same time you want to assimilate with the people at school, and they are sort of strange to you about certain things. So, most of your friends are other religious people who don't date. For example, I didn't go to prom and I didn't have a boyfriend. There was an expectation of, you should be looking for a man, but you shouldn't be obsessing about it. So, naturally going into college was very awkward. I did have a boyfriend by the time I got to college; who was a secret boyfriend, but the Muslim thing was always very sort of at the front. And then it ["being Muslim"] took a back burner because I thought I could just forget about it and just be like everyone else.

Halima further added that her praxis of "Muslimness" shifted later on as she decided to revisit her faith albeit from a feminist lens by immersing in the works of Muslim feminists:

But trying to reconcile everything with Islam […] When I went back into Quranic studies for myself, I was self-motivated, self-directed. I was piecing through parts of the women's movement for Muslims, I was reading Fatema Mernissi. I met Amina Wadud, I prayed with the women who are leading [Friday] prayers, I've actually been on the circuit to possibly get into that now that things are a little bit more developed, like, for example, in the Women's Mosque of America.

Meanwhile, Muhammad, a 35-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim man residing in Alberta, Canada, reported that he had previously identified as a religious conservative who would avoid attending events where alcohol is served but no longer identifies strictly as such:

[…] when I moved to Alberta, I started to be more involved with the MSA [i.e., Muslim Students' Association], so it was like conservative Islam, and what not. But then it felt more like proselytizing. And, that's just not me. I believe in people's agency, so yeah. And then it ["being Muslim'] just tapered off.

Muslim conversion as a process. In addition to unveiling the dynamic nature of Muslim identity in terms of people's understanding and praxis of Islam, Study 2 also contributes to our understanding of the lived experience of individuals who converted to Islam vis-a-vis the lived experience of individuals who were born Muslim. The narratives of Study 2 participants who identify as converts suggest that the act of converting to Islam can be a complex and dynamic process involving multiple developmental phases, instigated through soul-searching and a motivation to learn more about the religion, to the act of converting by giving the testification of faith, to the "honeymoon" phase of "being Muslim", to the struggles of adjusting to post-conversion life that may include the struggles of integrating into local Muslim circles, to the challenges of "coming out" as Muslim and managing close relationships in the process.

Sharing his conversion story, Diego, a 37-year-old Mexican-American convert, said his conversion was influenced; among others, by his experience of serving as a Peace Corp volunteer in the Middle East—which was a culmination of a spiritual journey sparked earlier in his life. Diego's story reinforces the idea of a developmental trajectory, highlighting some of the pushbacks he experienced from family members, and how they eventually came to:

I was not born into a Muslim family. I converted to Islam when I was in Jordan in 2000 ... I should know this, I want to say, it was 2011. This is nearing the end of my service. […] But my journey to that started back in high school when I took a summer class at Northwestern University, and I took a class on world religions. And we learned about many, and we got to visit different temples as well, but the one that stood out to me was a mosque, and even just the teachings that we were learning about Islam. I didn't have any previous knowledge of it. […] That's where the spark started, but things never quite moved much until my last year of college. […] So, it was then that I was determined that I was going to become a Muslim, that this was it. I remember calling my mother I think that same day and telling her, "Mom, I think this is what's going to happen. I think I'm going to start practicing Islam." My family, I mean, they still have feelings, but at the time she was like, "You're crazy, whatever." I'm sure that they thought it was just a phase like any other one that I had experienced previously, and they were sort of like, "Well, you can't do this. You're Catholic and you did your first communion and your confirmation, how could you do that?" It took some time to open up to friends and family. Now, my family doesn't know that I converted. I guess, traditionally. They don't know that story, at least, my conversion in Jordan. But they know that I'm practicing, and my mother's been very accommodating, too, when it comes to preparing foods.

Another Mexican-American convert, Selena, 33, has had quite a difficult transition in

"being Muslim", particularly as she resides in a small community with very few Muslims:

I would say this town is about 65% or so Latino, and the other is the majority of the rest of the town or city is White. […] The Muslim community here is very small, a majority of them are actually immigrants from Yemen. […] Of course, the people that have known me all my life, to them, I'm still the same. I just have a different set of beliefs now, but it's been a little bit difficult. It's been a little bit difficult simply because making the transition or not transition, but converting, in many ways, especially at the beginning can be a difficult experience […] In a way, my experiences were a little bit difficult and challenging just to feel a sense of community as a Muslim, but at the same time, with my cultural or ethnic community, I also feel a sort of rejection in a way. It could be very difficult, I guess and isolating, or it was at the beginning.

Selena specifically highlighted how some of the anti-Muslim hostility she had experienced

post-conversion was a direct result of her decision to publicly declare her Muslim identity by

adopting the headscarf. Selena said she felt a sense of betrayal coming from her Hispanic and

Latinx community:

I think that strangers, people that don't know me and people that learned that I'm a Muslim Latina, they get this sense or idea that perhaps I'm not somebody who is proud of my cultural identity. I'm somebody that has maybe sold out to a different culture. That's how I feel they think, that's how I feel they perceive me. I think a lot of that has to do with just not knowing and miseducation about Islam and what it is, the fact that it's a faith.

Selena, who is a teacher, further shared some examples of direct experiences with anti-

Muslim hostility from the Hispanic and Latinx community at work:

> I remember joining a table. Again, I'm new to the [school] district, but joining a table and someone telling me not to sit there because that seat was taken. Then I said, "Okay." I sat at the same table just on a different side and right across from where I was going to sit. Then another woman came, they were both Latinas. The one that told me that somebody was already sitting there started speaking to the woman that came to take that seat in Spanish and told her, "Oh, she thought she was going to sit there." I turned around and I told her in Spanish, "I'm sorry, I didn't know the seat was taken," and they looked completely shocked. [laughs] The fact that they heard me speak Spanish. I think those are experiences that have made me aware of who I am now as a Muslim.

Selena also recalled another example of anti-Muslim hostility while being public, which had

led her to develop a heightened sense of self-awareness and her surroundings:

> One time I entered this sushi restaurant. I placed an order. I didn't actually go find a table, but I just went up to the register and I placed an order. They had this special seating reserved for people that are either waiting to be seated or waiting for a to-go order, but they were near some tables that actual customers that want to sit in and enjoy their meal there are there. There was a table with chairs, but there was also one of those seats for the sit-in booths, and it was just long. It wasn't like a closed-off one, it was long. It would actually extend all the way near to where the door was, which is where I was sitting. A child started crawling that way, and his mom immediately screamed at him and pulled him back, like there was something to be fearful of. I feel those kinds of things are related to—They didn't happen before; nobody was ever scared of me before. Nobody reacted that way around me before, so I try to be really aware.

In further rationalizing her decision to wear the hijab during the "honeymoon

phase" of converting and making sense of some of the hostility she faced in the aftermath,

Selena said:

> I guess many of the times you don't really see things that could potentially later become more complicated or more of a problem. The reason why I say this is because everything at the beginning seemed like a honeymoon phase. I would describe myself when I actually decided to wear a hijab, I think I was still going through that phase where I was still experiencing all of the happiness and the joy of reverting or converting. It wasn't until later, and I don't know if that might have to do also with political climate that changes, but it wasn't until later [after] I embraced the veil and I started dressing [Muslim].

Selena also explained how her decision to publicly perform her Muslim identity has impacted

her relationship with her mother:

> My mom—That's one of the things that she told me early on is, she said, "You know I respect your faith, you know I respect your decision to become a Muslim," but she said, "And to wear your *hijab*." She says, "I know you have to wear it for prayer and all the stuff but I'm just afraid. It's okay to wear it for prayers," she said. "I'm just afraid that if you go out there like that, how people are going to treat you or what could happen to you." That was her concern. I think she was trying at that time maybe—I wouldn't say convince me, I don't think she was dissuading me but she was—As a mother, she was telling me something she was concerned about, that she doesn't want me being discriminated or worse, have something happen to me, something violent happen to me. At the time I'm just like, "No, this is—I get it, I completely get what you're saying but I have to think about why I'm choosing to do this." To me, my reasons for wanting to wear are more important than those other things.

While Selena's conversion story suggests one extreme of the conversion process, other converts have recalled different experiences. Mary, a 34-year-old woman of Caucasian/White background, emphasized how supportive her social network has been with her conversion:

> A few of my friends were like, "Is this for real?" "Well, it's not for fake, it's for real," but they've all accepted it. Most definitely I have some very, very supportive friends, but they live the life that they live and it's just not the life that I live anymore. They do keep their lifestyle away for me. *Al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: All Praises be to God] I just had to go a different way than they did.

Despite having supportive friends and an empathetic mother ("She's very supportive, *in sha Allah* [translation: God-willing]"), Mary also mentioned how the conversion process can still be alienating, particularly when interacting with her pre-Muslim social network and realizing how their worldviews now diverge:

> You feel a lot different whenever you're standing around a bunch of people and you're the only one wearing either a *hijab* [translation: headscarf] or a *khimar* [translation: longer version of the headscarf] or whatever it may be, and you're trying to hold conversations and you just have nothing in common, but it's people that you've grown up with. You love them, but I just don't even know what to say to people anymore. It's so different. That's when I realized I don't even want to be around these people anymore. *Astaghfirullah* [translation: I seek Allah's forgiveness], because you love them and you do want to be around them, but in all actuality, you don't.

Rasheed, a 39-year-old African American man whose parents were members of the Black Panthers political movement, said that while he is currently the only Muslim in his immediate and extended family, his relatives have been fairly supportive of his conversion as well:

I'm the only Muslim in my family, immediate or extended, I don't know. I think because the way I was when I was a kid, it didn't really surprise anybody overall anyway. When I converted to Islam my mother figured out, "You're going to do something like that" She said I was a little weird, not weird, that's not the appropriate word. I was a different child from especially my brothers. I was a lot more reflective. I remember when I was seven or eight years old, I asked her to stop serving pork in the house because I didn't want to have high cholesterol when I was 15.

In addition to mentioning the struggles they have experienced in managing their pre-Muslim social ties, Muslim converts in Study 2 have also highlighted the challenges with respect to interacting with fellow Muslims following their conversion to Islam. Rasheed, for example, recalls his experience of encountering pushbacks and alienation from other [typically born] Muslims who consider his status as a convert to offer "less authentic" an experience in "being Muslim". In speaking about his experience of being shunned at a mosque in Virginia, Rasheed, who identifies as an orthodox Sunni Muslim who subscribes to a Sufi spiritual path, said:

> Oh, definitely. When it [Sufism] does come up, you have a lot of push backs. And so even if you are able to theologically provide coherent arguments, they [Sufis] are automatically seen as being less authentic. And then you add on how being a convert allows you to have less authenticity, and then being Black also allows you to have less authenticity. So, I think those things are really some of the pertinent things about my experience.

Echoing Rasheed's experience with authenticity, Alex, 37-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim Canadian whose entire immediate family members had converted with him from Greek Orthodoxy, also recalls some microaggressions his family had experienced from other Muslims. Perhaps somewhat related to some people's perception of Muslim conversion being "less authentic" an experience, Alex added that converts may be particularly vulnerable:

> My nephew would be bullied, for example. He wouldn't be treated—The [Quran] teachers wouldn't necessarily stand up for him. Because we're converts, often we're in a situation where one Muslim tend to feel that they can easily take advantage of us, and it's a very common thing. Before, my sister would have Imams get on her words. They would never dare with somebody from their own community, for fear of that coming back to them. They just feel like we're fair game. There's stuff like that. It's hard to say. That's their experience.

Another Caucasian/White convert, 36-year-old James, who works as a prison chaplain and resides on the U.S. East Coast, reinforces the unique identity and experiences Muslim converts face when juxtaposed against born-into-Islam individuals:

> Subcategory of being a Muslim, being a convert is an important part of—aspect of who I am too. I feel like I have experiences that are different than a lot of born Muslims might have, or people who maybe immigrated to this country. I lived in the United States my entire life. I feel a strong identity as an American, but as far as a patriotic thing, I definitely feel American too.

Meanwhile, Selena, recalls the cultural barriers she faced in finding community and integrating into local Muslim circles:

> There's always a language barrier because the ladies speak Yemeni Arabic or dialects, and I speak English and Spanish. There's also a cultural difference because I'm a convert. When I was learning my faith, there was a lot of new things that I didn't know. They come from a much more, I would say, conservative culture and society back in Yemen, the majority of which are from—What is it called? They're from not big cities but really small, rural areas in Yemen. There's that cultural kind of difference and there's also a language barrier at the same time.

"Being Muslim" in the Present Political Climate: Respectability [Muslim] Identity Work and Global Awareness

I conclude my analyses for Research Question 5 with the warranted assertion that the notion of respectability is an essential component of Muslim identity work, particularly following the 9/11 terror attacks and ensuing War on Terror, and specifically within the context of North American Muslims. In examining Study 2 participants' responses regarding their self-awareness, their understanding-, as well as their praxes of "being Muslim", participants asserted that being a good representation of Islam and Muslims is part and parcel of the experience in "being Muslim", whether it be part of conveying the message of Islam or a means to counter damaging rhetoric, negative stereotyping, and misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims. This burden of respectability is even weightier in interacting with non-Muslim others and in predominantly non-Muslim spaces. James says that while he considers the responsibility

of respectable representation to be a weighty matter, he does not see it as something that is necessarily negative:

> I'm the only Muslim at my institution. Actually, I'm the only Muslim chaplain in the state correctional system. There were two more when I started. They've both since retired. I definitely feel like I have to represent Islam for the whole correctional system, which is a large system, which is an honor at times, but also very scary and definitely a burden. As Muslims, we talked about being *mukallaf* [translation: being religiously responsible or accountable], that idea of morally responsible which literally means to be burdened, weighed down with something. I feel like I'm responsible for this, but it definitely isn't, and so I feel it's a burden, but not to say it's a negative thing at all. It's a heavy thing to carry around.

James added that while his racial background meant that he may not phenotypically stand out as an American:

> I am visibly identifiable as a Muslim. I wear turban and more traditional clothing. All staff know I'm Muslim. All the inmates at the institution know that I'm Muslim. Cognizant every day. If I'm walking around, people know and identify me as Muslim. Whether I want it to be or not, it's always an important part of my identity at work, for sure.

Another Muslim American convert, Marisol, a 34-year-old woman of Hispanic and Latinx background, suggests that by engaging in respectable representation, she is also conveying the message of Islam, particularly when interacting with her non-Muslim family members: "I'm Muslim. And I try to live my faith not just practice it but also show it to people and pray that they become Muslim. Not through my actions, but just like, just being around Muslims, that hoping that people will accept the truth, especially my family." While several participants expressed the idea that respectability identity work is part of ongoing efforts to spread Islam, others tread the matter more carefully. Maryam, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim convert of Caucasian/White background, had reservations about the way certain Muslims have outrightly proselytize, adding that:

> I don't want to preach to people. What's that expression? The best sermon is a good example. That is one of my grandmother's big influences. Like I said, she didn't talk about her faith, she lived it. You could see through her actions and how she conducted herself and lived her life, you could see that she—That was something really impressive; in my mind anyways. You could see that she was a really good person. I try to be the same, I try to—Don't tell me about your religion, show me. Don't tell me

how good your religion is, show me. I try to do the same thing, I'm not by any means Mrs. Perfect Muslim. No, I'm not. I try to treat other people the way I'd like to be treated.

Echoing the respectable representation role as an "ambassador" that Muslims may take on as indicated above, Asad, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim man of South Asian descent, asserted that religion is indeed an important aspect of an individual's identity and he explained how Islam shapes his own identity as a humanitarian and interfaith worker in that respect:

> First and foremost, I think religion plays a very important role in signifying you as a person. For me, I think Islam signifies me much more than any other quality, because if I am an interfaith peacemaker or I'm a humanitarian, I am kind, I have inherited this from Islam. […] I become selfless, I'm not selfish, I become more helping to people around me—it's Islam which signifies me.

Amal, a 33-year-old Muslim lawyer of Arab/Middle Eastern background, expands the notion of respectability in Muslim identity work by suggesting that it also manifests in the types of individuals Muslims would befriend and network with in predominantly non-Muslim circles, and in effect start adopting certain political views:

> I would say that even outside the Muslim community, because we are Muslims, like we are minorities, we tend to, I think, be friends with people who tend to have more Leftist views and the Muslims are adopting those—I don't know if it's a word, like hyper-Left views.

Reinforcing the above perspective, Banan, 30, another Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background currently residing on the East Coast, sees her Muslim identity as intersecting with her ethnic identity and thereby expands respectability identity work to include the question of proper and fair representation. In her case specifically, respectability identity work equally pertains to her identity as a Muslim American woman of Palestinian heritage, as well as her identity of being a Muslim woman who is not visibly Muslim:

> I would say Palestinian and Muslim is very important to me, having people know that. I don't wear a hijab, but I take every opportunity to tell people that I am Muslim and that I am Palestinian because I feel like I want people to change perceptions of what they think Palestinians are, and what they think Muslim women are, and to know that we come in all shapes and sizes. We do all types of different things. We're all kinds of different people with different personalities, with different backgrounds. So, for me, I think that's very important.

Paralleling the respectability politics of African American women in Interwar Detroit (Wolcott, 2013), Study 2 participants have also indicated that respectability Muslim identity work is similarly engaged in *intra*-group interactions, i.e., individual Muslims' interactions with fellow coreligionists. Eighteen-year-old Amani, a Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, defines her praxis of "being Muslim' identity work as:

> Always trying to represent the Muslim community well and always just trying to be a help for the Muslim community in the Muslim community. I love my Muslim brothers and sisters, so I love going to the *masjid* [translation: mosque] and I love talking to all my friends at the *masjid*. […] And seeing all the aunts and uncles. I get so much joy by going to the *masjid* and seeing all my family members, all my aunts and friends, all the community members. As a Muslim I would describe myself as just ... I can't even sum it up into words. Yeah, I don't think I can sum it up into words.

The Significance of 9/11 in Muslim Identity Sensemaking

My analyses of Study 2 interviews further highlight the significance of the broader sociopolitical climate following the 9/11 terror attacks and the War on Terror in the identity sensemaking processes of self-identifying Muslims in North America, particularly among interview respondents currently residing in the U.S. The majority of my U.S. participants had affirmed that 9/11 was not only a paramount sociopolitical and historical turning point for individual Muslims' self- and ingroup identification, but that the significance of 9/11 had even eclipsed the anti-Muslim reputation of the current U.S. administration of President Donald Trump. While the Trump administration had further institutionalized Islamophobia through legislations and policies, such as the "Muslim Ban", and despite the rising numbers of reported anti-Muslim hate crimes that are well-documented (Gould & Klor, 2016; Hanes & Machin, 2014; Hobbs & Lajervadi, 2019; Muller & Schwarz, 2019; Panagopoulos, 2006), most of Study 2 participants do not share the sentiment that their fate as members of an underrepresented or minority population, has taken a turn for the worse. Regardless of gender, the narratives of Study 2 respondents from the U.S. suggest that with the exception of two participants, none

have had or could recall any considerable personal encounters with anti-Muslim hostility under the Trump administration.

For example, 37-year-old Halima, who lives in the Midwest and is of African-American/Black background, claimed that the fate of Muslims in the U.S. post-2016 presidential elections has not been particularly impacted. However, as a Black Muslim woman, she is equally impacted by the injustices and inequities occurring across the country and elsewhere in the world:

> I don't think it changed very much in the current or the post 2016 political climate. Yeah, the hostilities are there, the atrocities are there. And they've always been there. We were on the front lines back at the Iraq War part two. We're talking about way back. We were getting killed everywhere. And I used to say, you know, that *Hadith* [translation: Prophetic saying] was powerful to me, the one where if one part of the body hurts it all hurts. And like I said, I've cried a ton for injustice, any injustice because I grew up listening to people like Martin Luther King Jr. and come from stock like that, my family's like that. Like very conscious of injustice and inequity, and I think Islam has the best answers to trying to minimize or do away with inequities or inequalities. So, for me, it was just a continual struggle.

James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American convert, said that he had not personally experienced any difference in "being Muslim" in the present political climate:

> I'm trying to think. It's been a while since I've had anyone blatantly say anything. They never really say it to my face directly, or just say like within earshot, but not directly to me. I can't think of anything recent, like a specific wording that's coming to mind. Personally, I haven't noticed a lot of difference under this current administration and under the last administration in my own personal life. Although, I have a lot of Muslim friends who talk about the differences that they've experienced, but I've never really experienced anything that seems like, "Oh, this is definitely because Trump is in office," versus when he wasn't in office. I don't feel much has changed for me personally in the past couple of years.

Expressing a similar sentiment as above, Fiaz, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim American man working in healthcare, recalled his experience of "being Muslim" so far as the following:

> Living as a Muslim in the present political climate, I don't think it's really done anything; like, affected me much at all. Currently, I'm living in El Paso, Texas, which is basically an extension of Juarez, Mexico. Over there, there's not a lot of rednecks. There's not a lot of anti-immigrant sentiments or anything like that. Even as a Muslim I'm pretty respected. The current political climate opened up really interesting

conversations with other people, at times. Nothing hostile, really. I think if you're witty and fun, a lot of those potential hostile conversations end up just being positive or just a joke or something like that.

Other participants, however, have indicated that while "being Muslim" in the contemporary political environment has not particularly stood out from the context of previous political administrations, they suggested that events immediately following the 9/11 terror attacks have been significantly more impactful in their everyday interactions. For example, Hakeem—a 29-year-old Muslim American man of South Asian descent—recalled his early childhood of growing up Muslim and developing an affinity for the religion. His relationship with Islam had somewhat taken a turn following 9/11, however, as he struggled in trying to reconcile his understanding of Islam with the acts of terrorists who had hijacked his faith. Hakeem's struggle of growing up Muslim in the post-9/11 climate eventually led to a realization of a need to engage in respectability Muslim identity work:

> I think it's probably one of the, sort of up until that point, right. I like religion. There was a thing, I was raised about it. I don't know. I mean, it's also an age thing too. That happened when I was 10 or 11, so, religion was like a thing and I was taught the basis of Islam and basis of the prayer itself […] At that age and in subsequent years and you combine that with that [9/11] event, it was both, I'm starting to come more into this religion but at the same time, I'm, "Oh my God. What is happening? Why did people claiming to be of this religion do this thing? Crap, is it awkward now when I say, 'Oh, yes? I'm actually Muslim'? What do people think when you said that?" If anything, it forced me to really take on that mantle, "Okay. I'm a Muslim person so I'm going to try to be a representative of this and make sure I do the best things I can because people see the religion through me for right or wrong."

When asked specifically about his experience of "being Muslim" under the Trump administration, Hakeem admitted things had not been as impactful as the 9/11 terror attacks have had:

> Thankfully, not terrible. Honestly, I can't, I really can't think of anything changing. Just being real, I can't think of anything changing in my day-to-day life or how I interact with people. I think it's maybe made me more aware because I mean—Just actually, if I'm answering this question honestly, I think quite frankly what has happened in the past four years, it's probably not as impactful for me as a 9/11 was.

While Hakeem had also mentioned the significance of the current administration's "Muslim Ban" in galvanizing social justice activism within Muslim circles, he still felt that "being Muslim" in the current sociopolitical context is not as terrifying as the events following 9/11:

> That [9/11] was probably way more impactful than what's happened in the past four years. If anything, it's just the repeat, it's, "Okay this isn't anything unusual." Aside from maybe the Muslim ban which was probably one of the first times where me and other folks became more activist about it. That was one thing that may be may have been different. It's the first time I can think of that people who wouldn't usually participate in a protest or wouldn't usually participate in any form of activism did so because that was one of the first times I said, "Oh crap. This is a real thing that's happening is not good." Really outside of that, I think 9/11 was a little bit more impactful.

Maryam, a 52-year-old Caucasian/White Canadian and visibly Muslim woman, shared Hakeem's sentiment above, adding that she has not had any negative face-to-face experiences of "being Muslim" in Canada following President Trump's being elected into office:

> In person, not as much. After 9/11, it was a lot. Now, it's calmed down a little bit in person, but that's partly because feelings were really heightened after 9/11 and people were really tense and upset, which is understandable […] My interactions now are more like in the store where there's lots of other people around. Whereas somebody might have felt comfortable screaming at me walking down the street by myself, if I'm in the middle of Walmart, they're not going to say, "Hey you, blah, blah, go back home," kind of thing, really.

Another Canadian Muslim woman, 40-year-old Shahnaz, who is of South Asian background, affirmed the impact of 9/11 by recalling an incident she experienced on campus immediately following the tragedy, where the magnitude of self-awareness of not only "being Muslim", but "being visibly Muslim", had finally hit her:

> I guess one context that I could talk about is right after 9/11. It was my second year-- Sorry, my second day at university, so teacher's college. It was the day I think the buildings went down. I remember the whole day I just didn't speak out. I was really upset. I remember I guess the day after I had to go to class and I went into my class and I wasn't really interacting with anyone or talking or anything like that because, again, I'm taking all of this in, right? You don't know how people are going to react, et cetera. Then I just remembered one of my professors came to me and she just asked me. She said, "How are you feeling about everything that happened?" I just melted at that point. I guess the whole idea, the reason why I felt how I did was because of the fact that I was Muslim and that I clearly identified myself as Muslim. I wear the hijab and so everybody knew I was Muslim. I guess nobody really—It seemed as if nobody was impacted by that and then somebody saw that I was feeling something because of that

at that time. I think really I guess it's sort of like I personally felt here out of place and I think she really picked up on that and so I remember that being a significant time where I was very aware of the fact that I was Muslim and my identity and who I was, et cetera.

Even though most of my American respondents said they had not been directly impacted by the current U.S. administration's anti-Muslim policies and political rhetoric, one participant, Sahar, a 35-year-old visibly Muslim woman living in the Midwest, recalled an unpleasant incident following the presidential elections:

> So, when there was the vote for Trump, that was November or so—I like to walk in the national park in—what is it called? —It's Metro National Park, Kingston Metro National Park. I love to walk there and especially in the fall, and I used to take my friends with me, but then I didn't have energy for the coordination, or I don't want to go there to barbecue. I just want to clear my mind with nature. So, I developed a habit of going alone and it's okay. It's mostly weekends because it is scary when I walk a little alone when there's no one. Once it was weekend and I went there and everyone was wearing, not everyone, most of them were wearing red hats for Trump, supporting Trump, Trump, you know? And he [a man] came off a little bit of anti-Muslim or I don't know, he came off with a lot of hateful stuff against Muslims, especially the Muslim ban and everything. That was a time that I really questioned my *hijab* [translation: headscarf] because I was alone, I was the only person wearing the *hijab* that day in the park and everyone was walking, and they had this red hats and flags on their bicycles, and I was a little scared. One of them said, he actually stopped his car. I was walking and he stopped his car, he has a dog and he said, "You know you're in the States ... No, he said, "You know you're in America right now ..." Hold on. So, he said, "You know you're in America right now, you don't have to be dressed like that." And I was scared. So, I had a hat too, but it was a pink hat, it wasn't red. So, I just removed my *hijab* and I just put a hat. That was the time that I didn't want everyone to know that I'm a Muslim there. I didn't like his comment.

Another participant who is visibly Muslim and is of Caucasian/White background, Mary, a 34-year-old convert who claimed to be the only [visibly] Muslim resident of a small American town, had also shared similar experiences with anti-Muslim hostility. She says her experience of encountering verbal abuse has made her adjust her clothing in certain areas she frequents: "[I wear] The hijab. I wear a full garb. I'm completely covered every time I go out. No, that's the one time I did, and I got screamed [at], so I don't wear that one. I don't really wear that no more, not when I go out here. Now, if I go to Indiana, to the *Masjid*, I do." Adjusting one's appearance in response to growing anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia is not the only

strategy that visibly Muslim women have had to consider. Irfan, a 26-year-old Muslim

American man of South Asian background, claimed that he would dress differently whenever

he travels, particularly through airports:

> I act extra American when I'm at airports. I'll dress like more American. I usually dress kind of American anyways, but I'll wear a basketball cap, or I'll always make sure that they can clearly hear, clearly understand that I speak perfect English. I'll wear sports gear. I think that's generally everyone. If you're wearing sports gear, then you're not going to get trouble. I don't think I've ever had trouble at the airport actually, *al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: All Praises be to God]. The only time I've had trouble in the airport was in France and that was- I don't know if it was random but my views on France are very strong, so I'm going to say it's not right.

Acknowledging the gender aspect of anti-Muslim hostility often targeting visibly Muslim

women, Irfan emphasized his "Muslim male privilege":

> I guess I don't wear a *hijab*—that makes it a lot easier. I feel the women generally bear the brunt of any bad political climate. I do have a long beard, but that's about it. I'm a brown dude with long beard and hipsters have made long beards popular. Once hipsters start making *hijab* popular, I don't see a problem. For me, I haven't really—it hasn't changed my day-to-day life, I would say.

While Study 2 participants who reside in the U.S. have largely not noticed or perceived

a significant shift in anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia following Donald Trump's

election into office, participants who reside in Canada, particularly in British Columbia, have

said that there has been a noteworthy shift for the worse since Trump's presidency took effect.

For example, 52-year-old Maryam, a Canadian Muslim of Caucasian/White background,

suggested that some individuals, particularly those harboring anti-Muslim sentiments, have

become more brazen in expressing their prejudice and hatred. Maryam further mentioned that

the shift is particularly substantial when observing the media and witnessing online comments

on news articles:

> I've noticed the difference. People are less hesitant to hold back and much more willing and eager to say what they're really thinking. It seems like there are more people that have gone over to the right and they're expressing their opinions that—Well, there's a lot of Islamophobia. I've noticed quite a big change. Even here in Canada there's been a change. The ones that have hatred, they don't feel any hesitation anymore to say it. The things that they're saying and the feelings that they're expressing are much more extreme than they used to be. In the last couple of years, one or two years, I've noticed

that some of our publications here in Canada were more authorized to the right wing. You would expect nasty comments there. Those comments have gotten worse, but other publications that were center or slightly to the left, they usually had intelligent conversations and not attacks. They'd be more conversations and people might, for example, criticize a government policy or the Prime Minister, but they wouldn't say the type of things that they would say on the more right-leaning websites. I found that these more left or central publications, even they are now filled with really hateful comments and people are saying things now that they might have said before, "I hate Muslims," or something. Now they're saying things like, "Send them out with a body bag and a toe peg. The only thing to do with a rabid dog is get rid of it, shoot it." People are saying things like that now. Not everyone, but there are some.

Maryam further added that not only has she been closely monitoring recent developments in Canada; she has also used Facebook as a platform to share her concerns and raise awareness for rising right-wing activities in the country:

I've made it a point to follow what's going on and the rise of the right wing here in Canada and I've seen quite an alarming increase in right wing activity. There are people that are advocating that like-minded people would take up arms and learn how to use them. Some of these groups offer military training, or military style training, pardon me. That's something I've noticed and been following. I've been trying to urge our local communities, our Islamic communities to increase the security and people aren't taking it seriously. All these hateful groups spread such stuff around. I had seen that just one too many times some days. I wrote about that and that was only referring to a specific time, and specific group of people, and for specific reasons. I didn't write anything really long, but I wrote that, and I posted it on my Facebook. I don't usually talk about religion on my Facebook account. I have a lot of people actually say, "Hey, thank you for writing that." I know the people that are Islamophobic, they're not going to buy into that, but you know what, plant a seed, right?

Maryam also recalled an incident she had personally experienced online:

I don't hide the fact that I'm Muslim, but I don't advertise it either just because of the nature of my interactions online. Actually, I want to give you an example. There's the messages section and then there's message requests, I think they call it. At least they call the other message box or whatever. I found one in there a few months ago I had— somebody had written a nasty Islamophobic comment on an article or newspaper or something. I replied to it and [laughs], some random woman that I've never met in my life wrote me this big long Islamophobia diatribe and I just ignored her. I don't advertise the Muslim but people that know me know that I am.

Another Canadian Muslim woman, 37-year-old Parisa, who is of South Asian descent and lives in British Columbia, recalled how much of her experience living there as a visibly Muslim woman has been unpleasant. She added that despite the challenges of navigating public spaces as a visibly Muslim woman, she is no longer bothered by the hostility she encounters:

> With the community, I've faced a lot of racism, calling names and terrorist and things like in the bus, or just someone cursing or swearing about the Prophet Muhammad [peace and blessings be upon him], and different things. I would get really upset at the beginning, but to be honest, right now, it doesn't really bother me.

Recalling one particular incident she had experienced:

> I was at one of the thrifts, just really close by to my house. She said, "Really? Are you serious? You live in Canada. People had wars to just end this thing you're wearing." She gave me that salty look that, "This sort of thing that you're wearing—" She immediately called someone, started talking to someone. She was directing her phone, mic from her phone, just towards me because I was telling her to, "Educate yourself!" I told her, "I feel very bad for you. I feel pity you. You just need to educate yourself as what is this thing."

When asked about her experiences of "being Muslim" in the present political climate and the level of anti-Muslim prejudice specifically in British Columbia, Parisa explained:

> You could say lessen and you could say that severe less frequently, but when it happens, it's very bad. […] It's happening everywhere. I was in the mosque this past Friday. Two days before and one of the ladies I was in the mosque and there was a *halaqa* [translation: religious gathering]. She was saying that one of the bus drivers refused to let her in the bus. He said, "You can't come inside my bus because the bus is full." She's Black; poor thing, and she is Muslim. Can you imagine that? It's even harder for them. She said, "I forced myself inside the bus and I asked everyone if they can back up and they backed up and there was a lot of space, even for five or six more people." He refused to let her in the bus, and she was in the rain with a kid.

While not particularly recent, another Canadian Muslim woman, 18-year-old Zaynab, who is of Arab/Middle Eastern descent, recalled a similar unpleasant experience of being Muslim in British Columbia (BC). Referring to her childhood experience of growing up in the province:

> I grew up in way, way, way West. I grew up in BC, and BC happens to be a very toxic environment for Muslims. I remember a lot of hostility there. Yeah. In my experience, I have friends who currently live in BC who don't agree with that statement. But I know in my experience, I felt it was super, super negative living there. I lived there for three years and it was just the worst three years of my life.

Irrespective of the presidential administration and individual experiences of directly encountering incidents that are anti-Muslim or Islamophobic in nature, the majority of Study 2 participants do acknowledge a palpable degree of anxiety of "being Muslim" and being publicly identifiable as such in today's America. For example, Banan, a 30-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American woman, suggested that such anxieties have made the

community develop a heightened sense of awareness for other forms of social injustices.

Recalling a tragedy that had hit closer to home, Banan says:

> I think that Muslim Americans of the current political climate are not immune to some of the microaggressions or some of the more overt acts of violence that others around may be experiencing. And right now, I live in D.C. and actually, the local *masjid* that my husband and I attend is the one where a young girl was actually raped and murdered. It happened, I think, two years ago or something. I think her name was Nabra. So, that was our local mosque and I didn't know the girl's a very large community but just kind of thinking that, "Okay, I know where she was going. I know that area. I've been to that McDonald's. I've been to this mosque. That could have been any one of us." It really shakes you to your core and so I think, right now, the Muslim American experience may be one of trepidation, especially every time an attack comes out or something. I think you start to think, especially when there's been one in your community, like, "Oh my God, that could have been us. That could have been us. That could have been us."

Deonte, a 21-year-old African American Muslim convert who identifies as queer, chimed in to acknowledge some of the challenges "being Muslim" in America can be. Highlighting broader societal challenges impacting the nation, particularly racial injustices, and the intersectional nature of anti-Muslim racism, Deonte says:

> I think that it's definitely been a challenge. I think that first and foremost being a Black Muslim, a lot of times I'm erased in a lot of conversations. People usually think, when they say Muslims, they usually think of this racial, religious group that a lot of times Black people don't fall into. And so, you have to kind of even explain to people the ways in which you are affected as a Black Muslim, and then beyond that, you have to navigate the ways in which being a Black Muslim; specifically, is targeted in America. And so, connections with the Nation of Islam, and then when people ask if you're a political prisoner—there's obvious negative connotations to those things.

Additionally, Study 2 participants have expressed concern over the role of mainstream media outlets in the West in circulating misinformation, exacerbating people's fear of and hostility towards Muslims and Islam. In recalling a particular incident of anti-Muslim microaggression at work previously mentioned, Sahar, a 35-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim woman in the Midwest, asserted that while the media holds some responsibility in shaping people's attitudes, she suggested that "being Muslim" and respectability Muslim identity work meant that she had to make herself available to particular queries and concerns

non-Muslim others may have, no matter how uncomfortable and awkward such conversations

may be:

> I realized that some people, they're not necessarily racist, they just don't know how to approach the other culture or the other religion, or they didn't allow themselves space to be with other cultures, I think, because I could have been offended by that, but I was just trying to understand it. It hurt a little bit. You have to understand that the media shapes what they think of—that's the bias from the media. And if I'm rude, I wouldn't be welcoming her to ask me more questions she would get from the media, and that's something that I don't want to happen. She can learn from the media, it's not that bad, but again, you can learn better by interacting with the same people.

Another participant, Halima, a 37-year-old African American Muslim woman in the Midwest,

added that the media bias about Muslims render respectability Muslim identity work to be even

more timely and necessary:

> […] we do know that the media has done a lot of negative spin on Muslims and Islam in this country and in other places. But we still have a responsibility to show the real story not like the cosmetic version. A lot of Muslims are more comfortable with the cosmetic version of what Islam is rather than what it really is.

Hakeem, who is a 29-year-old South Asian Muslim American man working in Silicon

Valley, further suggested that "being Muslim" had also meant that respectability Muslim

identity work is an act of identity performance any identifiable Muslim is subjected to

regardless of individual religious practice. Once someone "comes out" as Muslim publicly,

there is an innate sense of self-awareness of public representation of the faith and the

community:

> Granted I'm not visibly Muslim, I regrettably shaved my beard, I don't wear *hijab*. I'm brown, but people seem like, "Maybe he's Indian." It's not super visible. People I'm close to know about it. My co-workers know that I'm Muslim, my friends know that. When they know that and then they see you then you realize people are aware of this. It forces you to remember that—enough that you remember that—I'm a representative of this.

Echoing Sahar's and Halima's lived experiences above, Hakeem's narrative further highlights

the relationship between respectability Muslim identity work and a Muslim individual's role

as a source of information on Islamic practices and Muslims. Recalling his own experience on

the matter, "being Muslim" in the present political climate renders Muslim religious practices, which may have initially been a private matter, into something that is very public:

> It also made me more willing to talk about that stuff and maybe more willing to, "Oh, yes. This is Ramadan. This is why I'm not eating. This is what's going on here." I'm welcoming that more. I think it just caused me to be a little bit more public about it. It's very common in American culture that religion was rarely talked about, you don't really bring it up in conversation with friends. That forced you to talk about a little bit more, but also internally you figure out, "Okay, what is it I actually believe? Why this? How could someone misinterpret this and think it's such an extreme level and how do I get there?"

Reinforcing the significance of the 9/11 terror attacks and the role that the media plays in its reporting of Islam and Muslims post-9/11, Irfan, a 26-year-old Muslim American man of South Asian descent, recalls his experience of growing up Muslim and [reluctantly] being catapulted under the media spotlight, which has been more of a detrimental experience to the broader Muslim community:

> I think because I'm old enough to really recognize the difference between 9/11 and what before and after. I think for me, it's a little because 9/11 happened in America, […] which was the defining moment of Muslims being completely private and keeping to themselves to now you're in literary every single news channel. I think it [being in the media spotlight] can be a good thing, [but] I don't think it has been a good thing for the Muslim community in America—we were just completely unprepared to be in the spotlight but we're getting better at it. Being in spotlight is not necessarily a good thing. I just said it, it can be a good thing, I think, [but] we're generally in the spotlight for the wrong reasons. For that purpose, I would generally distrust it, like media organizations and/or any major news network which is apparently—now—there's only five or six of them.

According to James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American man, the growing distrust some participants have about the media may be an outcome of how the press circulate certain damaging tropes that habitually pit Islam against American culture, which in effect puts Muslim Americans in a [false] bind—a unique experience as far as identity sensemaking is concerned:

> I would say that there's a lot of trying to navigate between two worlds that, whether they are or not, that people perceive as being very different and very incompatible. A lot of times you turn on the TV, or internet, or whatever, and there's all these people saying Islam and American culture, or Western culture are incompatible. They're at war with each other. As a Muslim who's American, it's like I don't feel at war with myself

or with other people around me. I'm trying to navigate through that world where people think that you really don't belong to either one of those worlds at times. It's definitely a unique experience.

Anti-Muslim Hostility Sensemaking and Global Contextualization

Whether or not the conundrum of "being Muslim" in America and the challenges of navigating through an increasingly contentious environment is a "unique experience", the narratives of Study 2 participants further suggest that Muslim individuals' hostility sensemaking may also involve the act of contextualizing contemporary issues impacting Muslims in North America amidst the broader constellation of global contemporary affairs. While Hajar, a 22-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern parentage, had acknowledged the difficulty of "being Muslim in America", she proceeded to contextualize such challenges by looking at the global context impacting Muslims more broadly, such as the Christchurch massacre:

> For me, I think it's so unfortunate how difficult it's become to be Muslim in America, and how easily targeted Muslims are now more so than ever before with our president being in office, some senators against Muslims, what's happening in the world, especially with New Zealand, and everything that's happened recently. For me, particularly, I'm not going to lie, it's a huge, huge challenge, but I find it interesting that—I felt within time, within history, there's always a group of people that are being targeted in such a way. We are living in a time right now where Muslims are a huge target.

Hajar's account suggests a higher level of contextualization by referring to the broader context of human civilization where minorities throughout history have experienced difficulties in various political contexts. While Hajar said that she had not particularly struggled in practicing Islam, she mentioned having to open up to people through respectability Muslim identity work by addressing questions from others, which may be awkward at times:

> Within history, there were other minority groups that were, also, a huge target. For me, particularly, within this political climate, it has been hard. When I say hard, I don't mean hard in instance of me practicing my faith, *al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: All Praises be to God]. That's something that I don't find difficult at all. To some degree, I think for me, like fasting during Ramadan is always an interesting one, explaining to people like what Ramadan is, and why am I fasting. I embrace those conversations. I love having those conversations with people. I don't think there is a single dumb question. I embrace

political questions because it, literally, eliminates misconceptions and views that people already have in their heads and—I embrace those types of conversations, but at the same time, it is difficult. It is difficult where I'll have some random interactions when I'm in the streets with friends, or I'd leave with my other Muslim friends, or some encounters of that sort […] Having those awkward conversations is really a huge step moving forward of really being diverse and inclusive to everyone.

Hajar further posited that respectability Muslim identity work is crucial in dismantling public misunderstanding and ignorance about Muslims and Islam:

Subhan Allah [translation: God is Perfection/free of defects], this is our time as Muslims that we're going through such a hard time, not just in the U.S. but also everywhere in the world. It's a really important time for us to really step up and really prove people wrong, really prove those misconceptions that people think of us and share that voice of how important our religion is and at some point to have different Muslim role models in every aspect, not just in technology but in government, in law. Everything that we do is really important, to really just step up our game and really spread our message of love of Islam and really show people that they're wrong with the misconceptions they have in their heads of us.

Another participant, Irfan, a 26-year-old Muslim American man of South Asian background, contextualizes the challenges of "being Muslim" in America by juxtaposing the experience against the challenges Muslims in India currently face under Hindu Nationalists. Further, Irfan's story further reflects the role social media has played in hostility sensemaking of Muslim individuals in North America:

I don't know. I just try to keep everything in perspective. That's why I followed a lot of geopolitics and things that have happened internationally. I come from India and for whatever reason, my parents, they came to the U.S. I was fortunate enough to be born and brought up in the U.S., but I can't imagine now being a Muslim person living in the state of—My family's from UP [Uttar Pradesh] and a Muslim person living in the UP in India right now is like one of the most discriminated. There's literally lynchings [*sic*] of Muslims in India. […] In the context with everything else, it's hard for me to feel sorry for myself or for anything bad that has happened to me. Obviously, if you do it you will get sad at certain situations but keeping that perspective is important to me, which is again why I follow all the that stuff around the world to remind myself.

Irfan's narrative is similarly echoed by Asad, a 40-year-old South Asian Canadian Muslim originally from a conflict-ridden area in the Subcontinent. Asad recalls some of the difficulties Muslims living in Occupied Kashmir have faced at the hands of Hindu Nationalists:

I'm from Kashmir Indian, Occupied Kashmir. We have Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Indian Occupied Kashmir. We are always in trouble as the Kashmiri people because

the Indian and Pakistan fight with each other. In between, we get a lot of trouble especially the mental torture, mental pressure. Every year we have almost hundreds and hundreds of days are blocked every year. We lose hundreds of days of school every year. We have a lot of trouble in Kashmir, but *al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: All Praises be to God], as a Muslim, we feel positive, we still feel positive and we move on. Otherwise, it's not easy. […] Overall, it's a very bad experience as a Kashmiri when we go to India, we have to be really inside [indoors], because someone can't attack you [when you're indoors]. Not all, of course, most Indians are good, but there are some fanatic Hindus so they can attack you anywhere and they can abuse you. There has been a recent trend, especially in the current government, the Modi [government]—Muslims have been attacked on eating beef, on wearing some dress, or doing something. They have been attacked. […] Their Internet gets blocked, after every second you have Internet blockade for two, three days, sometimes for months. It's such a mental torture out there.

Finally, in analyzing Study 2 participants' responses to address RQ5, CTI's notion of identity gap (Hecht, 1993: Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003) has proven useful in providing us with a better understanding as to the nuances of these gaps and the various contexts they may exist. According to Hecht (1993) and Hecht, Jackson, and Ribeau (2003), *identity gaps* occur whenever the four interpenetrative layers or locus of identity misalign, or that cognitive discrepancies emerge between these identity foci, with research highlighting dissonance to typically occur within the personal-enacted and personal-relational frames (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008). Prior to launching this dissertation research, existing scholarship suggested that for members of North America's Muslim population, the increasingly contentious sociopolitical and historical climate would render an environment that would increase the likelihood of identity gaps occurring between the *personal-enacted frame* and *personal-communal frame*. The understanding was such that Muslim individuals would experience an uncomfortable state of dissonance with respect to one's self-awareness of being a religious minority at a time where "being Muslim" is considered contentious through media misrepresentations and negative stereotyping, public discourse, political rhetoric, and public policies.

While the lived experiences of Study 2 participants do confirm the commonality of identity gaps surfacing within the *personal-enacted* and *personal-communal* frames, identity

gaps may also emerge within the *personal-relational frame*, as the stories of Muslim converts, as well as the experiences of Study 2 participants more broadly in using social media or in interacting with colleagues at work, suggested. For Muslim converts specifically, interacting with their non-Muslim family members, distant relatives, and friends, is one context where the personal-relational gap may occur. Diego, for example, said:

> It took some time to open up to friends and family. Now, my family doesn't know that I converted. I guess, traditionally. They don't know that story, at least, my conversion in Jordan. But they know that I'm practicing, and my mother's been very accommodating, too, when it comes to preparing foods. So definitely they also are aware of me being Muslim and also of my dietary restrictions. But I am, and I've gotten to the point where I'm not afraid of using phrases like "*Ma sha Allah, in sha Allah*"— just "Allah" for example, in my posts, because it is who I am and I don't want to take that away from who I am. And how I identify.

Further, Diego shared another example of "coming out" as Muslim to his colleagues at his new place of employment:

> And I guess when I do voice [my identity as a Muslim], and it's going to happen soon because Ramadan is coming, but I'm going to have to open up to my coworkers and let them know, "Hey, Ramadan is coming. I'm not going to be offended if you invite me to eat or whatever, but just know that I'm going to be fasting during this month." That would definitely come into play and I know that at least one of my coworkers in the department is aware that I am Muslim, but not everyone. I guess how it has affected me in some ways is more of just going back to myself and really just reflecting on myself as an individual and what it means to be Muslim. My own understanding of my faith.

The lived experiences of Muslim converts, such as Diego's account above, further suggest the utility of social media platforms and engagement in building or maintaining social ties post-conversion to Islam. Another participant, Muhammad, had reported another example of a personal-relational identity gap. Reflecting on his experience of working with his graduate advisor in Quebec:

> When I was in Quebec, actually, I would say that was the case. I came to Canada when I was 24, and started as an internship with University of Sherbrooke, and it was a cultural shock, I guess— both my supervisor and myself [*sic*], and things went downhill. Part of it, I refused to go to their parties because there was alcohol involved and what not. I was very strict at the time. I guess still am. But then, before he ended my contract, because we had an agreement that I would start a master's with him, which we didn't. And he said that—like, we went to a basement where he grew plants, because that's what I do for research. So, there were no witnesses—and he said that, "Yeah,

we'll have to end this, and perhaps you can —we still can be friends" and he made a joke about alcohol, and what not. And I told him immediately, "perhaps this is why things didn't work out".

Even though most of the experiences that Study 2 participants have shared with respect to personal-communal gaps took place within the context of interacting with non-Muslim others, participants' lived experiences have also unveiled how such gaps may occur in social interactions with Muslim coreligionists. Hakeem, for example, reported:

> A good example is probably, for me personally, I eat non-*zabiha* [translation: not Islamically-slaughtered] stuff. I'll go to a Chili's; I'll go to McDonald's. For my folks, that was just not a big deal. There're other people who don't really eat non-*zabiha* meat. It's interesting to compare and contrast that and see what drives you in that direction.

Another example was shared by Deonte, who recalled a particular incident with other Muslim converts in a space where they [Deonte] felt that they stood out:

> Yeah, so I think an experience that really just kind of allowed me to have this heightened sense of self awareness, I was actually in a group for Muslim converts, and I remember we were having a lot of conversations about just experiences and just life in general. And I looked around the room, and I'm realizing these people and their response, they don't vibe with me right, they don't vibe with my experiences in who I am, how I incorporate this religion. […] And so that really just made me not only take into account my Muslim-ness, but my blackness, and my queerness, and all these other things that make me who I am and allow me to navigate this world in a very unique way that a lot of people don't experience. I think that was a really big experience.

The above examples highlight not only the utility of CTI's (Hecht, 1993) identity gap as a theoretical construct, but it has also been particularly helpful for us in further parsing out the highly diverse and complex nature of the "being Muslim" experience, which the media and public discourse have too often and unfairly simplified or flattened. My analyses of Study 2 lived narratives reflect and reinforce—as a religious identity—the understanding of Muslim identity as being inherently intersectional. The religious--spiritual experience of individual members of North America's Muslim population is lived through the lenses of race, gender, and ethnicity. The intersectional nature of the Muslim lived experience is particularly salient in the context of anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia, where visibly-Muslim women are perceived as "fair game" in public spaces where they exist as a minority, with certain localities

posing more of a challenge to them than others, such as small U.S. towns with homogenous populations, and British Columbia in Canada.

Summary of RQ5 Findings

The highly diverse constellation of Study 2 participants' narratives of individuality and self-awareness provide additional support for existing literature on the notion of identity, which was discussed in Chapter 2. Most notably, these stories underline the nature of identity as being psychosocial, multifaceted and fluid, as well as interactional. Participants' notion of who they are also falls in line with scholarly work on personality theory, such as McAdams and Pals' (2006) five-level analytical framework, and McAdams' (1985; 2010; McLean & Syed, 2018) narrative identity theory. Further, participants' responses also demonstrate some of the manners in which individuals pull from different aspects or coordinates of their identity when prompted, suggesting that some levels (McAdams & Pals, 2006), life experiences (McAdams, 1985), or layers/frames (Hecht, 1993) are more salient for some individuals and in particular contexts more so than for others.

Additionally, the lived experiences of Study 2 participants demonstrate the sociopolitical implications of identity as a concept (Wetherell, 2010), particularly participants' recollections of experiencing anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia. The implications of Muslim identity as being intersectional, i.e., gendered and racialized, are made even clearer through the responses of Muslim women in the Study 2 sample. "Being Muslim" is a sociopolitically contentious identity in North America, and while the influence of Donald Trump's administration in the constellation of things may be more tangible in certain geographical contexts than others, the significance of the 9/11 terror attacks and its aftermath on individual members of North America's Muslim population is abundantly clear for Study 2 participants, lending further credence to previous research on the topic (e.g., Abraham, Howell, & Shyrock, 2011; Beydoun, 2016; GhaneaBassiri, 2013; Kidd, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Further, the heterogenous accounts reflecting religious identity sensemaking above provides further contextualization to the Study 1 results discussed in the previous chapter, particularly the null findings of religiosity (i.e., RCI-10), religious ingroup- (i.e., MEIM-R) and ethnoracial ingroup identification (i.e., MEIM-E) in Muslim users' overall social media use (i.e., SMUIS), as well as their use of social media for identity work as measured by the criterions of self-presentation and both positive- and negative emotional disclosures. Consistent with Study 1 findings, however, Study 2 participants' lived narratives reinforce the significance of Muslim ingroup identification on impression management. Participants' sensemaking stories underline Study 1's concluding assertions suggesting an association between the notion of respectability and Muslim identity work.

As suggested by participants' narratives, the concept of respectability appears to be part and parcel of Muslim identity. Regardless of the diversity of individual sensemaking of Islam and praxes of Muslimness, North American Muslims seem to share a motivation to be "the best representation" of Islam and Muslims, as well as sharing an understanding of the necessity of individual engagement of impression management in person and across internet-mediated contexts, specifically within the post-9/11 context where Islam (as a religious faith) and Muslims (as a community of believers) have consistently been under public scrutiny. The motivations behind the collective practice of respectability identity work is further amplified within the context of rising anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia. The lived experiences of Study 2 participants lend further support for previous research, such as Eckert et al.'s (2018), suggesting Muslim individuals' engagement of respectability politics as a way of dispelling negative stereotyping, pushing back against hateful rhetoric, and asserting their decency as human beings and members of broader society.

Irrespective of color, gender, and geographic location, Muslim individuals across sociodemographic and cultural differences have consistently had similar accounts of having to

manage their understanding and praxis of "being Muslim" while navigating through predominantly non-Muslim spaces. Participants' narratives further expound on such challenges, which may include fostering an approachable attitude toward non-Muslim others and having to engage in "awkward conversations" about certain Islamic practices, such as the Ramadan fast, so as to correct any misconceptions and allay certain fears people may harbor. While the act of cultivating a respectable Muslim persona may be tedious and anti-Muslim hostility may often be distressing to individual members of the Muslim community, the lived experience narratives of Study 2 participants have also reflected the oft-referred to process of global contextualization within individual identity and hostility sensemaking processes. As previewed in some of the participants' stories presented above, social media is an important factor and facilitator of such processes. Study 2 participants have admitted to using social media not only as a way of keeping abreast of contemporary issues, but also in contextualizing local anti-Muslim hostility and juxtaposing it against other sufferings impacting Muslims across the globe. Such uses and engagement of social media are an essential component of what I define as *Muslim Social Media*, which refers to Muslim users' particularly distinct ways of using and engaging social media platforms—a discussion to which I will now turn to and further elaborate below.

RQ6: **How does social media use function in the above process of identity work?**
Muslim Social Media as a Cultural and Sociotechnical Phenomenon

In answering the above research question, my analyses of Study 2 participants' narratives reveal a distinct phenomenon of social media use and engagement among Muslim users, namely *Muslim Social Media*, as an essential aspect of identity work among Muslim individuals. As a culturally- and sociotechnically-distinct (in its broadest sense) phenomenon of social computing technology use, Muslim social media can be identified along two broad aspects of (1) motivation and (2) process. In terms of Muslim users' underlying motivation and drive in using social media, Muslim Social Media is identifiable through an overall essence of

intentionality and *sense of purpose*. Muslim social media users are not only motivated and purposeful in the diverse aspects of social media use, such as platform selection and platform-related self-disclosure, participants' narratives further suggest that Muslims weigh their behavioral intent and action in *utilitarian terms*, i.e., whether things are "of benefit" or "beneficial" to oneself and to one's social network, of which the broader Islamic paradigm of God-consciousness, worship, service, and accountability to God, become an important behavioral benchmark. In other words, the terms of "being of benefit" or "beneficial" in a Muslim's lexicon typically refer to the concepts of "being of benefit to one's Hereafter" or "beneficial to one's state in the Hereafter".

In terms of Muslim Social Media as a process concept, as previewed in the preceding section, social media use has been an important aspect of Muslim identity work, particularly with respect to the notion of respectability, identity-, as well as hostility sensemaking. As a process, Muslim Social Media can be seen as influential on at least three fronts: (1) cultivating self-awareness, (2) facilitating respectability Muslim identity work, and (3) contextualizing rising anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia in North America in global and globalizing terms. In terms of cultivating a heightened sense of self, Study 2 reinforces our understanding of the significance of 9/11 as a pivotal sociopolitical and historical event catapulting Islam, as a religious belief, and Muslims, as a community, into the forefront of public scrutiny. As a collective, members of North America's Muslim population were made increasingly aware of their identity as Muslim and their affiliation to Islam. The narratives of Study 2 participants reflect how the terror attacks on the Twin Towers were instrumental and unparalleled in shaping a Muslim individual's understanding as well as praxis of "being Muslim" in the North American context.

Cultivating Self-Awareness: Muslim Social Media as "Muslim Bias"

The conversations I had with Study 2 participants on their social media habits suggest a rather peculiar way of social media use and interaction among Muslim-identifying users. As mentioned above, one of the most distinctive patterns of social media use is their motivations. Muslim social media users typically approach social media use and platform adoption from a utilitarian lens. As if an extension or manifestation of "being Muslim" and living with a sense of purpose in the internet-mediated context, Study 2 participants have mentioned a variety of aims and objectives in adopting a particular social media platform, as well as in interacting with other platform users and with respect to self-disclosures. The main motivational aims and objectives are discussed below.

Social media as an information source and learning tool, including on Islam and Muslims. Across platform types and Muslim praxis, Study 2 participants say they are on social media as a way of seeking information about a variety of topics and issues, including Islam and Muslims. Participants have reported using social media to learn more about their religion, as well as about broader communities of believers, in addition to using it as a tool to find out about contemporary issues. For example, Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American convert of Hispanic and Latinx background, ruled out entertainment and self-disclosure as particular motivations for using social media, adding that she has been intentional in her following of certain user accounts:

> I don't use my social media to be entertained a lot. Some of it is entertaining, though, I won't lie, but I don't do it to, "Oh, I'm going to go out there and meet friends," or "I'm going to go out there and I just want to laugh," and "I'm going to follow this meme account," no. I use most of my social media platforms for information. That's why I tend to follow a lot of those types of accounts that would give me access to that information. It's not a very personal account. Again, going back to my conservative nature and just because—I don't tweet out personal—I don't post pictures of myself. I'm not going to be like, "Oh, here at Yogurtland having…" I don't really use it for that, you know what I mean.

Another Muslim convert, Alex, a 37-year-old Canadian of Caucasian/White background, similarly described his use of Facebook, his primary social media platform, as a tool to scope

out information through individuals who are part of his social network: "I've been on Facebook since 2007. I've always used it as a tool to stay informed. I have a lot of journalist friends—a lot of friends in different fields, that I like to keep informed and aware of what's going on." Another Canadian Muslim participant, Parisa, a 37-year-old mother of two, similarly added that she enjoys using Facebook as an alternative and interactive news source:

> For me as an adult, I really like it. It's a good platform to discuss your views and especially when you have good friends. You can share the news, whatever going around the world. One of the days, for example, I'm not able to watch the news and I get the news on Facebook and things like that.

Parisa's experience in using Facebook as an informative source is echoed by Asad, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim man of South Asian background. Asad said his overall experience in using social media as a source of information has been positive and this is influenced by the people he is connected with on the platform. Recalling his experience in using Facebook:

> My experience is good. I have learned a lot because it depends on my friends' circle. I keep my friends who are from home, I can learn and those who learn from me, from the same background, to political background, to humanitarian background. I have people around in my Facebook friends and followers and whom I am following, they are from different backgrounds. I get, overall, glimpse of the world, how the world is going on, how politics is going on in the world, where other problem is going on so that we can help the people around.

Similarly, for Sumaya, a 24-year-old Muslim American convert of Caucasian/White background, social media has been her platform of choice in keeping abreast of contemporary issues without having to expend much emotional labor since she can access information on her own time:

> I usually don't like watching the news. I usually get a lot of my news from Facebook, actually even from reputable news sources and stuff. To me, it's like if it's something that interests me, I'll read it on my own time and not have to sit there and watch and audibly hear it because that usually affects me more negatively than reading it. Reading it still affects me negatively, but it causes me the least pain. I still feel pain but either way to me, it's a lot easier to get news from the social media posts and stuff.

> Regardless of whether a social media user was born Muslim or had converted to Islam, most of my participants reported that they use the internet and social media to increase their

understanding and improve their praxis of Islam and "being Muslim". For example, Rasheed, a 39-year-old African American man and Muslim convert, said he had initially utilized the internet, i.e., internet relay chat (IRC), as the only way for him to learn about Islam through qualified religious scholars and other religiously reliable sources:

> Initially, especially back in the late '90s, early 2000s, social media was the only way I actually learned anything. Because at the time, I was in an area where there were Muslims there, but nobody was really qualified to teach anything. The one guy that was, he would only teach Arabic at the university, and he wouldn't do it in the masjid at all. At the time it was IRC.

An 18-year-old Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background and self-proclaimed avid social media user, Amani, had similarly shared her experience in using social media as a way for her to become a "better Muslim". Amani further talks about blogging platform Tumblr not only as a gateway to other social media platforms, but also about blogging and how it has been influential documenting her experience of wearing the headscarf for the very first time as a high schooler:

> Being a 15-year-old girl, you're very vulnerable to certain things, so I stumbled across the blog that really helped me and I can't even remember the blog's name, but I remember emailing the writer, the author of the blog. She actually found me on Tumblr two years later. And I recently talked to her again today. So, I feel like social media has influenced me so much as a Muslim. Just because I'm also on my Tumblr, so much knowledge is shared in my feed. I'm aware of certain *Hadiths* [translation: Prophetic sayings] or certain stories that make me a better Muslim. And then I also get information on it from my mother to make sure that I'm not getting random information from the internet. So social media has had such a great impact on me as a Muslim. Tumblr was just my starting point.

Halima, a 37-year-old African American woman who primarily uses Facebook, had similarly affirmed the role of social media in her experience of "being Muslim" and praxis of Islam:

> Islam, for me, developed a lot from my conversations with people online. I lived in much more liberal/progressive radical areas of the United States and met some of those key people. And they understood Islam that, Islam is a living, it's a living religion. It's not something that was buried in seventh-century Arabia. It's a revolutionary idea that encourages people to be accountable to the Creator of the Universe and to the Creator of the Universe who's non-gendered, although described as "He" in orthodox literature.

Participants have also referred to other social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, as a way to learn more about their faith and about the Muslim community more broadly. Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American convert of Hispanic and Latinx background, for example, said: "There are a lot of resources out there. There're so much valuable resources, I feel. This can be with regard to, like, if I want to—resources that can help me more learn about my faith, for example." Meanwhile, Fiaz, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim American, uses Twitter as a source of Islamic learning and information about Muslims through the people he follows and interacts with. Fiaz reported that he had created his Twitter account specifically as a tool to gain access to religious scholars and have certain faith-related queries answered:

> Social media—it's been an outlet to ask questions to *Imams* [translation: religious leaders] and stuff which I otherwise wouldn't have had access to. Like growing up over here, the best access I had to any Imam was—He was also at the same time a Ph.D. student in mechanical engineering and he had studied in Azhar and he was a very busy person. Often, especially when it came to like evolution and biology and stuff, nobody would have any clear answers. I'm coming to a point where not a lot of people anywhere have any clear answers about that. But that was basically what prompted me to get on social media and ask a lot of questions. Mostly, if there's any questions I have regarding current events, especially Muslims processing current events, that'll be through there.

Finally, in reflecting how social media use has been an influential learning and self-awareness tool, Deonte, who is a 21-year-old African American Muslim convert, said:

> I think it's been an amazing tool. I think through social media I've been able to find folks who are like-minded, and who share my experiences, and are able to empathize with me, and then even expand my views about religion. I don't think, if it weren't for social media I definitely wouldn't know as much about the religion as I do now. And I definitely wouldn't feel as confident in myself as a Muslim, and not having to hide myself.

Social media as tool to connect with other Muslims. The experiences of participants, such as Fiaz and Halima above, underline yet another theme with respect to Muslim social media and participants' intentional use of social media platforms. Study 2 participants have indicated social media use as a way of gaining access to information sources and public Muslim figures they would otherwise would not have access to. Halima, for example, further added that her use of Twitter was a way of keeping up with local Muslim communities, including

notable religious scholars and leading Muslim activists. Halima noted that using social media

to follow certain figures has been a particularly beneficial experience, reinforcing the idea of

utilitarianism thereby:

> I think, and this may just again, maybe my perception, but I feel like Twitter gives you more access to people that would normally be inaccessible. For example, a sheikh, or an activist, or even Congresswoman Ilhan, or other politicians out there. I feel that about Twitter, and I feel that that doesn't exist, for example, with Facebook. I could be wrong, that may just be my perception. You have access to scholars, Islamic scholars, or activists, like Shaykh Omar Suleiman, and here in the Bay Area we have Hamza Yusuf and we have Zaid Shakir. You have activists like Linda Sarsour and so many. I feel like following them is very beneficial. I'm able to keep up with what's going on within the Muslim community, within our society here in the United States.

> For some participants, being connected to other Muslims through Muslim social media

functions as a social support network, particularly in certain times, such as the U.S. presidential

elections. Referring to his experience with "Muslim Facebook", James, who is a 36-year-old

Muslim American convert of Caucasian/White background, said he appreciates it as it brings

likeminded people together in a single interactive space:

> Most of the people that I follow or are friends with on Facebook are Muslim. There's a lot of talk, with the last election cycle, about how Facebook and other social media insulates people. You only hear the opinions that you agree with. I definitely see that to be true. In some ways it's nice, because if I'm feeling a certain way, I know I can get on Facebook and there'll be people who feel the same thing that I'm feeling. It's nice to have that support, even if the person's not physically there with me, to have some sort of support network there. Other people in other parts of the country are thinking the same thing that I'm thinking, or whatever, versus turning on Facebook and, you turn on the news, for example, and you're not going to find a lot of people who think the same way you do. You have a social media where there are people who empathize with you, who share similar thoughts and feelings about what's going on that you do.

James also added that while most of the people he is connected to on Facebook are people he

interacts with in real life, he has also used the platform to connect with strangers, who are

mainly religious scholars, particularly those who reside in the West and share his understanding

of Islam and praxis of "being Muslim":

> Most people I do interact with are people that I also interact with in real life, like people that I work with or people that are involved in volunteer things that I do or actual real-life friends. As far as people I don't really know, lots are scholars, especially American scholars or Western scholars, who follow more traditional whatever you want to call it,

form of Islam that—there's people I feel like relate to in similar to the way I would relate to Islam. That curating thing so that you hear what you want to hear, I guess.

Another participant, Zaynab, an 18-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Canadian Muslim woman, appreciates Muslim social media for its "Muslim bias", which she intentionally seeks out in light of how she felt Muslims have been misrepresented in mainstream media:

> It's a bias. It's a Muslim bias in my news, and I'm very grateful for that bias because you're going to get bias either way. So, I may as well get my own bias […] I'm living in the West, but also, it's really impacted the way I get my news because a lot of the news like no one watches news anymore. So, a lot of the news I get will be through Facebook or it will be through Instagram. So obviously it would always come through some Muslim lens because the people that I follow happen to be Muslims. When they express their news to their stories, or whatever the case may be. They always tell it from a Muslim point of view. Like if a shooting happens, they'll be like, hey, this happened. They won't immediately point fingers at the nearest Muslim person and be like, hey, it was probably a random Muslim person. It was like an act of terrorism, no they'll … It's a very Muslim lens I get my news from.

Deonte, a 21-year-old queer African-American/Black Muslim, added that their timeline is not only deliberately "Muslim centric", it also highlights their intersectional identity of being a member of the Black Muslims subgroup and subscribing to Black liberation theology:

> My timeline is definitely Muslim centric. If you go a bit deeper, I definitely encourage, I definitely like to see a lot of black Muslims on my timeline. But particularly those who view religion through liberation theology or have a somewhat liberation minded view of religion. And so, I think that is the way a lot of my timeline is structured. As well as folks who mesh with my other identities as well. So, we have folks who are abolitionists, and who do that kind of work. You have folks who discuss anti-imperialism. You have folks who discuss queer theory and overall queerness. So, I think that as well provides an interesting amalgamation.

Deonte's Muslim centric timeline is also similar to Irfan's "Muslim-only feed". Irfan, who is a 26-year-old Muslim American of South Asian descent, argued that creating a Muslim-exclusive timeline is necessary for him since Muslims should have space where they could interact and share contents with one another without needing any clarification or preface:

> I should say I do have a Muslim only Facebook feed. I think it's important to have a space for—I don't know if anyone who responds or likes my posts will notice this—but think is important to have a space where you only have to interact with most people. I don't want to have to deal with explaining certain situations to my non-Muslim friends.

In talking about her experience with Facebook and to some extent Twitter, another participant, Marisol, a 34-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic and Latinx background, considers her newsfeed/timeline to be Muslim centric and akin to a Muslim social club. She added that her appreciation for her online social network is driven by the affordances that social media platforms, such as Facebook, provide as far as being an interactive platform bringing users' social networks together in a single space:

> I like the article shared, the discourse that happens. Sometimes, Facebook for me feels like a traditional Muslim majority society cafe where everybody is talking and having conversations and I'm just like "What are you talking about? What? What's going on? Leave a comment." I'm just like the fly on the wall. That's what I feel about Muslim Twitter as well, but not these days though. That's what I like about Facebook, is that, because I like to read and just learn. I like just knowing what intellectuals say or just regular people in their work, like what they're doing and I think it's just—Everybody uses it, regardless of your socioeconomic status, because I have some friends that are ratchet and I'm like I really can't talk about this right now." […] It's funny just to see my worlds collide. I think that one thing I like about Facebook is the different people that I've connected with in my life, just having them all in one space and it can be a reminder of like I know different kinds of people and that's like-- some that I know personally and share a space with and others that I know on a professional level and not really personal, but yes, I think that's why I like Facebook.

The phenomenon of Muslim social media as a type of "Muslim bias" also applies to other social media platforms, such as Instagram. For example, Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American convert of Hispanic-Latinx background, mentioned that her use of Instagram was primarily dedicated to Islamic reminders and Muslim women fashion inspirations:

> Instagram became this place where I do follow many accounts that give me Islamic reminders and also a lot of fashion, a lot of Muslimah fashion accounts also, whether it's companies or, I don't know, something like that. I started getting—Because you just learn more, the more you're exposed to things. I started learning about certain types of dresses that I liked because they were modest, but they didn't compromise fashion at the same time. They were completely beautiful. Then I started following all of these accounts about kaftans and all this other-—the Moroccan dresses, long stuff that I fell in love with. I think that's why I don't really use Instagram a lot because I just pretty much just go in there just to see, just to look, but I'm not really interacting or actively posting really anymore.

Another participant, 18-year-old Hayat, a Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, added that while she had been using Instagram as entertainment, some of the

accounts she follows were also religiously inspirational: "Well, definitely memes, I like jokes and stuff like that. Also, there are a lot of comic Muslim pages. They're very inspirational." Zahra, a 24-year-old Muslim American woman of South Asian background, likewise described her use of Instagram not only as a source of entertainment, but also a way of connecting with diverse others:

> [I follow] meme pages and funny things. I really like that. I really like humor. I think that's how we can make light of sometimes more serious situations. Also, a point of connection with people. I like that. Being able to laugh at yourself. I follow primarily Muslim meme pages and I think it's hilarious. There's this one girl who was 15 or 16. She has Muslim humor and it's so funny. It's really adorable. The stuff she posts are a lot of repost but just general. Also, a lot of people happen to be South Asian or Arab that are posting memes that are relatable to that. As an Iranian, it's also really relatable like this in between the Arab and South Asian world. We have this totally similar dynamics. There's this one picture for example of this dog with a bone next to it and it looks so nervous. When you have to say *Salaam* [translation: greetings of peace] to all the aunties, on *Eid* or something [laughs]. It's so true. It's just stuff like that. That's all on Instagram.

Additionally, Zaynab, an 18-year-old Canadian Muslim of Arab/Middle Eastern origin, had also mentioned the role of "Muslim influencers" in sharing their lived experience of "being Muslim" on Instagram. Zaynab added that Muslim presence on platforms like Instagram has been influential for individual self-expression as well as respectability Muslim identity work targeted at non-Muslim others:

> So, it's a way obviously, to teach them, it's just to talk to them personally. But also, Instagram, and Twitter, for example, it's just I'm not on Twitter, but Twitter has a huge Muslim population on there, and very, very strong Muslim population on there. Instagram has a lot of Muslim influencers, who also talk about their experiences […] it's a great way for Muslims to get known and to express themselves and for other non-Muslims to learn about us. I think it's just an amazing platform for us to get our voices out.

Muslim Social Media as Respectability Identity Work

Following the use of Muslim social media as an identity sensemaking tool, the lived experiences of Study 2 participants suggest that the phenomenon is also a conduit through which Muslim users engage in respectability identity work that is simultaneously targeted at two fronts: Muslim coreligionists, as well as non-Muslim others and a more general audience.

The theme of Muslim social media as respectability identity work manifests through particular self-presentation and impression management behaviors, such as users' engagement of and abstinence from certain contents that are shared on social media platforms. For example, my conversations with my interviewees revealed several topics/issues that most of them would abstain from engaging (e.g., sharing relevant contents or participate in online discourses), including LGBTQ-related issues and controversial political contents, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict and Israeli geopolitics. Similarly, participants have also shared some of the topics/issues they were most likely to engage, such as religious content like links to sermons or religio-spiritual commentaries. This form of respectability identity work is primarily engaged when interacting with fellow Muslims, which appears to support the work of scholars, such as Herriot and Scott-Jackson (2002), who noted that members of religious communities may engage in particular forms of social behavior as a way of affirming their identity and affiliation to the group by gaining approval from their coreligionists. Another example of respectability Muslim identity work is participants' inclination to engage the topic/issue of social justice and mental health awareness, which is a behavior primarily targeted towards non-Muslim others, as well as the broader population of social media users who are either on their virtual social network or may stumble upon their accounts, i.e., their so-called *imagined audience* (Litt, 2012). This type of identity work appears to be an attempt at reinforcing the idea that Muslims are decent human beings and active members of broader communities and societies.

Muslim Social Media and respectability identity work targeting Muslims. Study 2 participants revealed that they have intentionally avoided certain topics or issues whenever they are using their social media platform of choice. While there is considerable variance among the respondents as far as topics go, one particular emergent theme within this sample is the tendency for participants to avoid engaging in LGBTQ issues. This avoidance is apparently

related to the perceived difficulty of engaging such a sensitive topic on social media platforms,

as well as the perceived lack of expertise or knowledge about the topic within this particular

sample of interview respondents. For example, Irfan, a 26-year-old Muslim American man of

South Asian descent, said he would avoid sharing LGBTQ-related contents because he felt that

many Muslims struggle with the topic:

> I won't make post about certain things associated about maybe the LGBTQIA
> movement, and that's because I'm cognizant. One, is this beneficial? If it's not
> beneficial, then what's the point? Two it's like I feel a lot of Muslim people struggle
> with it, so I'm like okay. For me, it's something that's quite clear but I know a lot of
> people they don't know how to handle it and maybe I can understand why but I have a
> strong resource. I don't know. Not myself, but in Islam, it's not an issue for me but I can
> understand how it would be an issue for others.

Muhammad, a 35-year-old Canadian Muslim man of Arab/Middle Eastern background,

similarly said his avoidance is due to a concern he has about the possible impact of sharing

LGBTQ contents on LGBTQ individuals:

> There are other things that are sensitive, and I'm not fully aware of, so I refrain from—
> Like all the LGBTQ, or yeah, I'm not sure what that is about, so I just ... And then I
> read that there's higher suicide rate in that community, and they take those comments
> or those opinions to heart ... and that's where I stopped engaging the whole gender
> identity discussion.

Meanwhile, Parisa, a 37-year-old Canadian Muslim woman of South Asian heritage, said that

her avoidance of the topic relates to her lack of educational background to best approach the

issue publicly: "LGBT […] I choose not to comment. I want to, but I sometimes think that I

wish I had a proper education level higher to address that and debate that." Other participants

have been cautious due to past negative experiences of either having advocated for LGBTQ

Muslims or LGBTQ individuals in general. Deonte, who is a queer 21-year-old African

American Muslim convert, for example, said they avoided participating in discussions about

LGBTQ issues mainly to avoid conflict:

> I definitely avoid a lot of discussions around queerness, honestly, because of the ways
> me being Muslim and me being unapologetically Muslim even, informs how folks will
> have a preconceived notion about me, my relationship to queerness. So, I definitely
> avoid a lot of those discussions just out of self-preservation side.

Deonte's conflict avoidant stance is similarly shared by Diego, a 37-year-old Muslim American

convert of Hispanic and Latinx background, who recalled several past negative experiences in

advocating for LGBTQ Muslims through his Facebook account:

> I'm not against it. I think I still will post it, but there was at least two instances where I posted something about the queer Muslim community on my Facebook page, and I had individuals just, and this is kind of going back to earlier in our conversation where the comments came in and people started sort of arguing within my post, and it got to the point where I felt like if I don't say something, this is going to continue and I don't know if this looks bad or not. But I felt like I needed to say something. And so, there was just a lot of anti-gay comments coming in and it made me feel uncomfortable because I'm, it's just not me. It's not representative of who I am, but having those conversations where people feel very passionate or strongly against or for, it's just difficult to navigate.

Meanwhile, other participants say they have abstained from sharing LGBTQ-related contents

due to lack of personal relatability, particularly in terms of advocating for the issue. For

example, Shahnaz, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim woman of South Asian background, said:

> I think I avoid posting and interacting with new—I guess it's not new it's always been there—but I think people are becoming more open. It's the LGBTQ stuff. As it specifically relates to also—I think that that's stuff that I stay away from than I stray away from because it's not something that I necessarily advocate or relate to, so I'll stay away from that stuff.

Study 2 participants have also reported some of the reasons why they would engage in

respectability Muslim identity work through the sharing of religious contents. For Asad, a 40-

year-old Canadian Muslim man of South Asian descent, sharing religious contents, such as

links to Islamic videos, is a way of reminding fellow Muslims about certain principles and

values:

> I share the Islamic videos which can give solace, which can give patience, and which can help people to become kind and be helpful to people, to not be extremist, to not to be hypocrites. I like those videos so that people will learn that we should be God-conscious, we should not do these anti-human things.

Another participant, Alex, a 37-year-old Muslim Canadian convert of Caucasian/White

background, reported that he typically only shares Islamic contents on his Facebook timeline:

"The content that I normally share is either something Islamic, like there's a class or a recording or a statement, something like that or something political. That's, I would say, the rare time I would share something that's not one of those two."

Other participants, such as Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic and Latinx background, and Aliyah, a 40-year-old African American Muslim woman, similarly said that they would also engage or comment on status updates and discussion threads related to Muslim issues and Islamic contents. For example, Selena said:

> Sometimes there's other conversations I engage in that has to do with Muslim issues within our community, whether it's a topic that's being debated having to do with—I don't know—any kind of topic […] Even if people are discussing the fact that Ramadan is approaching and if people are starting a conversation on the fact that they have a certain goal when it comes to reading the Quran and if people want to start groups for supporting each other, something like that. Then, sometimes I run into perspectives of Muslims that I completely and wholeheartedly disagree with. I think maybe their speech is bordering like hatefulness. You know what I mean? I respond, especially when I feel like people are saying, "Yes. Yes, that's true," and I'm like, "Wait a minute, what's going on here? It doesn't sound right to me." I'll challenge the thinking. On occasion that's happened, and I've gotten people interacting with me. Then if I feel like I'm not really—what I'm saying is not making sense to them or I'm not really having an impact, and then sometimes-- because sometimes when people discuss stuff, especially online for some reason, it can heavily escalate [laughs] for some people. If I see that it's just not useful and it would just-- if I saw the communication isn't useful, then I just discontinue it.

In speaking about her interactions on "Muslim Twitter", Selena further added that there are specific topics and discussion she would avoid engaging with, such as feminism:

> There are certain topics like that within—I'm talking about with Muslim Twitter, [laughs] that I would avoid having discussions. If I know that somebody has a certain opinion that they're already set in their opinion of what—or I interpret them that way, that they're already set, that they think feminism is evil and this is the root cause of all the problems in Islam. I'm not going to talk to them about it.

Similarly, Aliyah also reported that she would not hold back from commenting on posts and pushing back against Islamic- and Muslim-related contents that are perceived as patronizing toward women:

> Then also, to be honest, there's some Muslims who have really conservative views of Muslim women and how we should lead our lives. Those Muslims, if I see something on their post, I will say something to them. I don't bite my tongue. It's usually—No, I

can't say. I was going to say, it's usually people that I know, but it's sometimes people I know and don't know. If it's on my feed and it annoys me enough or bothers me, I'm going to say something.

Muslim Social Media and respectability identity work targeting non-Muslims and general audience. Study 2 participants' narratives also suggest that they engage in respectability Muslim identity work targeted at the general audience and non-Muslim others and that such behavior may manifest in the topics/issues they would advocate for and abstain in engaging on the timeline of their most-frequently used platforms. While some participants claimed they would avoid any controversial sociopolitical and religious topics, others have reported that they would deliberately engage certain contemporary issues and sociopolitical topics as part of advocating- and organizing for certain social justice causes. Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American convert of Hispanic and Latinx background, for example, emphasized that she would intentionally engage political contents that were particularly important for her, such as defending Muslim American congresswoman Ilhan Omar:

> Definitely political—anything political—Not anything, sorry. Political issues that are important to me; I saw important. For example, one of the things that I mentioned was Ilhan Omar. During the time that that was—I just felt the need to comment on some tweets that I saw because I just felt like she was being villainized so badly, and it made me upset. [laughs] I was like, "Hey what's going on?" I don't know, I had to chime in, or say something, or tweet something. I remember during that time; I was sharing a lot of what I found to be true or what I believed to be true about why she was going through this experience when she had made certain tweets.

James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American convert, similarly said that he would usually engage in political issues that were particularly poignant or that he personally relates to:

> If someone shares an article or a video or something that's just really moved me in some way or another, and I feel that other people need to see it whether it's directly about something that's going on socially or politically in our country that I feel people need to see a different perspective, then I will share it.

Meanwhile, Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian Muslim American man, reported that he follows political figures on Twitter and would typically share contents that relate to current news stories:

> Almost all my tweets are related to current news stories. I follow again all the news organizations. If I see something is going on, then I'll retweet it and retweet videos. I also follow politicians and stuff on Twitter. A lot of the things I'm retweeting are related to that.

Study 2 participants have also reported that they were partial to social justice issues and mental health awareness, and issues that were generally personally relevant to them or their professions. As such, they would often engage and circulate social justice- or mental health-related contents or sharing contents that are relevant to their lived experiences as part of broader efforts in raising awareness of and campaigning for particular issues of concern among their online social networks. For instance, Aliyah, a 40-year-old African American/Black Muslim woman, suggested her partisanship to racial justice issues and topics related to other aspects of her identity, specifically, such as race and her relational identity as a mother and wife: "It's usually about some race relations, like the mistreatment of African Americans, or it'll be about parenting or marriage or achievement of African Americans." Shahnaz, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim woman of South Asian background, similarly said she would share contents relating to social justice issues, mental health awareness, and her lived experience as a mother: "I guess on parity issues. I guess the stresses of being a mum. I think that type of stuff. A lot of it was even on issues related to mental health. I think that's about it." Another participant from Canada, a 37-year-old mother-of-two of South Asian background, revealed that her personal experience of living with mental health challenges had motivated her to be vocal about and share her struggles online: "Being a single parent, it's not easy to study, and then there are other things as well as—Well, you know what? I'm very open about my mental health so I'm not shy to mention [about my struggles]."

Another Muslim Canadian woman, Maryam, who is of Caucasian/White background, similarly indicated her concerns for social justice issues and further reported that she would not hesitate in intervening and speaking out whenever she saw anything perceived as unfair or unjust:

> If I see a xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-person of color remark, I can't shut my mouth sometimes. I don't like injustice. I really, really hate injustice. I can't just shut my mouth and let somebody say something awful or mistreat somebody. I have to open my trap and try to be polite, except not get into an argument with anybody, but I have to speak up. I feel, anyways. You only get one go-round at life, so do things right.

Other participants, such as Marisol, said she would share social justice-related contents highlighting their lived experience as a Muslim woman of color of working-class background who grew up in Chicago and currently resides in Detroit. Marisol, a 34-year-old Hispanic and Latinx Muslim American convert and community organizer, recalled her experiences highlighting the intersectional nature of her identity:

> Islam, identity, that means Puerto Rican, Mexican, or just *Latinidad*, period. Injustices in Detroit. I do post about Detroit as well as Chicago, my observations of Chicago. Now that I moved away, our family. Stories of my grandfather. Injustices I have faced or observances. I remember this one post that few people *inboxed* me but it was about how growing up I would intentionally write on bright Lisa Frank stationery whenever I would send letters to any of my family members who were locked up so that the correctional officers could never lie to them and say the letter didn't come because my brightness among white would not—They can't lie about that. I share instance, like my moments in my life that I hope that others can relate to because our stories of a child growing up, constantly visiting different penitentiaries in the state of Illinois. Just stuff like that you don't really read about. I just try to share moments that have made me who I am. Again, because I don't like being judged by face value. I guess that would be it.

Zaynab, an 18-year-old Canadian Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background and uses Instagram as her social media platform of choice, reported that she has used the platform and the Instagram Story feature for political activism too. Relating an example of a recent campaign that she was a part of, Zaynab said:

> Currently on my story and its 23 hours so it's going to disappear in the next hour, but on my story I have myself posting a screenshot of a page. There's this like, whole thing going on right now. But my high school got flagged for like, quotes, "anti-Zionist behavior," which is totally untrue. But anyways, it got flagged for that. And as a result,

the entire administration at school and everyone has been trying to figure this out. And they're trying to keep it on down low. So naturally, the students being the students that they are, they've been creating pages to raise awareness of this because like, why should we keep it on down low. We should be raising awareness because we should be able to —we should be able to— we haven't done anything wrong; we should be able to express what we want to express. So, there've been a lot of posts that came up recently about that kind of stuff. That's right, a lot of pages. And one of the pages messaged me to ask for advertising. So, they messaged me, they said, "Hey, can you put the screenshot off our page onto your story?" And I was like, "Yeah, okay, sure." So, I did. So that's my current story right now.

Study 2 participants have also indicated that they would engage and circulate contents that were both professionally and personally relevant. For example, Banan, a 30-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, said she advocates for women in science and academia, and would additionally center issues that are related to "being Muslim":

> So, anything related to women in science or women in academia, I think is one that I tend to tweet about. And then the other one tends to be some of the news against or for Muslim-Americans or Muslims in general or kind of what's happening with Muslims in the world.

For Sahar, who is a 35-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern descent and works as an educator, the contents she said she readily shares are about the plight of teachers and the overall state of education in the U.S.:

> […] I care about education; I care about what teenagers go through. I had a tough teenage year; very tough teenage years and I want to be there for those teenagers. I wouldn't want anyone to be lost the way I was lost during my teenage years. So, I advocate for education. I want it to be heard, this is something important. I want people to hear that more and to understand that teacher's job is one of the most important jobs that is underestimated by many, because they're shaping the minds of the future. So, what you see right now in schools, that's the future, and it's very difficult, and I don't think one teacher is enough for 30 teenagers in a school. They're just going to cover the curriculum, barely cover the curriculum without attending to other issues. Right now, Trump wants to close the afterschool programs too.

Additionally, Sumaya, a 24-year-old Muslim American convert of Caucasian/White background and who identifies as transgender, reported that she would readily advocate for LGBTQ issues and would partake in galvanizing people's support to act on contemporary social justice issues:

LGBT-related things, also anything queer related. Let's see what else. Mostly stuff like that. Every now and then there's something else that doesn't fall into this category, but they mostly fall in those categories. Also, Trump-related. One [example] is the little blurb [from the] last picture that TransLatin@Coalition here in LA shared: Free Alejandra. It's basically a call to sign a petition because CBP detained a transgender woman recently. I don't like how people treat immigrants. I don't like how they basically send them to concentration camp. They get mistreated and separated from their families and stuff and how no one really seems to really do anything about it.

Further, Hajar, a 22-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern descent, said she designated Facebook as her platform of choice for political matters, while Twitter is dedicated to all things technological. Hajar, who also identifies as a technologist, is an advocate of women of color in technology and currently uses Facebook groups to advocate for such issues:

> I find Facebook, for me, is like a political platform and then for Twitter, it's mainly technology. I barely post anything tech-related on my [Facebook] newsfeed. The only time I post things tech-related are within the groups. Obviously, it's like women in tech or women in product. Those are more centric towards tech groups. We post political things, what's going on in the world, what's happening, like with the concentration camps in China. I repost things that people do not know about or people should be aware about. It's so funny. It's mainly political things or things revolving around women's rights or human rights.

Another participant, Rasheed, a 40-year-old Black Muslim Canadian convert, reported that he would typically share contents that were related to politics, criminal justice, and were academic in nature, in addition to responding to other people's updates:

> It's a range of things. Like some religious articles, sometimes like criminal justice issues, some political commentary maybe the people probably may not have heard. Sometimes, studies. Like interesting scientific studies, maybe occasionally. Like activities and events other people do.

Asad, a 40-year-old Canadian Muslim of South Asian descent, similarly said he would post political contents, particularly contents that are critical of politicians, as a way to keep others informed of problematic public figures:

> Sometimes, it's political content because […] politicians are spreading the lies. If it is against a politician who is creating the divide among the communities, we have to speak about those politicians. I may be sharing the videos, which can—we speak truth about the politician who is dividing the community and is spreading the lies and is saying, "I have done this and that," although he has done nothing. In order to get good leadership

in the country, I share a comment or videos which can make the public aware about crooked politicians.

Meanwhile, James, a 36-year-old Muslim American convert of Caucasian/White background, shared some of the motivations inspiring his most recent social justice-related updates on his timeline:

> The one about the affordable housing, a lot of people that I work with that I'm friends with on my Facebook are people that are involved in prison and ministry work, Muslim and non-Muslims, and people that work in Madison or in the area who care and are unaware about issues like that. I knew it would be of interest to them if they weren't aware of the city council meeting about this. It was upsetting to me. I figured they should know about this thing. There's not a lot we could do about it after it's already happened, but just to inform people about the stuff that's happening, and this is something we should be aware of.

James also mentioned that he had shared a post about the struggles visibly-Muslim women face on the day-to-day, as part of an attempt to express solidarity and raise awareness among both Muslim men and non-Muslim others about the challenges some Muslim women face, particularly in contentious sociopolitical contexts:

> […] the thing with the hijab, I remember posting out this thing. It was really beautiful, a reminder for myself [*sic*]—for Muslim men, and for several things. One is that; for Muslim men, that our sisters, especially the ones who wear a hijab, go through a lot because of that one article of clothing, essentially. Everything that they had to take, they face because that's a reminder to the men that our sisters are going through a lot, and also showing support for the sisters saying, "We try to understand what you go through, and we have your back," type of thing. That was more specifically targeted at my Muslim friends, and non-Muslim friends too, just to let them know this is something that Muslim women are dealing with. Just raise awareness I guess among the non-Muslims as well.

Based on my conversations, Study 2 participants have also indicated certain topics/issues they were most likely to avoid engaging while using their social media platform of choice out of concern for their diverse follower base and network of friends including non-Muslim others, as well as out of a broader concern about the nature of online interactions and discourses. Even though a couple of participants indicated they tend to avoid controversial political and religious contents, most of the participants reported they would avoid issues related to particular geopolitical contents, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Zionist

lobbying in the U.S., as well as the conflict between India and Pakistan. For example, Maryam, a 52-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim Canadian convert and interfaith activist, said she was wary of discussing politics with people on her social network, especially about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

> I will sometimes discuss politics, but I try not to—especially with friends because, everybody's entitled to believe what they want. If I see somebody acting like they're saying really awful things then I will speak out but if a friend says, "I really like that so and so, the MP," and he happens to be conservative, okay, whatever. Another thing I don't comment on very often is the conflict in Israel and Palestine because I have my views on it, but I also have a lot of Jewish friends and I think it's more important to come to an understanding to friendship and trying to understand each other and get to know each other than to attack and fight and argue and criticize that person. You know what? We're not going to solve it. I mostly avoid that too, but anyway.

Further, Marisol, a 34-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic-Latinx background, reported that she abstains from commenting or sharing contents related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to lack of knowledge and reference about the matter. Additionally, Marisol had also expressed a general discomfort in commenting on or addressing the issue of white privilege online, despite her being an active organizer for a national anti-racism initiative. Marisol suggested that social media users tend to get defensive and as such, she preferred to address sensitive topics offline:

> When it comes to geopolitics of Jews, I just don't get into. I'm not comfortable with that. I have no place for that. Stuff that I don't talk. I try not to share-- No, I don't know. I definitely have shared things about white privilege, and I know it touches people the wrong way. It's just like, "Well, get over it. You need to learn." I've done that a few times and it really ticks off a lot of people and I'm just like, "Okay. Is this worth it?" If they're not going to engage with me [chuckles] one on one or intellectually then is it really worth it instead of just ticking people off? My thing is like certain sensitive topics I prefer doing it in person because I would hate to bring someone pain and me [sic] be the cause of that. That's why stuff about white privilege, in particular, I like doing that stuff in person. There's only so much you can do online. People get really defensive and if they get defensive, they don't want to learn. How do you get them to be on the defensiveness and learn?

Additionally, Alex, a 37-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim Canadian man, said that he would avoid commenting on the Israeli lobby in the U.S. specifically out of fear that his

opinions may cause him trouble further down the line. Alex's experience also suggested that

certain social media platforms are biased in their censorship of circulated contents:

> […] all the friends of mine are posting about what is going on with AIPAC and stuff
> like that. For me, I've definitely kept an eye on what's going on with Israel and the lobby
> and all of those things, but I don't post anything about that. I don't post about Israel
> because I know that that can easily come back to me. Any kind of content that seems
> to be critical about the Zionism is heavily censored online. A lot of my friends are
> banned for a month just because they post something critical about Israel. I don't want
> to be on anybody's security list.

For Ousmane, a 25-year-old Muslim American man of African descent who mainly

uses Twitter for professional networking, the #MeToo movement is an example of a social

justice movement that he has avoided engaging or commenting on his social media account.

Ousmane story suggests that he is aware of certain limitations or challenges of sharing

controversial topics online:

> Let's say like the #MeToo movement. Those things I just don't talk about them. I don't
> know. You could say something wrong. At some point you don't really know what's
> right and wrong because it's the person who's going read it, it's going to decide what
> they see in what you say. Then you could say something terrible without even realizing
> that, without even intending to say that and that makes you look like the complete
> ignorant. I'd just rather read and learn and watch. I do have my views about it. I just
> don't share them on social media. I can talk about it with friends, but not out there. You
> never know. You never know where it's going. In 10 years, I could be hosting the Oscars
> and they are going to be, "Hey, you tweeted this 10 years ago." Just like what happened
> to Kevin Hart.

Further, seemingly suggesting an individual awareness of the nature of interactions on social

media, Hakeem, a 29-year-old Muslim American man of South Asian background, mentioned

that he used to be more willing to engage in online political discourse and debates, but has

largely avoided such discussions as he grew older. However, Hakeem did make an exception

when it comes to encountering disinformation on his newsfeed and timeline:

> I think one thing that may be a little different from when I was younger is I think maybe
> when I was younger, like in high school, I would probably be more willing or more
> frequently might comment or post on political stuff or more frequently engage in that
> sort of a debate. I think as you get older, you realize how pointless that is and don't do
> that as much. [chuckles] Maybe I don't engage with those as much. Maybe when I see
> a heavy article so to speak or something intense like that, I might not engage as much.
> It still happens if I find it interesting or intriguing. I think—Now when I'm thinking

about it, probably what would spur me to action the most would be around it's related to my concern around social media, would be around when I see something with Facebook or see something that's like, "Hey, this is incorrect information." That's probably what motivates me the most, but outside of that, not really.

Another participant, Asad, a 40-year-old Muslim Canadian man of South Asian origin and who is also involved in interfaith work, added that while he also identifies as Kashmiri, he has had to curtail sharing his thoughts and opinions about the Indian-Pakistani conflict in Kashmir:

> I have to be really careful in sharing the things about Kashmir because many friends who are in India, they do not know the actual situation in Kashmir. If I post anything, they may see it as Anti-India sentiment. I have to be careful and I don't want my friends to think like that. I am not against the Indian people, but we are against the policies of the Indian government. That is the problem, the common people of India, they don't understand. The Kashmir people are not against the people of India, they are against the policies of the Indian government and because of them, they are having a lot of trouble. We have to be very careful in sharing such stuff. I have to be very careful.

Amal, a 33-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American woman, shares Asad's sentiments above about having to restrain oneself from commenting on certain controversial topics despite harboring an overall interest in political issues: "I just want to clarify, like sharing my political views. I share stuff, I share articles and interesting things, but I don't—There are some controversial opinions that I keep to myself."

Muslim Social Media as Hostility Sensemaking Tool

Another emerging theme about Muslim social media is the way Study 2 participants have used their use of social media as sensemaking tools for their identity as Muslims, as well as their experiences in "being Muslim" in the North American context. Most of my interview respondents acknowledge the role social media plays in facilitating access to multiple sources of information, as well as access to various individuals, including public figures. One of the ways that Muslim social media has been influential in individual Muslim's sensemaking pertains to the experiences of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, particularly post-9/11, and how social media allows users to tap into the global pulse and contextualize more proximate incidents as a way of managing their concerns and worries. Muslim social media

users have not only benefited from circulated information and online social support network to help process difficult events—as a hostility sensemaking tool, Muslim social media have also allowed users to see how interconnected global issues are and; therefore, better understand contemporary affairs and the world around them. The phenomenon of Muslim Social Media as a hostility sensemaking tool appears to support the works of scholars, such as Schmalz, Colistra, and Evans (2015), who argue that social media use can be a mechanism for people to cope with or manage identity threats.

Global contextualization of anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia. For example, Shahnaz, a 40-year-old South Asian Canadian Muslim woman, said her interactions with other social media users on platforms such as Facebook has been one of the ways she processes difficult events, such as the Christchurch mosque massacres in New Zealand:

> It [social media interactions] kind of give me a new perspective on things, especially a lot of their very new on, I guess like the very, very recent event [i.e., Christchurch]. Often times people will—just when you're trying to process everything— already set down some messages about it or whatever and it might help in framing what just happened. I think that in that way it's kind of helpful or useful.

> Meanwhile, Amani, an 18-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern descent currently living in Christchurch, New Zealand, reported how through social media the world seemed like a smaller place and how human sufferings and worries are seemingly interconnected. Reflecting on her experience of being in Christchurch when the massacre occurred, Amani said:

> So, it's just crazy to think how we're all so impacted by these things and how my mom and my family members in South Bend, Indiana, and my family members in Jordan, who were genuinely worried and directly impacted by this event, just because I am here. So, I feel like social media is just like a perfect way to make people aware that this world is much more smaller [*sic*] than we think. So, I definitely rely on social media.

For James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American convert, Muslim social media helps contextualize his worries and concerns with respect to "being Muslim" in America by

keeping him connected to other Muslims who may share similar worries and [collectively]

empathize thereby:

> In some ways it's nice, because if I'm feeling a certain way, I know I can get on Facebook and there'll be people who feel the same thing that I'm feeling. It's nice to have that support, even if the person's not physically there with me, to have some sort of support network there. Other people in other parts of the country are thinking the same thing that I'm thinking, or whatever, versus turning on Facebook and, you turn on the news, for example, and you're not going to find a lot of people who think the same way you do. You have a social media where there are people who empathize with you, who share similar thoughts and feelings about what's going on that you do.

Other participants, such as Hajar, a 22-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American

woman, perceive the struggles that Muslims; as a community, experience are not exclusive to

the American context. While it has been a difficult time for many Muslims around the world,

Hajar believed that advocacy and representation are paramount during these times:

> […] as Muslims, we're going through such a hard time, not just in the U.S. but also everywhere in the world. It's a really important time for us to really step up and really prove people wrong, really prove those misconceptions that people think of us and share that voice of how important our religion is and at some point to have different Muslim role models in every aspect, not just in technology but in government, in law. Everything that we do is really important, to really just step up our game and really spread our message of love of Islam and really show people that they're wrong with the misconceptions they have in their heads of us.

Another participant, Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian Muslim American man and frequent

Twitter user, added that he has been tweeting about global affairs as a way to make his

followers see not only what is happening across the globe, but also help them see some of the

implications of U.S. politics abroad:

> I know that my audience is a lot of my friends. For whatever reason, there's 10 high school friends that still follow me on Twitter from back in 2009. Mostly what I post about international stuff. For me, I'm hoping at least some of what I post can make people understand what's going on in the world at large and also be more cognizant of U.S. actions abroad and how that's not necessarily in the best interest or in the best fashion or in the best manner.

Irfan's experience is also shared by Alex, a 37-year-old Caucasian/White Canadian Muslim

convert. Alex reported that Muslim social media, particularly "Muslim Facebook", has been a

tool for him to keep abreast as to how things are in other parts of the world, particularly the

Muslim world:

> I like to keep an eye on different parts of the world, what's going on, what's happening in Syria, Venezuela, what's happening in Kashmir and, of course, Palestine, Yemen. I have relationship with people all over the world so I'm definitely very much aware of the event that happens day to day. My last interaction—There's a journalist … she posted something about the attacks on the *masjid* [translation: mosque] in Birmingham last night. I liked that she posted a video of they found somebody, that somebody is in custody. Next to that, there was an attack on Mufti Taqi Usmani as an assassination attempt. He's the Grand Mufti of Pakistan. He's very influential in the world. I shared the article on Venezuela, and then a bunch of people commented on stuff I posted.

Another participant, Muhammad, a 35-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Canadian Muslim man

and self-proclaimed former "cyberactivist", described his past experience of using social media

to rally online for the Palestinian cause and counter media misreporting and misrepresentation:

> In 2008/2009 there was the strikes on Gaza, and I was surprised to see how many people were taking the Israeli side of the story, and buying into that narrative, and I thought I should counteract. So, I was mostly on the commentary section of YouTube, or on Facebook, trying to propagate that.

The globalizing and diversifying nature of social media as a platform in bringing people and

issues together, as reflected in participants' stories above, is also further acknowledged by

participants, such as Marisol and Shahnaz. For example, Marisol, a 34-year-old Hispanic and

Latinx Muslim American woman and racial justice activist, appreciates Muslim social media

for highlighting the diversity of the "being Muslim" lived experience: "Muslims from all kinds

of backgrounds whether that's super wealthy or abject poverty and reading their life

experiences that they'll share. Their analysis on things which again because I love people's

stories—it just shows just how diverse we are as Muslims." Meanwhile, Shahnaz, a 40-year-

old Muslim Canadian woman of South Asian background, highlights the role Muslim social

media has in facilitating the exchange of thought-provoking information, as well as in bringing

people together:

> I think I feel connected with a lot of people and usually a lot of them are either politically engaged or they have influence, or they are Muslims that have influence in the community. I think there's just a lot of really thought-provoking information that's

being conveyed out there. I've also been able to connect with some people and bringing them into my classes because of social media.

Summary of RQ6 Findings

In addressing Research Question 6, following my analyses of Study 2 participants' interview transcripts, I make the warranted assertion that a unique sociotechnical communication phenomenon exists among Muslim users of social media—a phenomenon I define as *Muslim Social Media*. As an emerging phenomenon of social computing technology use, Muslim Social Media is identifiable by a set of particular motivational and processual aspects of social media use, such as users' motivation to engage social media as a conduit to explore different aspects of their identities, their understanding of Islam, and a tool to explore various praxis of "being Muslim" in North America. Muslim Social Media appears to be an influential aspect in the identity and hostility sensemaking processes of Muslim individuals in societies where they exist as a minority population and within the context of a post-9/11 sociopolitical milieu. As identity scholars, such as Erikson (1968) and McAdams (2010), have long asserted, people tend to seek a sense of coherence and understanding particularly in contexts where their sense of selves or their identity is threatened. Today, the role of digital media, specifically social media use and SNS engagement, is indeed paramount to people's sensemaking processes (Cover, 2016). Additionally, Muslim Social Media demonstrates the way Muslim individuals engage social computing technologies as part of their characteristic adaptations (McAdams, 2006) to technology and media use, which in the context of today's sociopolitical climate, appears to also reflect a strategy in responding to broader developments in the community and society at large.

As evident throughout the aforementioned discussion, Muslim Social Media is influential on three fronts: (1) cultivating self-awareness, (2) facilitating respectability Muslim identity work, and (3) contextualizing rising anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia in North America in globalizing and interconnected terms. In terms of cultivating a heightened sense of

self, Study 2 reinforces our understanding of the significance of the 9/11 terror attacks as a pivotal sociopolitical and historical event that had catapulted Islam, as a religious belief, and Muslims, as a community, into the forefront of public scrutiny. As a collective, members of North America's Muslim population were made increasingly aware of their identity as Muslim and their affiliation to Islam. Study 2 participants' lived experiences and narratives that I have thoroughly discussed above not only reinforces our understanding of the diversity of North America's Muslim population, but also highlights the intersectional nature of Muslim identity along race and ethnicity, as well as gender. Further, these factors work together in shaping a Muslim individual's overall use of social media platforms, which can be seen to manifest in the emerging collective phenomenon of Muslim Social Media. Participants' responses have also revealed the pivotal role Muslim Social Media holds as a facilitator of respectability Muslim identity work online.

Taken together, the aforementioned discussion highlights the role of cultural and religious identity in social media use through the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, which has been an influential way of engaging social media for users in exploring and making sense of the praxis of "being Muslim" in North America, as well as a form of computer-mediated social support. While the previous discussion has centered on aspects of personal and social identities (i.e., cultural and religious) and its influence on social media use, the following section discusses particular usage of social media in greater detail, such as platform choice, awareness- and uses of platform features and affordances, individual concerns related to social media use, types of interactions on platforms, as well as emotional self-disclosures. The following discussion will also address the impact of individual differences variables, such as sociodemographic background, personality traits, and ingroup identifications, on specific uses of social media.

RQ7: **To what extent does identity intersectionality translate into social media use among North America's Muslim population?**

While the aforementioned discussion highlights the role of cultural and religious identity in social media use through the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, the lived narratives of Study 2 participants also emphasizes the role sociodemographic factors and personality traits play in influencing platform adoption and engagement. For example, similar to the broader U.S. adult population of social media users, age appears to have been an important factor between people whose most frequently-used platform is Facebook and those who opt for more visually dominant platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat. Even within a sample of sociodemographically, ethnoracially-, and culturally diverse population of Muslim social media users, "digital natives" do stand out for their choice of platform. Among Study 2 participants, those ages 30 and over were found to most likely use Facebook as their most frequently-used or preferred platform above all others.

Interestingly, while Study 1 had found some significant associations between participants' ethnoracial background and gender identity for more focused uses of social media, such as positive- and negative emotional self-disclosure, Study 2 unveiled a much more nuanced dynamic. While Study 2 findings provided further contextualization to and confirmation of prior Study 1 results indicating specific patterns of emotional disclosures among Muslim social media users of Arab/Middle Eastern background, reservations in disclosing positive life events and emotions due to the belief in "the evil eye" were also found to be shared by participants of other races and ethnicities. Muslim social media users of African American/Black and South Asian backgrounds, for example, were just as likely as their Arab/Middle Eastern counterpart to avoid engaging in positive emotional disclosures. Additionally, while Study 1 and Study 2 significantly diverge in terms of sample sizes and care is therefore warranted in interpreting the following assertion, participants' gender identity does not appear to be a particularly salient discriminant of positive- nor negative emotional disclosure in Study 2 as Study 1 findings suggests.

Further, Study 2 participants' narratives suggest that Muslim social media users are not only aware of platform affordances and features, they are also discriminant with respect to the types of information they share, as well as the timing of disclosure. Study 2 participants' stories also reinforce the influence of personality traits on social media users' self-disclosure across social media platforms. For example, Muslims who were more introverted and conscientious were found to less likely engage in public negative emotional self-disclosure, and would opt for more private channels, such as WhatsApp, Instagram Direct Messages, and Facebook Messenger, instead. Additionally, specific platforms and platform features, such as Instagram and Instagram Stories, emerged as among the most preferred platform and platform feature among participants who are more extraverted and display greater manifestations of the openness to new experience trait. Study 2 interviews have also revealed some of the ways that participants have utilized platform-specific or built-in features and affordances for identity work.

Exploring Sociodemographic Factors, Personality Traits, and Social Identities in Social Media Use

Age, personality traits, and platform of choice. In analyzing the interview transcripts of Study 2 participants, I conclude with a warranted assertion that there are two influential factors relating to their social media platform of choice. These factors are namely (1) age and (2) personality traits. In addition to Facebook being the most commonly- and frequently-used social media platform among Study 2 participants (i.e., 16 out of 29 individuals), Facebook is also the platform of choice among participants ages 30 and older. Thirteen participants out of a total of 16 who had reported using Facebook as their preferred social media platform were between the ages of 33 and 52. Meanwhile, Twitter (i.e., 8 out of 29 individuals) and Instagram (i.e., 4 out of 29 individuals) emerged to be the most frequently-used social media platform among Study 2 participants who were 29 years old and younger.

My conversations with Study 2 participants further indicated that social media users are aware of the different appeals—features and affordances social media platforms have for certain demographics. For example, Deonte, a 21-year-old African American/Black Muslim American convert and avid user of Twitter, said they particularly appreciated the platform due to the relative ease in which information and discourses are exchanged, as well as how it facilitates networking opportunities. Deonte, whose intellectual curiosity appears to demonstrate elevated levels of openness to new experience, reported:

> I think because of the way I've noticed information is able to flow through Twitter, I've met a lot of amazing people. I've met a lot of amazing academic folks, and a lot of scholars, and I think Twitter is usually the medium where they're found. Where these ideas are allowed to proliferate in a more open "space". As compared to Facebook which is, I don't know, full of old people. And Instagram where it's not really as text centered, it's a very different purpose when compared to Twitter.

Another participant, Selena, who is 33 and is of Hispanic and Latinx heritage, reported that she intentionally uses certain platforms for specific reasons and would segment her social media behavior accordingly. Selena, who is an educator and enjoys meeting new people and trying out different cuisines from all around the world, explained why she appreciates Twitter more than the other platforms she is a member to:

> I don't have a Snapchat, but the ones that I use the most is Twitter and Instagram and Facebook. Now, the funny thing is, is that I use each place for a different purpose. Twitter, I feel is this place where you instantly get access to what's happening in the world. I feel like there are a lot of thoughtful conversations happening on Twitter, and I feel that people, in more recent years, have been really using Twitter to mobilize and for a lot of political campaigns and things like that or social movements. I see that Twitter in that sense, that platform, specifically, is very useful for keeping up to date with what's going on with the things that are of importance to me. Any issues or any causes and things like that, I feel it's very useful, and I feel that I do very much use it for just gaining access to information.

Zahra, a 24-year-old Muslim American woman of South Asian descent, had similarly noted the demographic and generational differences between platform users and that Facebook has become a platform for older users and "parents", while younger users are on Instagram:

> There's different age demographics; like, I don't know; most people in their 40s and above—I don't see them on Instagram. I think that's on purpose that a lot of youth,

younger kids, chose Instagram and so now their parents are just on Facebook they're not on Instagram. If their parents get on Instagram, they're going to find something else. It's just they want their own space, their own online space. I guess you could say safe space or just space away from their parents' generation, I guess—all the aunties and uncles that either might be nosy in their lives. I guess that's why I just moved business to Instagram […]

Another participant, 18-year-old Zaynab, who is an Arab/Middle Eastern Canadian Muslim and prefers Instagram over Facebook, enjoys the "aesthetics" of Instagram contents and had perceived the platform to be more "personal" than Facebook:

I love that it's just very aesthetics to look at, honestly. I really enjoy that. It's also a lot more personal. People don't mind sharing their photos on Instagram, because they know their friends aren't on there, and their relatives aren't on there. So, they don't mind posting their faces or their events, or whatever the case may be. So, it's just very personal in that way. People definitely are very cautious about using Facebook, they don't post to the same liberty.

Additionally, participants who displayed more extraversion and openness to new experience were found to prefer visually-dominant platforms, namely Instagram. For example, Masud, a 28-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American man, said he preferred Instagram because he perceives the platform as being less "cluttered":

My reason is it doesn't have much, people are not writing so much, so it's only pictures. If you like pictures, they give you a better picture of what people are up to. It's less opinions. I feel like it's quick. I don't have to spend time reading what people are up to or what people are feeling but I can look at a picture and I know. Of course, I understand it can be very fake and very superficial, but for the time being, it's the best out there where I can know what people are up to. There's also a story where you can share what's your doing right now. You can also follow famous people. I feel like some people are inspiring me. Instagram lets me know where people are at, so sometimes I end up meeting people or asking for a recommendation about places. Sometimes, I find out we're in the same place as someone else, so it does help. It makes stuff easier and handy.

Masud, who comes across as an individual who is not only extraverted but also demonstrates a greater sense of openness to new experiences than others, described himself as follows:

I think I'm easygoing, friendly. I like to meet people, learn about other people. I am very social, and I don't like spending time on my own. I prefer to be around people, and I have career goals I want to meet, and I try to balance both like being happy and meet certain career goals. A few years later, I decided to slow down on my career goals and enjoy life a little bit more.

Further, Study 2 participants who reported Facebook as their most frequently-used social media platform cited several reasons as to why it is their platform of choice, which ranges from user satisfaction to facilitating social grooming or bonding, to a matter of familiarity and long history of use. For example, James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American man, felt Facebook was sufficient enough a platform for him and his social interaction needs:

> I joined Facebook when I was in college and it was first starting out. I think I joined initially; my brother was on Facebook. My younger brother was on Facebook and I wanted to be able to connect with him. Then, I connected to some other- my other friends in college. I've been on there ever since then. I just never felt that real need to span to anything else. I never followed it. I feel like Facebook provides enough, or actually provides too much social media for me. I don't need anything else. It's definitely sufficient for me.

Further, James reported that he enjoys using Facebook for its newsfeed and built-in Messenger application:

> I like the [Facebook] newsfeed, because a lot people that I—not say friends—but a lot people, be able to follow people like scholars and personalities that might post articles or links to other articles, or some kind of blog post of the thing they write up there just to keep me in touch with the *deen* [translation: faith/religion], my thinking, they get it very easily accessible. I like that—being able to scroll through my feed and see things. I have some of my non-Muslim friends, a lot of them., they post things aren't benefiting me. I tend to not follow them. Just the ability to go to one place and have lots of different ideas, but they all tend to relate to […] the things that I'm interested in, and just have it all accessible in one place. It has a built-in messenger. The chat function is nice too. I can do that all in the same time. I'm not particularly attached to it. I wouldn't say I'm particularly attached to Facebook as a particular thing. It's just one that I happen to use. I've been using it for a long time, so I don't see the need to switch or add anything else. It seems to be sufficient for me.

Personality traits, cultural and religious identity, and emotional self-disclosure.

Based on my conversations with Study 2 participants, 11 interviews indicated that respondents would not engage in either positive- or negative disclosures online. People who were least likely to post positive updates, were equally least likely to post negative updates. Neither sociodemographic variables, such as age, sex, marital status, country of residence, nor cultural or religious identity, appear to matter. Further, participants who reported that they would

neither engage in positive- nor negative disclosures appear to be spread out across social media platforms. Please see Table 7 below for details.

Table 7. **Study 2 participants who indicated they would neither disclose positive- nor negative self-relevant information**.

Name	Gender	Age	Convert	Residence	Marital	Ethnicity + Race	Platform	Positive	Negative
P24	Man	39	Y	Canada	M	Black	FB	N	N
P13	Man	37	Y	Canada	M	White	FB	N	N
P3	Man	35	N	Canada	M	Arab	FB	N	N
P26	Woman	34	Y	U.S.	S	White	FB	N	N
P7	Trans	24	Y	U.S.	S	White	FB	N	N
P21	Woman	37	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	N	N
P28	Woman	18	N	Canada	S	Arab	IG	N	N
P30	Woman	30	N	U.S.	M	Arab	Twitter	N	N
P25	Man	25	N	U.S.	S	African	Twitter	N	N
P22	Man	24	N	U.S.	S	S. Asian	Twitter	N	N
P17	Man	26	N	U.S.	S	S. Asian	Twitter	N	N

Even though sociodemographic factors, as well as cultural and religious identity, do not appear influential in this context, participants' narratives do suggest that emotional self-disclosure is a function of an individual's personality traits, as well as utilitarian concerns. For example, Parisa, a 37-year-old Muslim Canadian Muslim of South Asian background who uses Facebook as her preferred social media platform, reported that she would not publicly disclose self-relevant positive life events and positive emotions, and would resort to more private channels for such disclosures:

> I don't feel comfortable sharing private things because for that, we do it on—we have a Viber group for my siblings. We talk about it or just send pictures of us because it's a family group only from my mum and my siblings. On Facebook, I don't really trust it much. I have friends I don't want things that whatever I'm going through, it's none of their business, or why would I share those private.

Similarly, Fiaz, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim American man who indicated Twitter as his most frequently-used social media platform, said he preferred disclosing such information privately among family and close friends as opposed disclosing such information online: "I

never felt the need to. I would inform close family and friends, but I've never really felt the need to."

Further, Study 2 participants who had expressed some ambivalences about engaging self-relevant emotional disclosures overall, such as Hajar, a 22-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American woman, said her willingness to disclose would depend on the nature of the content:

> For me, if it's a very personal issue, I don't want to post to social media. If it's a really personal issue, people are going to hear about it, every close family member, and my close friends. I don't want everyone to know about my job and what's going on in my life.

Table 8. **Study 2 participants who indicated they would disclose positive self-relevant information.**

Name	Gender	Age	Convert	Residence	Marital	Ethnicity + Race	Platform	Positive	Negative
P29	Woman	37	N	U.S.	S	Black	FB	Y	Y
P1	Woman	33	N	U.S.	M	Arab	FB	Y	N
P9	Woman	40	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P23	Man	29	N	U.S.	S	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P14	Woman	22	N	U.S.	S	Arab	FB	Y	Y
P8	Woman	52	Y	Canada	M	White	FB	Y	Y
P18	Man	36	Y	U.S.	M	White	FB	Y	N
P12	Man	40	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P31	Woman	35	Y	U.S.	M	Hispanic	FB	Y	Y
P2	Man	37	Y	U.S.	S	Hispanic	FB	Y	Y
P27	Man	28	N	U.S.	S	Arab	IG	Y	N
P19	Woman	24	N	U.S.	S	Persian	IG	Y	N
P6	Woman	23	N	U.S.	S	Arab	IG	Y	N
P5	Woman	35	N	U.S.	S	Arab	Snapchat	Y	Y
P10	Woman	18	N	U.S.	S	Arab	Twitter	Y	Y
P15	Woman	33	Y	U.S.	S	Hispanic	Twitter	Y	Y
P11	Queer	21	Y	U.S.	S	Black	Twitter	Y	Y
P4	Woman	40	N	U.S.	M	Black	Twitter	Y	Y

While a handful of participants reported they would not engage in any emotional self-disclosure online, the results of the interview analyses as reflected in Table 8 above suggest that overall Study 2 participants do use social media to disclose self-relevant positive life events and emotions. That said, the interviews have also revealed more nuanced details regarding the

likelihood and manner of disclosure. For example, Amal, a 33-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern

Muslim American woman who primarily uses Facebook, said she would publicly share such

updates but would refrain from engaging in more "mundane" disclosures:

> I actually do, I'll post it. Every time I had a kid, we announced it. When we moved to a new house, I didn't announce it. Promotion at work, I talk about it. I do because I'm a business owner. It comes with the territory. Part of growing your business is talking about your business' achievements. Like life events? I guess if it's something that I want the public to know, I'll put it up there, but I don't see the need to tell everyone about where I went.

Similarly, Masud, a 28-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American man and self-

described extrovert, reported that he reserves his Instagram updates for exciting activities or

events:

> I don't like to share boring stuff. I think I do something exciting once a month. I don't post my food or my workout, which I see that—Day to day basis, I don't post it. I post when I travel, or I get something exciting, or I remember it's a big event or something. I try to post once a month on Instagram.

For Marisol, a 34-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic and Latinx

background, disclosing self-relevant positive life events and emotions is part of her personality

as an individual who enjoys "sharing experiences" that are [spiritually] meaningful:

> It really, really depends on what it is. For me, I like sharing experiences. It just goes back to my personality. I want people to appreciate their own experiences because Allah doesn't place us in all situations and spaces. Being in one particular space doesn't mean it's more blessed than another. That's why I mainly share experiences and the souls that I'm with, instead of […] the stereotypical life highlights.

Another participant, Deonte, a queer 21-year-old African American/Black Muslim American,

said they tend to not disclose positive life events and related emotions unless it is after the fact:

> So, I try to be pretty, try to stay pretty sequestered when it comes to personal life events. If I know for sure something's happening, I would then, honestly be like oh I just got this job I'm really excited for it, or I just got into this school, and so on and so forth. But that's only after something has happened, and I'm sure of it.

Study 2 further reveals how wary participants are in terms of coming across as being

boastful when they share or disclose self-relevant positive life events and emotions and would

therefore moderate their disclosures accordingly. This shared sentiment appears to relate with

the agreeableness trait, which is driven by belongingness motivations and acceptance-seeking (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, Study 2 also highlights how reservations about engaging in positive emotional disclosure due to the "the evil eye" is a belief that is shared by participants across ethnoracial backgrounds, as opposed to it being a behavior and understanding shared exclusively by Arab/Middle Eastern social media users, as Study 1 suggests. For example, Aliyah, a 40-year-old African American/Black Muslim American woman who frequently uses Twitter, said she is not only wary about appearing conceited but would also only disclose sparingly because she is also concerned about "the evil eye":

> I try to be mindful of that because I don't want to come off as *braggadocios* and then I do believe in evil eye, so I try to do it sparingly. My son plays basketball, so if he had a good game, I'll likely say something. If my husband and I go out on date night, I might post a picture, but I try to sparingly talk about my and my family's personal successes.

Zaynab, an 18-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim Canadian woman who prefers using Instagram, reported that she is also cautious about "the evil eye" and would only disclose positive life events when others have also disclosed or posted about it:

> Yeah, I'm generally super, super cautious about that stuff only because it's like a cultural thing but like, also a Muslim thing. I like to avoid the evil eye if I can. So, I generally I'm pretty cautious about that stuff. But then if it's a shared success, I know other people are already posting about, like, it's already out there. So, I'll post about it as well. For example, when I mentioned like being co-published earlier. I was co-published with another girl who was also in Muslim engineering in my faculty, in my program. So, when she posted it, I was like, well, it's already out there. She already posted it, let me post it too. So, I also posted it. But then, if it was just the people that I published along without her I wouldn't—No one else posted about it on the social media, I probably wouldn't have mentioned that either.

Another participant, Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian Muslim American man who frequently uses Twitter, similarly shared other participants' concern about "the evil eye" and reported that he typically would not disclose such information or would do so only on a "need to know basis":

> I don't do that at all. For the most part, I almost hide everything. I feel most of that stuff is kind of need to know basis, like if you want to know, you can ask me. I believe in the *'ayn* [translation: the evil eye] so I'm not going to post things that are generally—A

lot of things are temporary so it's okay. I don't want to bring people's attention into some things.

Additionally, Rasheed, a 39-year-old African American/Black Muslim American and frequently uses Facebook, said he would refrain from engaging in positive emotional self-disclosure as it is perceived to be a boastful act: "Not usually, no. I don't want to talk about myself, I guess. I don't like bragging. It's kind of bragging a little bit, so I don't usually do that." Meanwhile, other participants, such as Maryam, a 52-year-old Canadian Muslim of Caucasian/White background who frequently uses Facebook, believed that while sharing positive life events and emotions is a good thing and would likely engage in such disclosures, she also added that she would try to leave out certain details when doing so:

> Fairly likely. It's nice to share good news. Depends, I don't want to share a lot of detail, for example, when my grandson was born, I told a few people that I had had a grandson. I didn't go into much detail. My son's kind of private and he's afraid of the eyeing. I didn't post pictures or anything like that. I think I just made an announcement. I do update my account with what's good news and stuff.

Another participant, Diego, a 37-year-old Muslim American of Hispanic-Latinx background, reported that while he would not necessarily refrain from engaging in positive emotional disclosures, he is not only discriminant with respect to the platform but also the timing of disclosure. Diego's story also suggests that his self-disclosure behavior has changed and no longer shares such information as frequently as before:

> I probably don't do it as much on Twitter. I will share it on Facebook, but I think I've gotten—I try not to share a lot of myself on Facebook. It happens, but it's been cut down a bit. But any life changes, I'll probably wait it out a bit and then say, "You know what? I'll share this with them now because maybe it's time," and letting others know where I am. Also because I also am connected with other librarians across the country, so I also want to be able to keep up to date with them and keep them informed if in case sometime in the future they want to reach out to me, or maybe there's an opportunity for collaborating on a project or maybe being a part of a panel or something like that. Then that's when I would probably post updates but, of myself, but I don't do it right away, I guess. I let it breathe for a bit and then I just, I make it public.

The notion of shifting patterns of social media behavior and habits, including emotional self-disclosure, is another important theme that emerged within my sample of participants. For

example, Sumaya, a 24-year-old Caucasian/White American Muslim who frequently uses Facebook, reported that she no longer shares information about herself online or rant, because she no longer feels a need to do so:

> I virtually don't really post about myself anymore unless again, something really, really major. Because at this point, a lot of the things that I talked about are more private. The people I usually talk to are the ones that know. I don't really rant on Facebook as much anymore because I have people to rant to more than I used to.

Selena, who is a 33-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic and Latinx background and frequently uses Twitter, similarly reported a shift in her social media behavior, particularly regarding emotional self-disclosures. Selena further explained that the change in behavior might be due to the aging process and also her conversion to Islam:

> I feel like that would happen more often before. I feel like now I'm focused on not really using it so personally. I feel I'm older, and I feel like young people tend to use it more in a way to really—They tend to use social media more in a personal way and in a way to socialize more. I feel like older individuals use social media less in that way. I feel, generally speaking, not to say that there aren't exceptions, but I also think it has to do maybe with becoming older, but it might have to do with my conversion.

Other participants, such as Hajar, a 22-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, said she does not update her Facebook account as frequently as before and this is due to personal concerns over excessive social media use:

> I made my Facebook account when I was a freshman in high school which was, dear God, was many years ago. The funny thing was when I first made it, I literally used it just like any high schooler. I would be that person that would post every single day, like literally, every single day. Stupid things like going to the movies or whatever. I started using it less and less during my junior high school when I realized how much time I was spending on it. I realized at that time it was an addiction. I realized I was getting in the way of other things that were more important in my life.

Another participant, Shahnaz, a 40-year-old South Asian Canadian Muslim woman who frequently uses Facebook, similarly indicated that she does not share much information about herself or about positive life events and emotions anymore and would prefer observing other users' social media updates instead:

> Not as much anymore. I used to do it a lot more before. I would say maybe once a month, maybe something like that, like a status but most of it is just, like posting articles

or the commenting on other people's stuff. The reason why I stopped, when thinking back to it, I think I was just——To me, I just—I don't know, I just felt like why do I need to share so much about myself and what's going on in my life? I just figured, I would find out what other people are thinking and what's on their mind.

Table 9. **Study 2 participants who indicated they would not disclose negative self-relevant information.**

Name	Gender	Age	Convert	Residence	Marital	Ethnicity + Race	Platform	Positive	Negative
P30	Woman	30	N	U.S.	M	Arab	Twitter	N	N
P19	Woman	24	N	U.S.	S	Persian	IG	Y	N
P22	Man	24	N	U.S.	S	S. Asian	Twitter	N	N
P25	Man	25	N	U.S.	S	African	Twitter	N	N
P27	Man	28	N	U.S.	S	Arab	IG	Y	N
P28	Woman	18	Y	Canada	S	Arab	IG	N	N
P17	Man	26	Y	U.S.	S	S. Asian	Twitter	N	N
P6	Woman	23	N	U.S.	S	Arab	IG	Y	N
P13	Man	37	Y	Canada	M	White	FB	N	N
P26	Woman	34	Y	U.S.	S	White	FB	N	N
P3	Man	35	N	Canada	M	Arab	FB	N	N
P24	Man	39	Y	Canada	M	Black	FB	N	N
P9	Woman	40	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P1	Woman	33	N	U.S.	M	Arab	FB	Y	N
P7	Trans	24	Y	U.S.	S	White	FB	N	N
P12	Man	40	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P23	Man	29	N	U.S.	S	S. Asian	FB	Y	N
P18	Man	36	Y	U.S.	M	White	FB	Y	N
P21	Woman	37	N	Canada	M	S. Asian	FB	N	N

Study 2 participants have also shared their attitudes and experiences in engaging in negative emotional self-disclosure, such as posting about or sharing negative life events and emotional states one goes through, such as expressing sadness and anxiety. The majority of my participants (i.e., 19 individuals out of 29) reported that they would not and have not engaged in negative emotional self-disclosures online, as reflected in Table 9 above. In contrast to Study 1 results on the least likelihood of Muslim females in engaging negative emotional disclosure online, Table 9 above suggests that gender does not appear to be a factor in negative emotional disclosure for Study 2 participants. However, considering the relatively small effect sex has on negative self-disclosure among Study 1 participants, a greater number of participants may equally be needed for Study 2 interviews in order for sex and gender to emerge as an influential theme. That said, several reasons were mentioned as to why Study 2 participants have avoided

negative emotional self-disclosures, most of which pertained to utilitarian concerns, i.e., not seeing any benefit in doing so, and the overall discomfort with the idea of being publicly and emotionally vulnerable. The overall shared sentiment and attitude toward negative emotional self-disclosure and participants' preference for more private channels when engaging in such disclosures appear to be consistent with Waterloo et al.'s (2018) research. For example, Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian American Muslim man, said he would opt for less public ways of emotional disclosure:

> I have a close enough connection with enough of my friends where I'm like if something is going terribly wrong or horribly wrong, there's not a time where I'm like, "Wow, this is a sad thing like personally happened to me or affected me where I can be like—I don't know. I just try to keep everything in perspective. That's why I followed a lot of geopolitics and things that have happened internationally.

Zahra, who is 24, of South Asian background, and lives in the U.S., similarly reported that while she would still use internet-mediated platforms for such disclosures, she would resort to more private channels instead, such as Instagram's Direct Messages or Facebook Messenger:

> I wouldn't really use any like broadcast social media. I would just either text the close friends or the friends that I already am in contact with, the one we text a lot, the other one we text sometimes in Instagram, one we use messenger, one we use Telegram, for example. It would just be how can I most conveniently contact that person, where is our conversation on, is it on Snapchat right now, is it on Instagram. I would use that and then just contact that one individual that I've been talking to and being in contact with.

Another participant, 25-year-old Ousmane, a Muslim American man of West African background, suggested that engaging in negative emotional disclosure would be against his personality:

> Well, in the beginning, you asked me about aspects that I figured out about myself. One of them is that when I get sad or if something bad happens, I don't really talk to a lot of people. I probably have-- I talk to my mom for sure and maybe a couple of friends, but that's all. I don't share my business, so I don't really talk. I don't say it out. I don't post about it. I just feel like, what are they going to say? "I'm sorry. You'll be better." I know that. You know about my business, but you don't help me in any way. [laughs] Maybe you believe your helping because you say, sorry but I'm just saying. I don't know.

> Twenty-eight-year-old Masud, who is a Muslim American man of Arab/Middle

Eastern background, chimed in expressing his doubt that engaging in negative emotional

disclosure would succeed in soliciting the right emotional support that one needs when going

through a difficult time:

> Very unlikely. Almost impossible. I don't think the right people would reach out to me. I think people will read my—Like a desperate need for help or attention. I don't know. People would read whatever emotions, sad emotions I'm going through, and they will interpret it their own way. They would either overreact or send negative help or negative feedback. I don't see it beneficial. I know I can trust certain people. Maybe I will talk to them, but not on social media where 700 people can read it. Actually, it would slow me down. It's incredible.

Another participant who had similarly expressed her skepticism in the utility of engaging in

such forms of emotional disclosure online and felt quite strongly against it is Zaynab, an 18-

year-old Canadian Muslim woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background:

> Absolutely never. Oh, I never. No, no. No, no. I'll message a friend if I have to look on Snapchat or something. But I don't post about it publicly. I don't know why— it might be like, it's, quote, "a sign of," which is not but its quote, "a sign of weakness," if you happen to reach to people like that. But I just like, I've never— that's just never been my thing to post about something like that publicly. It just it's very personal. […] Because also, if I kind of want to feel better I know, who can make feel better? So, there's no point of messaging everybody on—letting everybody know on my story when I could just like message that person directly and be like, "Hey, I'm sad because of this, this and this."

Hayat, a 35-year-old Muslim American of Arab/Middle Eastern background and

frequent user of Snapchat, further suggested that publicly sharing her worries and difficulties

on social media may have occurred in the past, when she was younger, but she no longer

considers such disclosures as being appropriate, as it would violate other users' expectations

of their social media experience:

> I don't think I will. I used to back in my high school days early maybe ninth, no nine, nine maybe like tenth, eleventh. I used to post a lot about my negative feelings and stuff, but I realized that people don't really want to hear about negative stuff, unless they really care. I don't really—If it's something good, I post it. If it's not something good, I just keep it to myself, or share it with close friends. I don't see the point of bothering for example, all my 70 followers on Snapchat with something, "Oh my God, I had such a bad day today. Oh my God, I can't believe this happened" or something like that. Not everyone cares.

While most of Study 2 participants felt rather strongly about negative emotional self-

disclosures on social media, some participants had expressed less reservations—reporting that such disclosures would depend on the context, the frequency of disclosure, as well as the platform that is used to disclose such contents. Reflecting on a past experience from a utilitarian lens, Fiaz, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim American man and frequent Twitter user, said he had realized that one of the negative life events he had experienced previously was related to his unhealthy use of Twitter. As such, he no longer spends as much time online anymore:

> I feel there's no benefit in me engaging and I just lose any motivation to be around internet people. I need friends in front of me right now to talk to. Last time I deactivated my account was also after this negative life event. I was applying for residency and I didn't get into a position. I noticed that I would distract myself with Twitter a lot. I thought I'm better off without Twitter.

Another participant, Aliyah, a 40-year-old African American Muslim woman whose platform of choice is Twitter, indicated that while she would not necessarily refrain from negative disclosures, she is aware of how "permanent" contents that are shared online are and how such disclosures may impact her children's future. Aliyah reported that she would not frequently use social media for negative emotional disclosure:

> Not as often, especially when it comes to other people in my life, like my kids. I don't feel it's fair for me to put their faults out there. This stuff lives on, so I certainly wouldn't want to be responsible for anything negative that happens to them in the future. They didn't ask for this. I'm very careful about posting anything negative about them.

Shahnaz, another 40-year-old participant who resides in Canada and uses Facebook frequently, meanwhile, said it would depend on the nature of the negative disclosure, noting that certain topics may be better suited for more private platforms, such as WhatsApp:

> I think about negative life events, I guess it depends on what it is. For example, I've noticed that some people are, for example, posting funeral arrangements online for people. Things like that, I can see the social utility in that. But just in terms of, "I'm feeling sad today", or whatever, [chuckles] I think it's just like, "Okay, so what are you expecting? Are you expecting people to—" It depends? I think that I have a lot of people in my own life that I can discuss things like that with that I don't need to put it on social media unless it's an issue that's related to work. For example, I might post that on a WhatsApp group of people that are of similar professional background that may actually give me advice that is relevant.

Another participant who noted platform differences as a variable is Selena, a 33-year-old Muslim American woman of Hispanic-Latina background who frequently uses Twitter. Selena suggested that if she were to engage in negative emotional disclosure online, Twitter; rather than Facebook, would be her platform of choice. Selena's interview on this topic highlights how common social media users segment their social media behavior according to different platforms —each of which is dedicated for different audiences:

> I wouldn't do it on Facebook, simply because—I don't know. I don't know that I'd be— I think the place that I would do that is on Twitter. Even then, I don't think I would—I think I would share that on Twitter. I'd be likely to share that on Twitter, but only Twitter. Other than that, I would just maybe tell friends about it.

Further, Amal, a 33-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American woman and frequent user of Facebook, suggested that her reservation in engaging in negative emotional disclosure online is part of her personality. Despite being a mental health advocate, Amal said she personally would not trust her social network and feel comfortable publicly disclosing a vulnerability: "Some people are like, 'I was diagnosed with depression.' I was just like, 'Whoa, whoa. I don't trust the public with that information. Whoa, whoa guys, hold on.' I understand if people feel comfortable doing that. I get it, but I don't trust people enough to do that." Amal's response above suggests that her reservation in engaging in too much negative emotional self-disclosure is a function of her more conscientious and neurotic personality.

Personality traits, cultural and religious identity, and platform affordances. Another aspect of social media use that was probed among Study 2 participants is their awareness of platform features and affordances. In addition to asking about participants' overall and specific concerns regarding their use of social media, including their most frequently-used platform, I had also asked them about their use of platform features in expressing their personality, their cultural identity, as well as their praxis of "being Muslim". While the interviews suggest that Muslim social media users' overall concerns about platform behavior broadly reflects existing public discourses on the subject, i.e., ongoing societal-level

discussions about problematic screen time and wellbeing, Muslim users' utilitarian bias seems to enhance particular concerns over others, such as the idea of futile and excessive usage. Most of my interview respondents had expressed concerns about "not putting one's time to good use" by being online—a concern that some have managed by taking sporadic time-off from the platform, restricting platform access using log-off/log-in strategy, and removing certain social media mobile applications from their digital devices.

Other concerns that Study 2 participants harbor about social media use reflect the worries of the broader population of North American adults, such as concerns over data privacy, data mining, and surveillance. While participants' personality traits also appear to moderate their perceptions of platform features, affordances, and related threats, my conversations with respondents also suggest a sense of "learned helplessness" that is shared by many participants. "Learned helplessness" when it comes to social media engagement appears to manifest in participants' attitude as "reluctant social media users" as well as their continued usage and engagement of particular platforms even after acknowledging warranted issues and concerns, such as the Facebook - Cambridge Analytica scandal.

Platform features and affordances for identity work. Speaking about her experience in using Tumblr as a platform, 18-year-old Amani, who resides in the U.S. and is of Arab/Middle Eastern background, said she first adopted Tumblr mainly for its features as a platform for audio-visual and textual content and affordances, such as anonymity. Amani reported that her adoption of Tumblr as a platform was a way of her documenting her journey of "being Muslim", specifically being a visibly Muslim woman:

> So, I never was into Tumblr before I was 15. I hadn't heard much of it. But I just wanted somewhere I could start writing about my experiences that no one knew me from South Bend, Indiana. And Tumblr's the only place that you can post a variety of things. You can post pictures, you can post music, you can post paragraphs and paragraphs and paragraphs of information. […] it was the easiest for me and I didn't know of anyone in the Muslim community that was heavily into Tumblr [who] would find me and started questioning me about things I posted on Tumblr […] on Tumblr I just see all of these religious blogs, but there's occasionally some funny things on my timeline, but

most of the time I just have religious blogs and pretty pictures and that whole thing, yeah.

Amani reported that when she first started her Tumblr blog at 15:

> I was on there every week posting about my experiences as a *hijabi* [translation: person who wears a headscarf] and how to prepare yourself as a *hijabi* and posting selfies of me and my new hijab. So, I definitely relied heavily on social media. I also got a lot of my information about the hijab, about people's experiences from social media […] I feel like social media has influenced me so much as a Muslim. […] so much knowledge is shared in my feed. So, I'm aware of certain *Hadiths* [translation: Prophetic sayings] or certain stories that make me a better Muslim. And then I also get information on it from my mother to make sure that I'm not getting random information from the Internet. So, social media has had such a great impact on me as a Muslim. Yeah, Tumblr was just; like, my starting point.

Similarly highlighting particular platform features for identity work, 21-year-old Deonte, who also resides in the U.S. and self-identifies as queer, spoke about particular Twitter features that help them express their identity as a Black Muslim American and personality as a voracious reader, namely Twitter's pinned tweet feature:

> I think my pinned tweet is actually really interesting. For me, I did a reading challenge for myself, I'm trying to read 45 books this year outside of school books, and books that I'm specifically reading for classes and stuff like that. And so, going through that you're able to see, oh wow, this person is Muslim, and they're really interested in theology as well as some of the sociological concepts that go along with being Muslim in America.

Deonte also mentioned that they use the 160-character Twitter "bio", as well as digital images, i.e., "emojis", to further characterize their persona on the platform:

> If you're looking at; like, my bio, I have the emoji of a *Ka'aba* [i.e., Muslims' House of God in Mecca's Grand Mosque]. I also have "they" and "he", so for me, if someone were to read my bio, even hover over my icon on a tweet I sent, that'd *kinda* be the first thing that they see. Then they can register that, oh they're a Muslim, and oh they use "they" pronouns. So, they may not be cisgender. So, I think those things are the two defining things.

Deonte added that while they also use Facebook and Instagram, the perception other social media users can get from Deonte's Facebook profile and Instagram account would not be the same as their Twitter profile, as they had intentionally segmented their content-sharing and platform engagement, accordingly:

Actually, the perception you would get is definitely more, is definitely different on Facebook and Instagram. My Facebook profile, you wouldn't be able to discern my queerness from there. I don't have that information on display as much on Facebook. And then my Instagram, I primarily use that to just lurk, so that isn't as updated as it should be. And so, I don't think you'd be able to discern the type of things you would from looking at my Twitter.

Another Twitter user, 25-year-old Ousmane, who is of West African origin, residing in the U.S., similarly uses his Twitter "bio" to express more of his identity and personality. Ousmane also said he uses both his profile picture and cover image as a way to communicate aspects of his identity on the platform:

I have a picture of myself; profile picture and then the cover is like a statue that is in Gambia. Then I have my bio underneath the sentence there is like the *Ka'aba* [translation: The House of God, located in Mecca's Grand Mosque], the flag of Gambia, the graduate cap, and a school bag. Emoji. Well, it says like, let's say am a Muslim, if I have to describe myself, Muslim comes first and then Gambian, student and then worker or whatever. That is what it means in that order.

Ousmane reported his 160-character Twitter "bio" as containing the following information: "It says given the fact that I may go back to whom I belong, anytime, without having the chance to say goodbye, I spread peace and positive vibes." Thirty-three-year-old Selena, who is of Hispanic-Latinx American background and also frequently uses Twitter, added that she; too, expresses her identity as a Latina Muslim through her Twitter "bio", in addition to expressing herself across the various contents she would tweet about:

My bio has that, and I think I tweet a lot about certain things. Sometimes I'll literally use the words like, "as a Latina or as a convert, this has been my experience", you know. Then apart from that, it's also in my either bio or description of myself. If I use a certain language—I guess if I use Spanish people can assume, I'm Latina. I guess it's just a way to say, "Hey this is me. This is who I am." I guess in hopes that maybe people—I'll find people to follow that are like-minded, or like-minded people will follow me. For example, I do know that I have come across, again, not that it has gone outside of Twitter, but I know that I have come across the accounts of several Muslim-Latino converts. I've found them through social media.

Other Twitter features that Study 2 participants have used for identity work is Twitter Hashtags. For example, Marisol, a 34-year-old Muslim American woman who; like Selena above, is also of Hispanic and Latinx background, explained how hashtags feature as part of

the way Twitter users of minority and underrepresented backgrounds assert their cultural

identity:

> I'm grateful for people who use the platform to share their own culture, like Central
> American Twitter, I love it. #centralamericantwitter. I learned so much as a non-Central
> American. A lot of the Latinx Instagram accounts that are on, like meeting other women
> who have same identity issues or struggles or learning about why cleaning within our
> culture is such a deeply-rooted anxiety. I was like, "Oh my God. There's a podcast about
> this? There's a podcast episode? Are you kidding me?" Just like where that comes from,
> why they need to be neat and clean is just so deeply rooted and what it means that it's
> so deeply rooted in our culture. I'm grateful for those that use this White platform that
> tries to make us all alike, but intentionally uses it to bring out their uniqueness.

Meanwhile, Amal, a 33-year-old Arab American Muslim woman, highlighted a particular

context in which she had utilized the hashtag feature to communicate her identity, perspectives,

and values:

> There are a lot of views that I do agree with. I'm just looking at my Facebook feed right
> now. The Ilhan Omar stuff, I agree with. I don't have an issue with what she said,
> although I don't agree. I think she could be a little more tactful, but otherwise, I
> hashtagged it with #IStandWithIlhan.

> For Study 2 participants with Instagram as their most frequently-used social media

platform, much of the identity work takes place in the form of visual images and videos, as

well as related captions. For instance, Masud, who is 27 and of Arab/Middle Eastern

background, explained that his Instagram photo grid reflects his personality as extraverted and

adventurous, in addition to signaling other aspects of his identity, such as "being Muslim" and

"being Arab":

> What signifies my personality is I think I'm off to adventure and I like trying new things.
> There is a picture of me fishing and there is a picture of me with a family in Kansas
> watching a World Cup. There's a picture of me riding a camel. It's so diverse and it's all
> about exploring new things and exciting things […] There is a picture from 2013 of
> people reading Quran on the floor of a mosque. There is also writing in Arabic. It
> doesn't mean—we might not be Muslim—but its Arabic writings and there is a picture
> of the Quran.

Another avid Instagram user, Zaynab, an 18-year-old Canadian Muslim woman of

Arab/Middle Eastern background, reported that her identity work also takes place through the

Instagram Highlights feature, in addition to the captions accompanying the photos she uploads:

So, on Instagram, you have the highlights, which are stories that you just saved for a long period of time. On my highlights, I have four different featured highlights. And I have one for Palestinian rights in particular, and all the posts that I've ever posted about Palestine it's taped to that highlight. And it just talks about, for example, two days ago, it was Palestinian prisoners' day. So, I put a post for that talking about statistics and that kind of stuff. And I have other post talking about, different events and different casualties, different art pieces that were specific towards Palestine. […] The second one talks about just general politics, and the other two are just personal photos of myself and photos of my friends. So, I use it because I use my story quite a bit like I'll post to my story, maybe —once a week, which is obviously someone else's not a lot at all. But it's a lot for me. I'll post in my story once a week with some political posts or some religious posts or something or the other. I use it a lot to talk about, not necessarily religion, but political things that are happening in the Middle East.

Zaynab added that she has also resorted to using the Instagram "bio" and emojis, in addition to writing captions to further express herself and her online persona:

[…] So, a lot of my captions happen to be like, they have aspects of my personality in there, I guess, in terms of just who I am, where I come from, that kind of stuff […] my bio also has like *Al-Hamdu lillah* [translation: All Praises be to God] in there. So, my bio nearly signals me as a Muslim person. I have like a flag in my bio, some of my vowels signals me like an Iraqi person. I have my major engineering in there. So, it signals me like a person from McMaster University in this program. So, I use my bio to signal who I am and to represent my identity very well, too.

Hayat, a 23-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, also reported that she relies on her Instagram Stories as a way of expressing her personality and identity:

Because my posts […] maybe reflect my personality and stuff, but my stories do more because, as I said before, I only post on Instagram if it's like start an occasion that I want to keep for the memories and stuff. With the stories it's easier. You can just try and send, it's faster. It probably reflects my personality more.

As far as Facebook users and their experiences in utilizing Facebook features for identity work are concerned, the interviews revealed that only a few participants have actually used certain built-in features, such as the Facebook "Intro" section, to express who they are online. Only three interviewees (out of a total of 15 participants who frequently use Facebook) reported that their "Intro" section had actually contained meaningful self-related information. For example, 24-year-old Zahra, who is Persian and lives on the West Coast., her Facebook "Intro" does indicate important aspects of who she is and what is important to her. Zahra also added that

she has used Facebook's Alternative Names feature to express her Persian heritage by listing

her name in Farsi. Additionally, Zahra has also used Facebook's cover photo feature as an

avenue for identity work:

> In my bio, […] my profile picture is me in traditional Iranian clothing. I think my bio just says it. I love God, my friends and family. My family and friends something like that. Just having my name written in Farsi all that stuff. I think that's all indicative of my background, of who I am. Having the Qur'an in that background cover photo of mine. I think all of these things—I don't think there's a person that I know, maybe random people I've met once and we're happy to be Facebook friends, they might not know too much about me but everyone knows I feel like for the most part. There's no doubt that people know I'm Muslim and that I'm something probably Middle Eastern. Those things they probably know about me. The more specifically, a lot of them probably do know the Iranian part of me.

Another participant, Hajar, who is 22 and of Arab/Middle Eastern background, had

similarly utilized Facebook's Nickname or Alternative Name feature to express her ethnoracial

and cultural heritage as a North African:

> I think for me particularly, and this is like a personal thing, it wasn't until like two years ago that in my account, I know for Facebook, when you make your account, you could have a nickname and it appears right next to your actual name. I wrote my name out in Arabic for a reason. I wrote my full name in Arabic for a reason just because I often got questions about people asking me things like, "Where are you from?" or, "Where are you originally from?" or, "What do you do?" I know most people know that Hajar is a Muslim name, obviously, and people who know basic Islam know who Hajar was but there are some people who don't know who Hajar is.

Further, Hakeem, who is 29, resides in the U.S., and is of South Asian background,

explained how the content of his Facebook "Intro" came about. He mentioned that he had

deliberately included self-relevant information in the section to communicate to other

Facebook users:

> I was talking to a friend about this like years ago. I was just talking about, "How would you define yourself?" or just—we were just coming through that and then, I realized like, "Oh, wow. I realized I hadn't really updated my social media—How would I make that as a bio?" What I came up with was like, "Duke Blue Devil raised in the suburbs of Philly with Pakistani food, Islam, and The Haverford School". Yeah, I think this pretty much captures who I am. I went to Duke. Duke was a big part of who I am today. Me growing up in Philadelphia, growing up around Pakistani culture was a big factor in who I was. My religion is a big factor in who I am. That school I went to in Pennsylvania was a big factor of who I am. Just talking about the things that shape me.

Hakeem had also mentioned that his profile picture and cover photos were other artifacts signaling his personality and interests:

> I guess it's not super obvious because you have to look at it. You just see me in a crowd. It was from when the Eagles won the Super Bowl. I was in Philadelphia watching and so it's of me in the city, right up to the win and there's a crowd of people celebrating. The cover photo is from a picnic—well, not a picnic, but a little Eid celebration we did on the beach where there was just a whole bunch of Muslims on the Bay Area and it's a cover picture. I think they're pretty reflective of my personality. In a sense of, very passionate about Philadelphia sports, a big Eagles fan, that was a big moment for me. It's something that would be on display, so to speak. The cover photo, yes, it was a really fun event. It was with a lot of people here in the Bay and I thought that was— captures me wanting to feel how I like to socialize and hang out. Yes, it was a fun event.

Meanwhile, for Muslim social media users who self-identify as being particularly religious or subscribe to Islamic orthodoxy, such as 37-year-old Alex from Canada, built-in Facebook features, such as Featured Photos, becomes a conduit through which they express themselves and their personal values:

> The things that signify my identity, or how I identify—There was once where the layout for the profile page where you can put highlights, certain photos, and that comes there. So, I put very key *shuyukh* [translation: religious scholars] that are very important to my worldview. I've put their pictures up, that's probably the most character you get.

Alex, who is Caucasian/White, further added that up until recently, he had used a picture of a religious scholar in Mauritania as his personal profile picture. Alex later explained that the religious scholar in question was someone he had personally studied with and looks up to. Recently, however, Alex had changed his profile picture:

> For many, many months I had a picture of a shaykh in Mauritania. Just last night […] I changed it. I changed my cover photo to calligraphy writing of the four caliphs and then my profile picture is again calligraphy of an *ayah* [translation: verse] of the Quran […] That's my identity there.

What is interesting to note about Facebook users within this particular sample of social media users is that most of the interviewees indicated that Facebook, overall, is considered relatively more "private" than other platforms, like Instagram and Twitter. The majority of Study 2 participants who frequently use Facebook further disclosed that much of the people they are connected to on the platform are people they actually know in person, such as nuclear

family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. This finding lends further support for Lenhart's (2009) work, who found that 90% of social media and SNS users engage the platforms to keep in touch with known others, as a way of building social capital (Gonzales, 2017; Kang, 2000; Mesch, 2012). For example, 30-year-old Banan, who is Arab/Middle Eastern, said: "So, Facebook and Instagram I have, they are more personal accounts. So, it's all friends and family and things like that." Another participant, 40-year-old Aliyah, who is African American/Black, added that she enjoys using Facebook since her network comprises people she actually knows: "Facebook, I like, because that's where my family, my friends are, people that I actually know." Finally, Selena, who is 33 and is of Hispanic and Latinx background, further highlighted the "personal" or "private" nature of Facebook for her and how she would not consider "friending" random Facebook users:

> Facebook is a little bit more personal to me. Again, I don't consider myself very social on social media because my circle is small, and it's just pretty much people I know. I know a lot of people that they add people they don't know on Facebook, but I don't, because I do know that it's more personal to me, so I'm not going to be adding people that I don't know.

Since the majority of Study 2 participants who use Facebook described their overall behavior on the platform as related to relational maintenance of known others, it appears that Facebook users have not particularly engaged in extensive identity work using built-in platform features. For example, James, who is 36 and a Caucasian/White American, said: "I don't have a bio written. I just have my job, where I live, and where I'm from. That's the only thing I have in my little intro thing." Some participants, however, do utilize Facebook as an avenue for self-expression. For 33-year-old Amal, who is a Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern parentage, Facebook is her platform of choice for self-expression because it facilitates visual and textual content-sharing:

> I think that it's more conducive to the way I express myself. Instagram is very visual, and I don't like taking a lot of pictures of myself and posting pictures of myself. I'm not always Instagram ready, and all these people with their—It's very visual and I'm just like, "My house is a mess. I don't have any chance at the court. My son's sprayed all of

cooking oil over the house last week." I'm just not there. I'm not a size zero and whatever. That's just why. I use it honestly mostly for business, like what I'm doing if I'm at court or something. If I want to express my thoughts, Instagram just doesn't work just because of the nature of the platform. LinkedIn is just very professional; people don't talk about their personal views or their personal lives too much. It's mostly business. I can say that if you want to talk about political stuff, I don't think LinkedIn is the right platform. That's why Facebook, I would say, it's a good mix of pictures and words.

Amal's explanation above further suggests that she is not only intentional with how she engages social media platforms, she is also aware of certain platform features and affordances and would segment and organize her content-sharing, accordingly.

In addition to inquiring about Study 2 participants' individual platform engagement for identity work, I have also asked them to share some of their concerns and reservations about using social media in general and also about their use of specific platforms they frequently use or prefer. As mentioned earlier in the section, the stories Study 2 participants shared regarding some of the concerns and worries they have suggested that there is a considerable overlap between Muslim social media users and the broader North American adult population of social media users. Five broad themes of concerns emerged following the interview analyses: excessive social media use, data privacy, data mining, surveillance, and anti-Muslim hate speech and Islamophobic rhetoric. Perhaps related to the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, the majority of Muslim social media users interviewed for Study 2 reported excessive social media use as being a top concern about social media overall, and this is a concern that is shared by participants across sociodemographic factors and platforms of use. For example, James, a 36-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim American, mentioned several concerns he had about social media use, ranging from it being a waste of time to the amplification of hateful rhetoric:

I have a couple of concerns. One is, the amount of time that we can easily waste on it. It's so easy to, like I say, you start scrolling through the newsfeed and then next thing you know, you've read like 200 posts whatever and you haven't really actually done anything. It can be easy way to waste time, which is not a good thing, especially from Islam perspective, we don't want to be wasting our time. Also, how it's so easy for voices to be amplified that, unqualified, hateful voices so forth, to be—have a platform. Everyone has a platform on social media, which is good and bad. There are people who

need to be heard and they are heard, but then there are people who really shouldn't be heard by anyone, but they're heard as well.

Another participant who reported excessive social media use as a concern while using Facebook is 25-year-old Ousmane, who is a Muslim American man of West African background. Ousmane further explained that upon realizing how much time he had wasted; he eventually deactivated his Facebook account:

> I don't know, hours just talking to people, discussions that never end, just hours. I couldn't get anything done I was like, "What's going on? What have I done?" Let's say it's a Sunday, I go play soccer in the morning, I come back it's 11:00. Probably I stay over there until 9:00-10:00 just talking to people. Random stuff, wasting time. I was like, "Okay that's it, I'm done."

In addition to limiting one's actual use of the platform, Study 2 participants have also shared other strategies aimed at getting a better use of their time. For example, another Facebook user, Hajar, who is a 22-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background, reported that she would only log on following certain notifications and has curated her newsfeed such that she is able to briefly scan for updates and not end up spending too much time on the platform, which used to be a problem for her before:

> I don't look through my newsfeed at all, which is very funny. I only look at my notifications. If I will look at my newsfeed, I probably spend literally like five minutes, maybe less than that. There are hundreds of posts that I'm not looking at that my friends are posting every day. I do that because I don't want to stumble back in that path of spending 5 hours a day on Facebook when I could just be spending less than two hours a day and really focusing on the groups that I'm part of and posting content that's going to be helpful for people or answering questions that people need help with. I find it really sad and unfortunate right now how social media is really consuming our day-to-day lives and it's really an addiction right now.

The concerns that participants, such as James, Ousmane, and Hajar, have expressed above about social media being a time-waster is also shared by users of other platforms. For example, Sahar, a 35-year-old teacher of Arab/Middle Eastern background who lives in the Midwest and frequently uses Snapchat, suggested that excessive platform use may also expose oneself to harmful ideas:

I think it's wasting my time in useless stuff and having ideas, polluted ideas, because the more you expose yourself to polluted ideas until it becomes normal, it does affect you. I think it does affect you. I had a conversation with one of my students last week, two weeks ago, I think, the kind of music he was listening to, first, it was inappropriate school music, it was offensive to women, it has drugs. And he said, "I'm just wasting time." I said, "No, it will influence. It will subconsciously, things that used to trigger you, 'Oh my God, no,' it would become just normal in your brain and you will accept it." And that's a fear. I don't know if you get what I'm saying. That's a fear. If I expose myself to polluted ideas that I used to resist it, I would say, "Okay, it's normal now." I don't want that to happen. […] What I'm afraid sometimes is that time passes by and it was useless because some of my cousins, they're just dancing, and they're just putting on makeup, and I watch it and don't realize how much time I wasted watching them dancing and putting makeup.

Masud, a 28-year-old Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim American who uses Instagram, further lamented about how unproductive social media use can be, especially when compared to the amount of activity and meaningful interactions one could have offline:

Concerns—I'm not getting the best use of my time. I know for a fact if I read a book or if I had the same number of meaningful relationship face-to-face with people with certain friends or these people I'm following, they were around and we're having a face-to-face meaningful conversation will be a lot beneficial.

Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian Muslim American man who is an avid Twitter user, chimed in to add his own concern about social media use being time-wasting:

I think number one I apparently use it way too often. [laughs] I spend too much time on it. I thought I had only spent like an hour a day but that's fine but apparently, it's like a little bit more than two; well, that's not great. I think you can get lost in it and I guess, yes, you'll just get lost in it and it's a time sink for sure. Unless I find way better ways to manage or use your time.

Fiaz, a 24-year-old South Asian Muslim American man who is another avid Twitter user, similarly added that in addition to the ease of losing track of time when using the platform, he is also concerned about getting involved in issues that are of little concern to him otherwise:

Generally being a time waste. Generally, getting myself involved in issues that have nothing to do with me, that have nothing to do with where I am in life right now. It's easy to get wrapped into a bunch of things which seem like this is the end of the world. In the end, when I look at it, I'm confident that my family's fine, everything's going well. This may be a big concern for a lot of people in a lot of different life situations, but for me right now where I am. I'm fine and there's not really any benefit from me engaging in it.

Fiaz further suggested that the nature of particular platforms, such as Twitter, which is designed

to maximize user engagement, may lead unassuming users down the time-wasting rabbit hole:

> It's very confusing because you'll come in with genuine things which you seek to get answered or things that you really want to engage in, but you'll end up engaging in a lot more than what you thought you would. There's a lot of posts on Twitter which are basically just designed to outrage you, designed to get you angry, or designed to get some sort of reaction out of you to keep you engaged when you're better off just leaving the situation.

Related to the topic of excessive social media use, Study 2 participants have also

highlighted certain implications such usage has on users' interpersonal communication skills.

Alex, a 37-year-old Caucasian/White Muslim Canadian, said:

> Social media concerns—The fact that people are unable to socialize. Society and social media is pivotal in this regard and that is society's going down a very dark road, as far as I'm concerned, of not being able to maintain interpersonal relations with people on a personal level; in person rather than online, being able to have a conversation with somebody without them having to look at their phones.

Alex's concern above is also shared by 34-year-old Marisol, a Muslim American woman of

Hispanic-Latinx background. Marisol suggested that lack of social skills is especially

noticeable among social media users of certain demographics:

> I definitely see the lack of social skills and conflict resolution being a problem and I say that also just because of the work that I do. A lot of people, they do similar work in different areas. You can't work with people if you're blasting online about the people you're working with, but you expect to share a space with them on the ground and then you expect them to trust you. No, that's not how it works. I feel like social skills are definitely a huge problem with social media. Then I see a lot with the people in the mid to early 20's.

Meanwhile, Diego, a 37-year-old Muslim American man of Hispanic-Latinx background, had

shared his own struggles trying to navigate social media use:

> I've been trying to do this, and it's been kind of difficult that with using social media, I've found myself not really taking the time to just sit down and fully disconnect and be able to just sit down and read a book. It takes a little bit of effort and part of it maybe is attention, or part of it is there's still that pull, like if I don't check in, I could be missing out on something and I don't want that to happen. In some ways I feel like I'm losing my connection to the handling of an actual book, just being able to open it and read it and get lost in it instead of getting lost in technology.

Halima, a 37-year-old African American Muslim woman, who had recently deleted her Facebook account, further lamented how unhealthy excessive social media use has on society, where everyone is on social media. Following her social media hiatus, Halima reported feeling alienated from her friends while interacting offline:

> I've noticed a number of my friends don't really talk to me unless I talk to them because it's like almost out of sight out of mind. Like you're not online, so I don't really know you are a person anymore. That's a dangerous social shift. I mean, that's a cultural shift in our society. I don't know if you've detected that. But there are people who literally cannot associate unless you're in the loop about what's going on online. So, you're socially alienated from even your own friends that you might even see every day or talk to. But the only way that they talk to you is if you're texting them because they don't think about you because everybody's living online now.

In addition to excessive social media use being a concern Study 2 participants had about social media engagement, data privacy, data mining, and surveillance, are other themes that have emerged across the interviews. For example, Deonte, who is 21, African American, queer, and a racial justice activist, reported that surveillance is a particular issue of concern to them as a Twitter user:

> I definitely think surveillance is a really big concern that I have. Understanding how these conversations that we're having around certain idea they may be really cool, and they may be really important, and they may lead to new knowledge and everything, but we're not the only ones that are looking at these conversations. And these things have repercussions, especially being Muslim and being black, with that history of that and surveillance. I think that is something that definitely worries me. I think surveillance is also the biggest issue. We have Facebook coordinating with the government, we have Facebook coordinating with campaign efforts, we have that direct connection. And we have these companies selling off our data to whoever decides to pay them enough money. So, I think across all platforms, surveillance and just knowing where your information is and the ways in which data is used as a form of currency is definitely a big issue of mine.

Another user of Twitter, Selena, who is 33, Hispanic/Latinx, and lives in West Coast, has also similarly expressed her worries about surveillance:

> You wonder about surveillance. Not that that's something that's ever concerned me because I don't really feel I have anything to worry about. People can survey on me all they want, or you know, but I do think it's strange or weird. It's just weird to know if there is someone watching your account or what they're doing. Then I've heard of other stuff where it's like, yes, there are certain accounts on Facebook that were being used to lure extremists, people with extremist views and feeding into it and seeing where it

goes. I'm not fearful of that because I'm aware of who I am and what I believe in. At the end of the day, I think that I'm pretty capable of knowing what's right and wrong, but I don't know how I feel about that, I guess. I just think that it's weird and it's like-- I guess I would be concerned about who are the people that they're targeting.

Further, Banan, a 30-year-old Muslim American woman of Arab/Middle Eastern background who frequently uses Twitter, explained that a particular concern she has about overall social media use has been data privacy:

> I think just privacy. I mean, you hear reports of like, "Your posts are not private, and Facebook is storing them," and all of these things. I think, to me, that freaks me out. It's not one of those things where you have a ton of information to hide, but at the same time, it feels very invasive to think that somebody is storing photos of you or your children or things like that. So, I definitely really tried to limit what is on there, in general, because I think it would be weird that Facebook just has a vault of photos of myself or my children or our vacation.

Amal, who is 33, Arab/Middle Eastern, and uses Facebook as her preferred and most frequently-used platform, also reinforced data privacy as a pressing concern for her as a social media user:

> It will go back to privacy. I don't know what information Facebook is keeping about me. They could say there's all the consents in the world and then it's like impossible to-- At one point it was accessing my camera roll and saying, "Do you want to post these pictures?" I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Are you accessing my pictures?" That kind of thing. I think I stopped that because people were complaining about that. I don't see it anymore. Again, you don't know if your computer is listening to you because I know I've heard people talk about that.

> In addition to the issue of data privacy and breaches, Muhammad, a 35-year-old

Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim Canadian, has also mentioned data mining was a particular concern of his:

> It's mining and mapping my use of the Internet, to know what I need, or who I am, what I care about, and use that as material. Yeah, that's my biggest concern, and it makes me angry, actually. And I don't know what they do with that information, and I don't know what else is in store— I don't trust them.

Another participant, 28-year-old Masud, who is Arab/Middle Eastern, resides in the Midwest, and uses Instagram, has also expressed his concerns about data mining and targeted advertisements:

Sometimes, I question how much they know about me because of the relatable ads and the comments like people that they suggest I know. I just think it bothers me how much because it's technology. People are—It's technology, you know? It's nothing that alerts me. It's just they're able to know more about us than in the past.

Finally, Study 2 participants have also expressed their concern about the disinhibiting effect social media use can have on mediated interactions such that hateful rhetoric and online bullying have easily proliferated. Aliyah, a 40-year-old African American/Black Muslim woman, said that in addition to toxic online behavior being an issue of concern, the permanence of online contents and also context collapse are additional challenges that social media users have had to navigate:

> It can be a really nasty place. People are really nasty to one another because everyone's behind their clipboards, so things that you wouldn't necessarily say in someone's face, you feel the courage to say it behind a keyboard. There can be a lot of misinformation online also. I am really good about reporting people. If I see something that I think is offensive, I will report them. I do not hesitate. Maybe they need a break from social media. I would say that just how nasty people can be and the prevalence of misinformation. I think the more I saw people sharing things and then being negatively affected, whether or not it was deserved. You say the wrong thing; it's going to get forwarded and forwarded and forwarded and forwarded and your livelihood could be affected.

Speaking on the phenomenon of online hate speech from a perspective of an educator, another participant, Selena, who is a 33-year-old Hispanic-Latinx Muslim American, reported:

> The greatest concern. I think, again, I would go back to when social media is being used to share hateful rhetoric, I think that's a big concern for safety reasons. Also, children, I guess, not to be—but the vulnerability of children, because I understand that a lot of kids aren't carefully monitored or their online activity isn't carefully monitored and so— I understand that a lot of young kids or young adults even, do have a presence on these platforms and so—because I know that there are a lot of vile stuff out there, just concerned about minors and children now being in this space where they have access to that and what that could-—the possibly damaging effects it can have on them.

Similarly related to the above concerns on the impact that social media use can have on vulnerable demographics, Irfan, a 26-year-old South Asian Muslim American, also highlighted the damaging impact social media use may have on people's wellbeing. He further suggested that social media platforms have also contributed towards the polarization of society:

> I think that's mental health for a lot of people, that's a huge effect, like negative effect of social media. I would also say like the echo chamber effect were you just become more attuned and accustomed to certain views like change all those views and you can't—I think it puts people on polar opposites at that point especially in this country which is already like a—It's a two-party system. It's not parliamentary where you can have a variety of views. Theoretically, you're either left or right or you're being apathetic to the entire system.

The polarization of society and the proliferation of echo chambers is also a concern that Hakeem has. Hakeem, who is a 29-year-old Muslim American man of South Asian descent, and a self-described technologist, further explained how problematic echo chambers are, particularly in the age of mis- and disinformation:

> It's tough. I'm in tech, I love tech, I love technology. You want to hope and believe that users are smarter than they are. Now, you do have to wonder, can you still make the assumption that users of your platform know how to critically think and know how to critically differentiate what's real or what's actually authentic information from what's propaganda or what's trying to rile them up? I think that's one big, big thing with it. Also, I think on the other side of that is because it's very easy to find yourself in a group or find yourself surrounded by people who have similar ideas, are the echo chambers causing folks to not even want to see other opinions, see other perspectives. I think it's twofold, the rise of the echo chambers and the rise of not having to engage with thoughts that are difficult or conversations that are difficult, along with because this is becoming a source of truth for some of the people, can they trust that or should there be intervention and prevent that?

Summary of RQ7 Findings

The above discussion of Study 2 findings for RQ7 reveal the significant role of personality traits in influencing platform choice, engagement of specific platform features and affordances, specific self-relevant disclosures online, such as emotional self-disclosures, as well as particular concerns Muslim social media users have about platform-specific engagement and social media use overall. Taken together, Study 2 findings suggest that Muslim social media users are active and goal-oriented users as theories, such as UGT, would suggest (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Further, Study 2 participants appear to be aware of the technological properties specific to particular social media platforms and the action capabilities of such properties as they engage in identity work online (Schlenker, 2003; DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017). As the participant narratives

demonstrate above, overall and more focused uses of social media are communication behaviors that are influenced by individual difference factors, such as sociodemographic background, personality traits, and cultural identities (i.e., ethnoracial and religious).

Study 2 participants' sociodemographic background, such as age, as well as personality traits, appear to be influential in an individual's adoption of particular social media platforms. Extroverted participants and those demonstrating higher levels of openness to new experiences appear to prefer more visually-dominant platforms, such as Instagram, as well as microblogging platforms, such as Twitter. As the interviews suggest, as a textual-based platform where updates are presented in a linear progression of 280-character messages (i.e., tweets), in a reverse-chronological order, Twitter's focus on information sharing seem to cater to the needs of individuals requiring greater intellectual stimulations (Hughes et al., 2012). Further, participants who are more wary about privacy and self-disclosure overall, seem to prefer platforms offering customizable privacy settings, such as Facebook.

Further, while exploring possible reasons behind participants' hesitancy in engaging negative emotional self-disclosure, as Study 1 results suggested, I found that certain personality traits, such as introversion and conscientiousness, were equally—if not more influential—than users' ethnoracial and cultural backgrounds. With respect to Study 2 participants' demographics, the implications of a participant's ethnoracial background was relevant in the discussion of more focused uses of social media, such as positive- and negative emotional self-disclosure. Here, Study 2 findings provide further contextualization to prior findings from Study 1, which had found a significant difference in positive emotional self-disclosure of life events and emotions among Arab/Middle Eastern Muslim users of social media. The above narratives not only reaffirm particular patterns of usage associated with the belief in "the evil eye", participants' lived experiences have also unveiled a shared collective sentiment of refraining from positive emotional disclosures of life events across racial groups and ethnicities

within the sample. Regardless of ethnoracial background and platforms of choice, participants tend to avoid sharing positive life events and emotions citing reasons varying from "the evil eye" on one end, to concerns of appearing arrogant and boastful on the other end. Moreover, respondents have also indicated a much more nuanced experience with respect to emotional disclosures overall. Some have avoided disclosing too much details of an event, others have avoided engaging in disclosing information in a real-time manner. This emerging sense of a more nuanced praxis of emotional self-disclosure will have implications for existing research and future studies, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

The diverse narratives and lived experiences of Study 2 participants in using platform features and affordances for identity work above have also unveil the different manners in which participants perceive and also utilize specific features to express and communicate their identities to other users on the platform. Digital images, i.e., emojis, as well as specific platform features, such as "bios", Hashtags, Featured Photos and Story Highlights, as well as Alternative Names, have emerged as examples of artifacts for identity work that participants have at their disposal. My respondents have resorted to platform-specific affordances and features to express various aspects and coordinates of their identities, varying from their ethnoracial background, personality, to professional-, religious-, and gender identities and praxes.

Finally, my conversations with Study 2 participants have also reveal specific concerns they have with respect to social media use; more broadly, and platform-specific uses, more specifically. While participants have expressed concerns with hateful rhetoric and bullying that occur through social media platforms, participants have also indicated that the most pressing concern they have is related to the idea of excessive and addictive social media use. Other concerns that have surfaced reflect the apprehensions stated in prior work on social media with other audiences of users, such as data privacy, data mining and targeted advertising, and surveillance. It is also interesting to note here that participants' ethnoracial background, in

addition to personality traits, may be influential in shaping the perceived- and experienced levels of threat that online surveillance poses, such as for Muslim social media users of African American/Black background, as well as those involved in social- and racial justice activism. Taken together, the intersectional nature of identity appears to manifest in platform preferences, emotional self-disclosures, using platform features and affordances for identity work, and specific concerns related to social media- and particular platform uses. As the above narratives and discussions suggest, just as individual difference variables, such as sociodemographic background and personality traits, are influential factors in social media use, cultural variables, such as ethnoracial and religious identities, are also of particular significance.

Overall Study 2 Discussion/Implications

Aimed at further exploring the results of Study 1 and capturing the lived experiences of Muslim social media users in North America, Study 2's scholarly contributions are noteworthy for three reasons: (1) capturing individual identity- and hostility sensemaking narratives of North American Muslims (RQ5), (2) exploring social media's role in the above sensemaking processes and discovering the sociotechnical phenomenon of Muslim Social Media (RQ6), and (3) understanding how the intersectional nature of an individual's sense of self may manifest in specific identity work-related behaviors on social media platforms among Muslim social media users (RQ7). Below, I will discuss the aforementioned findings in light of the three "sensitizing" theoretical frameworks that were mentioned in the beginning of the chapter and reviewed previously, namely CTI (Hecht, 1993), CB5T (DeYoung, 2015), affordances framework (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017), as well as the notion of respectability politics (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Richardson, 2019; Wolcott, 2013)— the relevance of which had emerged in Study 1 and continues to be of relevance in Study 2.

The lived experiences and narratives of Study 2 participants with respect to RQ5 extends identity research from a communication perspective by reinforcing the notion that identity is not only complex, layered, and interpenetrative as CTI (Hecht, 1993) suggests, it is also a notion that is better understood as a dynamic process. Whether it be in reference to their personality traits or their cultural and religious identities, participants' identity sensemaking narratives reflect a "process of being or becoming". Most of my conversations with Study 2 participants have highlighted critical junctures indicating some degree of a change in terms of aspects of their personality. Hajar, for example, explained that while she was younger, she "did not want to be associated as having a hustler mentality, but I am embracing that right now because so many people have noticed that about me. They always tell me like, 'You have been hustling these past couples of years and you just go after what you want. You don't take a no. If you do take a no, you'll find another yes. If one door closes, you manage to find three other doors are open.' I embrace that now." Hajar added that accepting the "hustler mentality" ran parallel to her embracing her ethnoracial and cultural identity of being a second-generation immigrant woman of color carving a career in the technology industry.

Other participants have undergone a shift in how they see themselves, albeit in the opposite direction. For example, Alex, who claimed to have previously been fairly extroverted and heavily engaged in community work, had taken a step back from public engagement and had opted for a more reclusive life after becoming disenchanted with the level of corruption he said he had witnessed, including within religious circles:

> I mean, years back, I was a lot more active in the community, joined all sorts of things, think tanks, board of directors, all sorts of initiatives I was involved in. I really got disenchanted by it all, seeing a lot of the corruption that happens behind the scenes. […] Just seeing those things on a regular basis—it jades me. You get jaded by it.

The experience of Alex, a Muslim Canadian convert, highlights the lived experiences of other Muslim converts across North America, which Study 2 explored in depth. The challenges that Muslim converts experience during their transition into Islam, for example, are not shared by

individuals who were born into Muslim families. Throughout the process of converting, social media plays an influential role at various points, beginning from the processes of seeking information about Islam and local Muslim communities to the processes of "coming out" as Muslim to non-Muslim family members, friends, and colleagues—Muslim converts have resorted to using social network sites, such as Facebook, to broach the topic in various ways.

Within the Study 2 sample of participants, several individuals had not only indicated their status as Muslim converts, but also specified they were of Hispanic-Latinx background. This demographic feature is largely consistent with recent statistics. As Pew Research Center reported, the U.S. Muslim population is projected to grow much faster than other religious groups in the country, with one-in-five Muslim adults identify as having converted into Islam (Mohamed, 2018). Other studies (e.g., Eletreby, 2010) suggest that the conversion rate of individuals previously raised atheist, agnostic, or of a different faith who are now Muslims has steadily increased since 9/11. Further, according to a recent report produced by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2018), the Hispanic and Latinx population is the fastest growing group to embrace Islam in the country with a growth rate of close to 700% within the last decade.

While the post-9/11 and present sociopolitical and historical environment have been influential in shaping North America's Muslim population, these individual lived experiences provide us with an even-richer perspective on the dynamics of identity and identity work, particularly in one's experience with "being Muslim", "Muslimness", or the Muslim religious identity. Of particular note, Study 2 expands our understanding by increasing our sense of familiarity with the lived experiences of Muslim converts. Further, just as Study 2 participants have shared their stories of navigating through various contexts of experiencing—at minimum—a heightened sense of self-awareness, participants' narratives have also revealed their resilience in the face of perpetual cognitive dissonance and hostility. Study 2's

contribution in highlighting the micro experiences of human resilience and tales of hope is just as important as capturing the experiences of adversity we may not get to easily hear and often learn about.

Related to parsing out the experience of "being Muslim" in the North American context and social media use, Study 2 unveiled a curious sociotechnical communication phenomenon of Muslim Social Media, which refers to the Muslim-specific ways of adopting social media platforms, ranging from particular motivations of adoption and engagement, to specific types of targeted audiences, as well as particular types of circulated contents—all of which serves the utilitarian principle of "giving benefit" to oneself and one's social networks, a principle that is informed by Islamic spirituality. As a communication phenomenon, Muslim Social Media highlights how members of underrepresented and marginalized populations use social media as a way to seek understanding, explore, and make sense of their identity amidst a contentious sociopolitical and historical environment. Muslim Social Media can also be seen as a social support mechanism, where users deliberately seek out information perceived to be in support of their identity praxes and validating to their lived experiences of being Muslim in North America more generally.

Moreover, Muslim Social Media reflects how the notion of respectability identity work operates in internet-mediated contexts. Based on the conversations I had with Study 2 participants, it is curious to see how Muslim social media users engage in respectability identity work through social media platforms when interacting with both Muslim coreligionists, as well as non-Muslim others. The topics and types of contents that participants have reported as far as engagement, circulation, and avoidance go are reflective of the motivations and concerns individual Muslim social media users have with respect to their social networks. As the interviews suggested, respectability Muslim identity work can be seen to have manifested in participants' overall avoidance of certain topics related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and

LGBTQ issues, as well as their advocacy and support for broader social justice concerns and contemporary issues.

Study 2 participants are not only aware of who their audiences are on their respective social media platforms of choice, but they have also engaged in various examples of selective self-presentation and impression management behavior largely aimed at appeasing Muslim others while assuaging concerns and clarifying misunderstandings stemming from non-Muslim others. Similar to the "politics of respectability" of Black Baptist women of the Interwar period who had drawn influence from biblical teachings, Victorian ideology, the philosophy of racial self-help, and democratic ideals derived from the U.S. Constitution (Higginbotham, 1993; Richardson, 2019), Muslim social media users have similarly engaged in communication styles and the performance of identity emphasizing manners and morals derived from a combination of Islamic teachings and humanist beliefs. For example, while Selena reported that she uses Twitter to keep abreast of contemporary social and political issues in the U.S., and had come to the defense of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar whom she perceived as having been unjustly criticized and "villainized so badly", Selena also indicated that after converting, her interactions with her male friends; online and offline, have not been the same. This shift, in a way, can be attributed to Islamic norms governing gender relations:

> One thing that I do know is before being Muslim I had a lot of male friends. I would interact with them whether it's on social media and also on a personal level still, maybe go out with some friends. It's interesting because I feel like after I converted, […] my relationship with male "friends" started to change, because maybe before they would get away with telling me something that was maybe a little bit flirty, but it's like now because I'm to them conservative or I'm uncomfortable with that and I don't have that relationship with them where I'm responding in the same way, even if before it was just joking and stuff, I am not comfortable with that anymore. I noticed that my male friends started to distance themselves.

Taken together, Muslim Social Media is a form of respectability Muslim identity work, whereby those who partake in it do so as a way of simultaneously managing identity

hypervisibility and reclaiming humanity from repressive categories and negative stereotyping in a post-9/11 world (e.g., Shams, 2018).

Study 2 has also provided further insights into understanding how members of underrepresented and marginalized ethnoracial and cultural populations utilize social media platforms and specific affordances for identity work, such as emojis, hashtags, featured images, and pinned tweets. Participants' narratives have also revealed other platform features and affordances that users have resorted to using as part of expressing their identity and sharing contents that reflect certain values that they hold dear. For example, even though as a visually-dominant platform catering to younger subsets of the adult social media usership, Instagram has largely been seen more of an entertainment platform, my conversations with Study 2 participants who are avid Instagram users suggested that they have also used particular built-in features, such as InstaStory highlights, for identity work. Zaynab, for example, also explained how identity work for her goes beyond the act of sharing images on the platform, it can also take place through the act of image captioning:

> […] the captions are kind of what like drive the point home […] I'm a Muslim person and I use Muslim words in my captions "deal with it" kind of thing. So, a lot of my captions happen to be like, they have aspects of my personality in there, I guess, in terms of just who I am, where I come from, that kind of stuff."

Zaynab's use of image captioning appears to be in line with existing research on the matter. For example, in a study of Indonesian Muslim *hijabi* [translation: Muslim women who wear the headscarf] influencers on Instagram, Baulch and Pramiyanti (2018, p. 11) found image captioning to be a way for Muslim influencers to signal religiosity on the platform, presenting themselves as "pious subjects" thereby.

Finally, Study 2 extends personality and social media research through centering the lived experiences of Muslim social media users by exploring their self-concept narratives, their understanding and perception of what particular social media platform features and affordances offer, as well as exploring the ways in which they adopt particular platforms and affordances

for individual identity work. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the role of individual differences factors, such as personality traits and sociodemographic factors, like age, in influencing users' engagement and use of particular platforms is clear, as scholars, such as DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock (2017), have suggested. Nowhere is this more reflected than in the platform adoption patterns of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, within the Study 2 sample of social media users. Further, since the question of social media affordances is a matter of individual perception, exploring how individual social media users perceive and understand the action-capabilities of particular social media platforms and features using qualitative methods is timely and necessary. By exploring social media use among a population of users that is diverse both sociodemographically and culturally, Study 2 allows us to explore more closely user perspectives and how these perspectives influence impression management behavior—all in all answering scholarly calls, such as DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock's (2017).

In line with their findings (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017), the analyses of the interview transcripts suggest that Muslim social media users have also perceived—across platforms—variance on (1) self-related affordances, such as presentation flexibility, content persistence, and identity persistence, (2) other actors-related affordances, namely content association and feedback directness, and (3) audience-related affordances, such as audience transparency and visibility control. Additionally, the current study supports Shane-Simpson, Manago, Gaggi, and Gillespie-Lynch's (2018) findings suggesting that affordances, privacy concerns, gender, and age predict preferred social media site, while Facebook preference is associated with more privacy concerns and less self-disclosure. The current study also supports Phua, Jin, and Kim's (2017) research, suggesting that social media users' preferences for particular SNSs are driven by their concerns for social capital—bonding and bridging social capital behavior. Within Study 2 sample who prefer Facebook, for example, the narratives

underlined how it is the platform of choice for Muslim social media users who are more concerned about privacy, about maintaining social ties through social bonding, and are concerned about the act and repercussions of disclosing self-relevant information online. The popularity of Facebook as a platform for Millennials appears to have also been reflected among Study 2 participants, where the majority of Facebook's frequent users are those in their late 20s and older.

Meanwhile, users who are more extroverted and curious tend to opt for visual-sharing platforms, such as Instagram, while those who demonstrate higher needs for information and intellectual stimulation, as well as were more eager to establish interpersonal connections with likeminded others—bridging social capital in the process—tend to gravitate towards microblogging site Twitter. In conjunction with the aforementioned discussion on specific social media platform features and affordances for identity work, Devito, Birnholtz, and Hancock's (2017) taxonomy has proven useful in enhancing our understanding of users' praxes of social media for identity work.

Additional observations as pertaining to Muslim social media users' self-disclosure behavior online are worth further noting: "Context collapse" (Baym & boyd, 2012; Ellison & Vitak, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2011) and "the privacy paradox" (Barnes, 2006; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016) all appear to influence the way Muslim social media users engage social media for identity work. On Facebook, particularly, users appear to demonstrate more hesitation in disclosing self-relevant information (status updates) out of concern re: self-presentation and impression management. This manifests in the way users reported their use of the platform primarily for social bonding and relational maintenance purposes. Study 2 findings appear to reflect Lenhart's (2009) who found that 90% of social media and SNS users engage platforms to keep in touch with known others as a way of building social capital (Gonzales, 2017; Kang, 2000; Mesch, 2012). Thus, lurking behavior appears to be a curious communication strategy

in mediated contexts where managing impressions and identities becomes incredibly complex (Cunningham, 2013; Papacharissi, 2013).

Muslim social media users are aware of their audience invoked (Marwick & boyd, 2011). In the context of Muslim Social Media, for example, nowhere is this more evident than in the acts of advocating for and abstaining from certain issues and online discourses, as well as particular reluctance in disclosing personal or self-relevant information, specifically when the audience addressed (Marwick & boyd, 2011) is known or transparent (Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Vitak, 2012).

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY OF MUSLIM SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH (MSMR) FINDINGS, CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Overview of MSMR Findings

Muslim Social Media Research (MSMR), comprising Study 1 (quantitative) and Study 2 (qualitative), is among the first few sequential explanatory mixed methods studies that systematically explore the use of social media and social network sites (SNSs) for identity work among Muslim social media users in North America (U.S. and Canada). Through this two-phase study that was multidisciplinarily-informed by the cybernetic Big Five theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2015), Communication Theory of Identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993), an affordances framework (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017) and Black respectability politics (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Wolcott, 2013), I had sought to seek a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of social media adoption and engagement within a particular segment of America's underrepresented and marginalized populations. As a dissertation research project, MSMR explores the role of individual differences, such as sociodemographic background, personality traits, cultural- and religious identity, in influencing how individual members of North America's Muslim population adopt and engage social media platforms and SNSs as conduits for the creation, articulation, negotiation, performance, and management of [Muslim] identity in everyday communication behavior.

MSMR Study 1 investigates the associations between sociodemographic factors, personality traits, cultural identity variables, as well as general- and identity work-focused usage of social media and SNSs, among users who self-identify as Muslim and currently reside in the U.S. and Canada. Guided by four research questions and 10 hypotheses, and utilizing a 99-item survey inventory, the study was aimed at investigating social media use patterns across Muslims living in North America. A series of exploratory correlation analyses, simple linear regressions, and one-way ANOVAs were performed between key individual difference

variables, such as ethnoracial ingroup identification, age and gender, general uses of social media (SMUIS), as well as specific uses of social media related to identity work, such as self-presentation, impression management, and emotional self-disclosures. Study 1 results revealed that the sociodemographic factors of age and country of residence were associated with participants' adoption of particular social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Instagram) and the general uses of social media as measured by the Social Media Use Integration Scale (SMUIS; Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Johnson, 2013). Additionally, Study 1 found sex, as well as race and ethnicity, to be additional sociodemographic variables significantly related to the use of social media for emotional self-disclosures. Muslim social media users who are of Caucasian/White background were more likely to disclose self-relevant positive life events and emotions on social media than their Arab/Middle Eastern counterpart, while Muslim female participants were found least likely to engage social media for negative emotional disclosure when compared to their male counterparts. As far as the Big Five personality traits are concerned, Study 1 highlights the significance of the openness to new experiences trait in driving much of social media use within the Muslim sample particularly identity work-related social media use, such as self-presentation, impression management, and emotional self-disclosures. Neuroticism and agreeableness were additional traits found to be related to more focused uses of social media among Study 1 participants. Finally, as one of the first few (quantitative research) attempts at including cultural variables alongside sociodemographic and personality factors in social media research, the results of Study 1 were largely null with the exception of Muslim ingroup identification, which was measured by an adapted version of the Revised Multigroup Ethnic Identification Measure (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007). The largely null findings between two of the three operationalizations of cultural identity (RCI-10 and MEIM-E) and social media behavior further suggests that some aspects of Muslim social media users' behavior online are not particularly distinct when compared to the behavior of the

broader adult population of social media users in North America. Nevertheless, Study 1 results do suggest that Muslim ingroup identification is a significant predictor of social media use for impression management among Muslim social media users—a discovery that was later on explained by Study 2 findings. Together, the findings of Study 1 and Study 2 thus represent the notion of identity as reflecting the meanings of both "sameness" and "difference" (Brah, 1996).

Moreover, while Study 1 was necessary in uncovering baseline trends among Muslim social media users for comparison across users of other cultures and demographics, the stories that these patterns of numeric descriptions tell were found to be limited in explaining the overall processes of social media use and SNS engagement in identity work, particularly when taking into account the contentious nature of Muslim identity within the contemporary local and global sociopolitical climate of rising anti-Muslim hostility. As Study 1 demonstrated, the Muslim population in North America is a unique population that is sociodemographically and culturally diverse, the heterogeneity of which is reflected in the specific patterns of social media uses and motivations. At the same time, Study 1 results have also revealed certain aspects of social media behavior that resonated with the patterns of uses we see across the adult population of social media users more broadly, irrespective of individual differences factors, such as personality traits, sociodemographic background, and cultural identities. Moreover, the results of Study 1 had reinforced the need for further [qualitative] exploration of individual sensemaking processes, particularly with respect to one's self-concept/personality and one's understanding and praxes of ethnoracial identity and "being Muslim", and how all this interacts with one's engagement of social media and SNSs—a call that communication scholars, such as DeVito, Birnholtz, and Hancock (2017), have put out. Study 1 results provided much of the groundwork for Study 2, which was a qualitative research project employing in-depth semi-

structured interviews of self-selected Muslim users of social media and iterative qualitative analysis (Tracy, 2013).

Following the completion of Study 1, Study 2 was thus launched to not only help triangulate and expand our understanding of Study 1 results, but to also further explore the subjective experiences of individual users of social media, particularly when cultural variables, such as religious and ethnoracial identities, are involved. Guided by three broad research questions, Study 2 was aimed at probing individual sensemaking processes pertaining to identity, identity threat/hostility, and social media behavior. The lived experience narratives of Study 2 participants have not only further emphasized the heterogenous and complex nature of identity as an analytical concept, by unveiling unique praxes of "being Muslim" within the present political climate, participants' lived experiences that were shared with me have also underlined the relevance of the notion of respectability in reference to Muslim identity work in North America, especially in the post-9/11 environment. While previous research on Muslim identity has largely treated it as an exclusively religious identity, Study 2 findings suggest that it is a unique type of social identity due to its inherently intersectional nature. As the stories of Study 2 participants revealed, an individual Muslim's race, ethnicity, and gender were found to be important aspects of identity through which their lived experience of "being Muslim" manifest. The gendered and racialized nature of Muslim identity was found to be particularly salient within the context of identity threat, such as anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia— both of which were reported elsewhere as having steadily risen following the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and Donald Trump's election as U.S. President.

Finally, Study 2 findings suggest that the notion of respectability is embedded within the very concept of Muslim identity, which in turn affects how Muslim individuals engage in identity work in both internet-mediated settings and face-to-face contexts. Here, Study 2 unveiled unique sociotechnical communication phenomenon, namely *Muslim Social Media*

that pertains to specific Muslim-related ways of engaging social media platforms and SNSs. Muslim Social Media was found to vary depending on the particular intentions and motivations driving an individual's adoption of a platform to the types of audiences one engages to the types of contents and information that one creates and/or circulates through these platforms. Whether it be "Muslim Facebook", "Muslim Twitter", or "Muslim Instagram", Muslim users of social media were found to be particularly intentional in their behavior online—further lending support for UGT's psychosocial suppositions that people are largely goal-oriented and motivated users of media and technology (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Katz, 1959; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Papacharissi, 2008). As the subjective accounts of Study 2 participants demonstrate, Muslim social media users are largely cognizant of the differences that exist with respect to platform features/properties and affordances, specifically those relating to identity work (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017; Schlenker, 2003), and would engage each platform accordingly. Further, the findings of Study 2 have also revealed how individual members of the Muslim population in North America have resorted to Muslim Social Media as a way of increasing their understanding of Islam and exploring their praxes of "being Muslim", particularly in a sociopolitical environment where Muslims are not only underrepresented, but also often misrepresented and maligned in much of Western societies. These findings appear to lend further support to existing research examining the use of social media and SNSs as a strategy of coping with and managing identity-threatening situations that scholars, such as Schmalz, Colistra, and Evans (2015), have argued. Furthermore, as a digitally-mediated form of respectability politics (Harris, 2003; Higginbotham, 1993; Pitcan, Marwick, & boyd, 2018; Wolcott, 2013), the sociotechnical communication phenomenon of Muslim Social Media may represent not only a collective effort in mediated Muslim self-[re]presentation (Eckert et al., 2018), but also representing strong group identity-related online identity performance (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Cunningham, 2013; Donath,

1999; Hogan, 2010; McEwan, 2015; Rambaree, Knez, & Ma, 2017) paralleling other culturally-distinct phenomena of social media use, such as Black Twitter (Brock, 2012).

Contributions

Conceptual contributions. MSMR is aimed at exploring and parsing out several important concepts that are pertinent to the lived experiences of Muslim social media users, particularly their understanding and praxes of "Muslimness" or "being Muslim" and how this relates to their use of social media and SNSs as tools for identity expression. While Study 1 results had suggested that religious identity is an influential factor in Muslim social media users' internet-mediated impression management behavior, Study 2 provided us with further contextualization as to how and why "being Muslim" or "Muslimness" is a significant factor. One salient theme that emerged in Study 1 and Study 2 is the notion of *respectability identity work* and how it has emerged as an essential component of Muslim identity. Specifically, the lived experience narratives of Study 2 participants unveiled the sociotechnical and communication phenomenon of *Muslim Social Media*, which is one of the ways Muslim individuals engage in respectability identity work online. Additionally, we come to understand that Muslim Social Media is also a means for Muslim individuals to understand and contextualize rising anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia amidst broader contemporary events and global issues—further expounding on the notion of social media use as a coping mechanism for identity-threatening contexts (Doojse, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Schmalz, Colistra, & Evans, 2015). Moreover, the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media illustrates an important example of social media implications, particularly for social media users who are of underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. At a time when popular discourse surrounding social media use has been dominated with the idea of "problematic" screen time, MSMR demonstrates how potent and relevant a tool social media and SNSs are in providing a "third space" for individuals to explore and be reflexive of their identities (e.g., Pennington,

2015: 2018; Pennington, Bozdağ, & Odağ, 2018), as well as an alternative space for people to push back against damaging rhetoric and tropes (e.g., Eckert & Chadha, 2013), taking control of their humanity and agency in the process. As a process concept, Muslim Social Media allows its users to (1) cultivate self-awareness, (2) facilitate respectability Muslim identity work, and (3) contextualize rising anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia in North America by juxtaposing it with similar happenings in other parts of the world, such as the Christchurch mosque massacres. Moreover, Study 2 reinforces our understanding of the significance of the 9/11 terror attacks and its aftermath in affecting a Muslim individual's understanding and praxis of "Muslimness" in North America.

Methodological contributions. By utilizing both numeric descriptions and textual data, and harnessing the knowledge-generating potentials of integrating both types of data through a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, MSMR provides us with clearer and more complete insights into the phenomenon of social media use, specifically among members of underrepresented and marginalized populations. As this dissertation demonstrates, each phase of the data collection processes provides a unique type of information that would make better sense when the two data types are combined, integrated, and iteratively analyzed. For example, the results of Study 1, which had highlighted the influence of Muslim ingroup identification (MEIM-R) on impression management, were influential in the process of formulating specific probes for the Study 2 interview guide aimed at exploring participants' understanding and praxis of Muslim identity. The incredibly rich lived experience and self-reflexive narratives of Study 2 participants further reveal the intricate nature of Muslim identity as an analytical concept. Further, Study 2 interviews and analyses were able to provide us with a holistic and clearer understanding as to why and how "being Muslim" is an important factor influencing the social media behavior of Muslim users.

The results of Study 1 and Study 2 highlight the utility of an integrated mixed methods research design by harnessing the power of numeric and textual data in capturing the lived experiences and subjective recollections that further illuminate our understanding of human behavior more broadly. For example, in the context of ethnographic research and cultural studies, a mixed methods design allows us to develop a heightened sensitivity to cultural differences by: (1) capturing cultural variability and (2) illuminating the agent-structure nuances between an individual and their culture. MSMR demonstrates that individuals actually vary quite considerably with respect to the extent to which they subscribe to group-level beliefs, values, and practices. Moreover, individuals also differ within themselves in expressing, enacting, or applying their cultural beliefs, thus further demonstrating that people actually do actively engage with culture rather than being mere receptacles of it (Breugelmans, 2011; Schrauf, 2018). Whether it be conducting social media or personality research, future studies should continue to engage mixed methods design, particularly when investigating diverse populations and cultures, and complex social phenomena (Robinson, David, & Hill, 2015).

Theoretical contributions. The results and findings of MSMR Study 1 and Study 2—combined—reinforce the notion of identity as being something that is agentic, related to one's group affiliations, and carries sociopolitical implications (Wetherell, 2010). Identity can be seen as an agentic concept when we reflect on the psychosocial nature of Study 2 participants' self-concept narratives that are largely in support of McAdams and Pals' (2006) five-level analytical framework of personality. The results and findings of MSMR also lend further support for CTI (Hecht, 1993) in that this dissertation reinforces our understanding of identity as being shaped through communication, relationships, and communities. When prompted during the Study 2 interviews, the salience of particular identity coordinates (Cover, 2016) or layers/frames (Hecht, 1993) for each individual was clear. Identity can also be seen as agentic

when looking at its implications on social media behavior. Study 1, for example, enhances our understanding of the significance of sociodemographic and personality factors in people's adoption and engagement of social media and SNSs by expanding the population context of social media users to include an ethnoracially and culturally diverse sample that has largely been understudied in both identity and social media research. At a time when the communication discipline has been criticized for its lack of cultural and methodological diversity and inclusivity (e.g. Chakravartty, Kuo, Grubbs, & McIlwain, 2018), this dissertation research project is an important and timely contribution on both fronts. MSMR facilitates the process of carving out space so as to center the lived experiences of underrepresented and marginalized members of the population. Within the context of Muslim social media users specifically, the current sociopolitical climate in North America where anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia have steadily risen and hateful individuals have become increasingly audacious with their prejudice toward others, research investigating the experiences of Muslim individuals and the role technology plays in the identity and hostility sensemaking processes become an even more timely and necessary impetus.

Further, identity scholars, such as Erikson (1968) and McAdams (2010), have argued that people do seek a sense of coherence in contexts wherein their identities are threatened and have utilized social media as sensemaking tools (Doojse, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Schmalz, Colistra, & Evans, 2015). As the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media may suggest, Muslim social media users in North America appear to use social media and SNSs as a way of coping with the daily challenges and concerns, as well as to strategically manage their understanding of Islam and praxes of "being Muslim" amidst a sociopolitically-contentious environment in the aftermath of 9/11. Muslim social media users' engagement of social media for identity work further reflects Schlenker's (2003) research on self-presentation and impression management. CTI's (Hecht, 1993) notion of identity gap (Jung & Hecht, 2004) was also proven

useful in examining Muslim Social Media as a communication phenomenon. As Study 2 narratives suggest, Muslim social media users have engaged in the act of abstaining from certain topics online, e.g., LGBTQ issues and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as a way of managing the cognitive dissonance that may occur in their *personal-enacted* and *personal-communal* identity frames. While scholars have previously identified the *personal-enacted* and *personal-relational* gaps as being the most commonly occurring identity gaps (e.g., Drummond & Orbe, 2009; Nuru, 2014; Wadsworth et al., 2008), the *personal-enacted*, *personal-relational*, and *personal-communal* gaps were all common among the respondents in this study.

Finally, as reflected in the Study 2 narratives, Muslim social media users' lived experience of social media and SNS engagement for identity work further highlights not only their awareness of the technological properties (Schlenker, 2003) and identity work-related affordances of specific social media platforms (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017), but also that Muslim social media users are active and goal-oriented users of technology. Further, Muslim Social Media may also demonstrate a rather peculiar example of characteristic adaptations (McAdams, 2006) to technology and media use that is culture-specific (Fuchs, 2017; Uski & Lampinen, 2016).

Limitations

As with any scholarly and human endeavors, this dissertation has its limitations, which I will address per study—in the order that the studies were conducted. One of the major limitations of Study 1 is its reliance of self-report survey. While the anonymous questionnaire was largely designed to measure actual social media behavior instead of the propensity of engagement, participants may either over- or under-estimated their actual levels of participation. As such, caution is warranted in interpreting Study 1 results. Another potential issue is inherent to self-report surveys, namely social desirability biases. In addition to the challenges of behavior estimation and recall, the use of self-report data may increase the

likelihood of social desirability on intended effects. Future studies on social media use that incorporate self-report surveys may consider supplementing the collected data with behavioral or observational measures of social media use. This may include—but are not limited to—an automated collection of digital traces for a more accurate measure of frequency of use, as well as the collection of actual social media contents that may be computationally and linguistically analyzed. Additionally, following a quantitative, baseline exploration of social media use, researchers may wish to include a qualitative, in-depth exploration of social media behavior that would offer richer and more granular data for interpretation, as I have attempted with this dissertation.

Another major limitation is the nature of the sample included in this research. Since Study 1 explores the way social media is used among a particularly unique population, the generalization of these findings to other demographic and subpopulation groups may be difficult to establish. Study 1 participants identified as Muslim or belonging to the Islamic faith, who currently reside in the U.S. and Canada, with many reporting their diverse sociodemographic backgrounds. Further, there is a notable sex imbalance among Study 1 participants with female participants constituting approximately 70% of the sample. As a convenience sample, the demographics in Study 1 may not accurately reflect the larger population of Muslims living within North America. Despite these limitations, however, to the best of my knowledge, Study 1 findings are among the first few attempts at concurrently exploring the role of sociodemographic factors, personality traits, and culture in both generic and focused uses of social media platforms. Finally, the statistical analyses performed for Study 1 preclude us from making causal inferences. However, Study 1 fulfills the primary objectives set forth in its design, which is explorative as opposed to causal in nature. One of the ways of addressing the limitations of Study 1 is by expounding on Study 1 findings in greater detail by

exploring the lived experience of individual Muslim social media users through Study 2's in-depth semi-structured interviews.

As with any exploratory qualitative research, however, Study 2 is also limited as to the extent to which we can interpret and extrapolate the data. One major impediment to Study 2 is the scope and length of the analyses and write-up, which are bounded by logistical concerns, such as the need for me to keep this dissertation to a certain length. Considering the inherent multidimensional richness of qualitative data drawn from the lived experiences of study participants through semi-structured in-depth interviews, much of participants' narratives were undeniably abridged due to the inherent limitations of the written word and the two-dimensional dissertation format. Related and central to these limitations is perhaps my own role as a data collection tool and the inherently subjective nature of my own understanding and interpretations of participants' lived experiences. At best, readers should interpret Study 2 findings with caution. While the themes that emerge and were captured during this study were the results of careful and extensive analyses and that these findings can be considered representative of the lived experiences of individuals sampled for Study 2, readers should avoid extrapolating Study 2 findings to the broader population of North America's Muslims, particularly the broader population of Muslim users of social media. Further, similar to the sample-related limitations of Study 1, readers may also recall an imbalance pertaining to participants' country of residence. The number of Study 2 participants who were from the U.S. had outnumbered their Canadian counterpart by seven participants, which may skew Study 2 data findings. Additional scope restrictions may apply as pertaining to the social media platforms that were explored in Study 2. As much as I have tried to account for as wide a variety of social media platforms and experience of social media use and behavior, and as diverse a sociodemographic background and individual differences as possible, I am; again, constrained by the limited scope of this dissertation and accompanying logistical concerns,

including the time-sensitive nature in which this dissertation research needed to be completed and delivered.

Additionally, Study 2 findings are constrained by the nature of people's self-reported perception and recollection of events and behaviors, as well as social desirability bias. As such, while undoubtedly a rich account of subjective lived experiences, these narratives are also subjected to the inherent biases accompanying qualitative research designs and data collection methods. The absence of anonymity and distance between myself as a researcher and my study participants, for example, may be useful for certain disclosures, but not others. Further, the combination of methods, participants, and contexts all provide entry-points to the introduction of discrepancies and idiosyncrasies that some researchers may seek to avoid in contexts where they are more interested in establishing patterns of causality as an explanatory mechanism. Again, readers should take into account the nature of Study 2 and its underlying motivations, which is largely an exploratory research design and conducted with the primary aim of expounding on Study 1 results.

Future Research

Following Study 2's discovery of Muslim Social Media, additional qualitative and quantitative future research to further explore the phenomenon is imperative. As far as qualitative future work is concerned, Study 2 findings suggest a need for more extensive longitudinal ethnographic research that can be conducted both virtually and offline to further parse out Muslim Social Media as a sociotechnical and communication phenomenon. Considering how Study 2 participants' self-construals and their recollections of social media use reflect a considerable degree of fluidity, more in-depth investigation of within-subject social media use by tracking social media engagement as a process (with its ebbs and flows) may also be more useful in the future. While I had employed iterative qualitative analysis (Tracy, 2013) in analyzing Study 2 data, future research may need to employ grounded theory

(Strauss & Corbin, 1994) methodology, which would allow significantly more space for themes to organically emerge from the textual data for the purpose of theory building "from the ground up". Relatedly, future quantitative work may also be conducted following "big data" research design, namely utilizing data collection methods that would allow us to track actual patterns of Muslim social media users' platform use data. Social network analysis, for example, can be used to explore group-level social media behaviors, such as when exploring the social structures and linkages existing between major actors and influencers within Muslim Social Media. Future quantitative research would further allow for the generalization of study results across broader populations of Muslim social media users.

Conclusion

This dissertation research was conducted in order to explore some of the *substantial implications* of social media use (Cover, 2016) in relation to individual difference factors, such as sociodemographic, personality traits, and cultural identities, for a subpopulation of America's underrepresented and marginalized populations, namely those who identify as Muslim or belonging to the Islamic religion. Through a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, the results and findings of Muslim Social Media Research (MSMR) Study 1 and Study 2 provide further support for the trifecta of human behavior (Hogan & Bond, 2009) by illuminating how sociodemographic factors, personality traits, as well as culture and cultural identification, i.e., Muslim identity, influence individual adoption and engagement of social media platforms and SNSs for *identity work* or the creation, articulation, negotiation, performance, and management of identities.

While each of Study 1 (quantitative) and Study 2 (qualitative) data provide unique contributions to our understanding of social media behavior overall, the integration of both phases of this dissertation research provides us with a more holistic and complex snapshot of human behavior and how it intersects with the adoption and engagement of social media

platforms and SNSs in the everyday communication repertoire of Muslim social media users. Against the backdrop of a contentious sociopolitical (and historical) landscape with respect to "being Muslim" in North America, MSMR revealed an interesting sociotechnical communication phenomenon of Muslim Social Media—a distinctly Muslim way of adopting and engaging social media platforms and SNSs in everyday communication. Study 1 results indicated the influential role of Muslim identity in impression management online; and the lived experience or idiographic narratives of Study 2 participants further expounded on the notion of respectability identity work, along with its association with participants' understanding and praxes of "being Muslim", and its manifestation in internet-mediated contexts through the phenomenon of Muslim Social Media. Taken together, we have come to understand the pivotal role that social media use holds for members of underrepresented and marginalized populations to understand and communicate aspects of their identity. As evident in this specific case study of a sample of North American Muslims, social media and SNSs have emerged as important conduits for users' identity explorations and expressions, as well as an essential means for hostility sensemaking.

APPENDIX A
STUDY 1 SURVEY: SOCIAL MEDIA USE [QUALTRICS]

Q1 Are you 18 years of age or older?
Yes
No

> Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No

Q2 Do you identify as being Muslim or belonging to the Islamic faith?
Yes
No

> Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify as being Muslim = No

Q3 Are you:
A Revert/Convert to Islam. If so, approximately how many years have you been Muslim?
Born into a Muslim family.
Other: [Please Specify] _____

> Display If Do you identify as being Muslim = Yes

Q4 Do you identify as currently residing/working/studying in America?
Yes
No

> Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify as being American? = No

Q5 Do you currently maintain an active account on any of the social media sites or apps, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Snapchat?

Yes
No

> Skip To: End of Survey If social media site activity = No

Q6 What forms of social media sites do you use online or on your cellphone? Please check ALL that apply.

Twitter
Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn
Snapchat
Other — Please specify.

Q7 This question requires you to think about each platform individually. Please indicate how much you use each one.

	Weekly or less	Few times a week	Daily	A few times a day	Hourly	Multiple times an hour

Twitter
Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn
Snapchat
Other — Please specify.

Q8 Now, we would like you to identify which social media site *you use most frequently*. The social media site I use most frequently is: _____

Twitter
Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn
Snapchat
Other — Please specify.

Q9 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform.

In the past week, approximately how much time per day have you spent actively using (platform)?

0 – 14 minutes
15 – 29 minutes
30 – 44 minutes
45 – 59 minutes
60 minutes or more

Q10 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform.

About how many total friends/followers do you have?

100 or less
101 - 200
201- 300

301 - 500
501 – 1,000

Q11 Considering the social media site *you use most frequently*, please estimate how often you perform the following activities:

	Weekly or less	Few times a week	Daily	A few times a day	Hourly	Multiple times an hour
Post to (platform)						
Send a message through (platform)						
Read other people's posts or profiles on (platform)						
Receive a message through (platform)						
Edit something you've posted on (platform)						
Delete something you've posted on (platform)						
Comment on a (platform) post						

Q12 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as one of your frequently-used social media platforms. Please respond to the following questions as accurately as possible.

I feel disconnected from friends when I have not logged into (platform)
I would like it if everyone used (platform) to communicate
I would be disappointed if I could not use (platform) at all
I get upset when I can't log on to (platform)
I prefer to communicate with others mainly through (platform)
(platform) plays an important role in my social relationships
I enjoy checking my (platform) account
I don't like to use (platform) (*r*)
Using (platform) is part of my everyday routine
I respond to content that others share using (platform)

Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (platform)

Q13 Regarding your use of (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

I am able to express who I really am (i.e., my views, beliefs, opinions, interests, etc.) on (platform)
My activity on (platform) is an accurate representation of who I really am.
Overall, my presence on (platform) is an extension of my offline self.

Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (platform)

Q14 Regarding your use of (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

I am concerned about the way I present myself.
I am concerned about conveying a desirable impression.
I am concerned about how other people think of me.

Q15 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform. In the following section, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statements.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Information sharing
(Choi, 2016; Park & Lee, 2014; Smock et al., 2011; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform) to…
        ... share information about myself (i.e., my views, opinions, beliefs, interests)
... share information that could be relevant and useful for others
… share information on what I find interesting
... inform as many friends as possible at once about changes in my life (i.e. relationship status, change of residence).

Information seeking
(Choi, 2016; Park & Lee, 2014; Smock et al., 2011; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform) to…
… inform myself about certain topics.
… receive advices and recommendations.
… learn about information at first hand.
… encounter arguments to different views.

Relaxation
(Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Lin, 1993; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Scherer & Schlütz, 2004; Smock et al., 2011; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform) because…
... because I want to take a break.
… because it makes me ease off.
… because it relaxes me.
… because it helps me to forget my problems.

Entertainment
(Choi, 2016; Lin, 1993; Park & Lee, 2014; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Scherer & Schlütz, 2002, 2004; Smock et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform) because…
... it is entertaining.
... it is fun.
... it is exciting.
... I enjoy the games and other apps.

Pastime
(Choi, 2016; Lin, 1993; Park & Lee, 2014; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Scherer & Schlütz, 2002, 2004; Smock et al., 2011; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform)…
... to kill time.
... because I am bored.
... to have something to do.
... to occupy myself.

Self-expression/self-presentation
(Choi, 2016; Park & Lee, 2014; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Smock et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013):

I use (platform) to …
        … to express who I am.
… to share my views, opinions and moral concepts.
… to inform others about my interests.

Escapism
(Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Scherer & Schlütz, 2002; Smock et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013):

I use (platform) …

    … to escape from everyday life.
… to get away from other things.
… to get away from my responsibilities.

Social surveillance
(Choi, 2016; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Scherer & Schlütz, 2004; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform)…
… to learn more about others.
… to look at photos, videos or status updates of my friends.
… to compare myself to others.
… to stay up-to-date.

Communication
(Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform)…
… to communicate with more than one person at the same time in groups or chats.
… to exchange with my friends and my family.
… to contact persons with whom I haven't been directly involved yet.

Social interaction
(Park & Lee, 2014; Smock et al., 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013; Yoo, 2011):

I use (platform) to …

    ... to get to know like-minded people.
… to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances who live nearby.
… to keep in touch with friends and acquaintances even if they live far away.
… to re-establish contact with old acquaintances.

Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (platform)

Q16 Previously, you've indicated ${q://QID16/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} as your frequently-used social media site. Please answer the following questions on a scale of 1 (not at all willing to post) to 5 (totally willing to post).

How willing are you to update your ${q://QID16/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} status when you are feeling …

	Not at all willing	Somewhat willing	Neither willing nor unwilling	Somewhat willing	Totally willing

…happy?
…cheerful?
…joyous?
…delighted?
…jealous?
…possessive?
…envious?
…suspicious?
…calm?
…quiet?
…serene?
…tranquil?
…anxious?
…troubled?
…worried?
…uneasy?

Q17a Previously, you've indicated Facebook as your frequently-used social media site. What is your *most preferred function/feature* on Facebook?

Status Updates
Comments
Wall posts
Groups
Instant messenger
Marketplace
Other — Please specify.

Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (Facebook)

Q17b Previously, you've indicated Twitter as your frequently-used social media site. What is your *most preferred function/feature* on Twitter?

Tweets
Retweets
Direct Messages
#Hashtags
Other — Please specify.
Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (Twitter)

Q17c Previously, you've indicated Instagram as your frequently-used social media site. What is your *most preferred function/feature* on Instagram?

Photos
Stories
Direct Messages
Global feed
Other — Please specify.
Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (Instagram)

Q18 In the previous question, you've indicated your most preferred function/feature on ${q://QID16/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}. In the following text box, please explain why **it is your most preferred function/feature to use on the ${q://QID16/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}.**

Display If Now, we would like you to identify which social media site you use most frequently. The social media site I use most frequently is (platform)

APPENDIX B
BFI-44 [QUALTRICS]

The Big Five Inventory (BFI)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who likes to spend time with others? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

Disagree strongly 1	Disagree a little 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree a little 4	Agree Strongly 5

I see Myself as Someone Who...

____1. Is talkative

____2. Tends to find fault with others

____3. Does a thorough job

____4. Is depressed, blue

____5. Is original, comes up with new ideas

____6. Is reserved

____7. Is helpful and unselfish with others

____8. Can be somewhat careless

____9. Is relaxed, handles stress well

____10. Is curious about many different things

____11. Is full of energy

____12. Starts quarrels with others

____13. Is a reliable worker

____14. Can be tense

____15. Is ingenious, a deep thinker

____16. Generates a lot of enthusiasm

____17. Has a forgiving nature

____18. Tends to be disorganized

____19. Worries a lot

____20. Has an active imagination

____21. Tends to be quiet

____22. Is generally trusting

____23. Tends to be lazy

____24. Is emotionally stable, not easily upset

____25. Is inventive

____26. Has an assertive personality

____27. Can be cold and aloof

____28. Perseveres until the task is finished

____29. Can be moody

____30. Values artistic, aesthetic experiences

____31. Is sometimes shy, inhibited

____32. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone

____33. Does things efficiently

____34. Remains calm in tense situations

____35. Prefers work that is routine

____36. Is outgoing, sociable

____37. Is sometimes rude to others

____38. Makes plans and follows through with them

____39. Gets nervous easily

____40. Likes to reflect, play with ideas

____41. Has few artistic interests

____42. Likes to cooperate with others

____43. Is easily distracted

____44. Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

APPENDIX C
MULTI-ETHNIC IDENTITY MEASURE - REVISED (MEIM-R) [QUALTRICS]

In the United States, people come from many different cultures and religions. Some examples of religious cultural groups are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and many others.

The following questions are about the Muslim cultural group, and how you feel about it or react to it. Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. I have spent time trying to find out more about the Muslim group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim group.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I understand pretty well what my Muslim cultural group membership means to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have often done things that will help me understand my Muslim background better	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my Muslim group.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel a strong attachment towards my Muslim group.	1	2	3	4	5

Similarly, in North America, many Muslims originate and identify with many different ethnicities and races. Some examples of ethnic/racial groups are African American, Arab, Caucasian, South Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian.

The following questions are about your ethnic and racial identity, and how you feel about it or react to it. Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic/racial identity, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I have a strong sense of belonging in my ethnic/racial group.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I understand pretty well what my ethnic/racial membership means to me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have often done things that will help me understand my ethnic/racial background better.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I have often talked to other people in order to learn more about my ethnic/racial identity.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel a strong attachment towards my ethnic/racial identity.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX D
RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT INVENTORY-10 (RCI-10) [QUALTRICS]

Instructions: Please read each of the following statements and choose the response that best describes how true each statement is for you.

	Not at all true of me	Somewhat true of me	Moderately true of me	Mostly true of me	Totally true of me
I often watch, listen to, or read informative material about my religion (e.g., via TV, radio, books, magazines, social media, or the internet).					
I make financial contributions to religious organizations (e.g., zakat, sadaqah).					
I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.					
Islam is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.					
My Islamic beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life.					
I enjoy spending time with others who are Muslim.					
Islamic beliefs influence all my dealings in life.					
It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and reflection (e.g., voluntary salah [prayer], du'a [supplication], tilawah [recitation of the Quran], dhikr [litanies], or fikr [contemplation]).					
I enjoy working on activities of a religious nature (e.g., lectures and talks related to religion, events at the mosque, Ramadan-related activities, preparing for Eid).					

I keep well informed about the activities of my local religious group (e.g., social events, lectures, funerals) and have some influence in the group's decisions.

APPENDIX E
STUDY 1 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY [QUALTRICS]

Q1 Where do you live?
Urban
Suburban
Rural

Q2 In terms of biological sex, which of the following do you identify with?
Female
Male
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q3 How old are you? (in years) age groups

[text entry]

Q4 Approximately, what is your yearly combined _household_ income (before taxes)?
Less than $25,000
$25,000 - $49,999
$50,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $99,999
Over $100,000

Q5 Below you will see many categories of race and ethnicity. Please review them carefully as you indicate your ethnicity/race you identify with (Check all that apply.)

Caribbean
Afghan
Turkish
Persian
Black or African American
Arab or Middle Eastern (e.g., Yemeni, Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi)
Hispanic or Latinx
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)
White/Caucasian/European
South Asian (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)
Southeast Asian (e.g., Malay, Indonesian, Thai, Burmese)
Multiethnic/multiracial (please specify in the text box)
Other (please specify in the text box)

_____

Q6 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

High school or less
Some college
Post-Baccalaureate

Q7 What is your current employment status?

Employed Full Time
Employed Part Time
Unemployed
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q8 What is your marital status?

Single
Married
Divorced
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q9 I hope to conduct more research on social media use among Muslims in America in the near future. Would you be willing to participate in an interview about your experience?

Each participant who completes an interview will receive a participation incentive in the form of a $50 gift card. If you are interested, *please provide your name and email address or phone number below.* Your contact information will *only* be used to contact you about future research and will not be shared with anyone.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q10 Do you have any further comments you'd like to make about the survey or your experiences? If so, please use the space below.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX F
STUDY 2 RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX G
STUDY 2 PARTICIPANT TABLE

ID	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race & Ethnicity	Residence	Muslim Identity	Preferred Platform
P1	Amal	33	Woman	Arab (Palestinian)	USA	Born Muslim	Facebook
P2	Diego	37	Man	Hispanic/Latino (Mexican)	USA	Convert	Twitter
P3	Muhammad	35	Man	Arab (Tunisian)	Canada	Born Muslim	Facebook
P4	Aliyah	40	Woman	African American	USA	Born Muslim	Twitter
P5	Sahar	35	Woman	Arab (Saudi)	USA	Born Muslim	Snapchat
P6	Hayat	23	Woman	Arab (Saudi)	USA	Muslim	Instagram
P7	Sumaya	24	Transgender	Caucasian/White	USA	Convert	Facebook
P8	Maryam	52	Woman	Caucasian/White	Canada	Convert	Facebook
P9	Shahnaz	40	Woman	South Asian (Pakistani)	Canada	Born Muslim	Facebook
P10	Amani	18	Woman	Arab (Jordanian)	USA	Muslim	Twitter
P11	Deonte	21	Queer	African American/Black	USA	Convert	Twitter
P12	Asad	40	Man	South Asian (Indian)	Canada	Born Muslim	Facebook
P13	Alex	37	Man	Caucasian/White	Canada	Convert	Facebook
P14	Hajar	22	Woman	Arab (North African)	USA	Born Muslim	Facebook
P15	Selena	33	Woman	Hispanic/Latina (Mexican)	USA	Convert	Twitter
P17	Irfan	26	Man	South Asian (Indian)	USA	Born Muslim	Twitter
P18	James	36	Man	Caucasian/White	USA	Convert	Facebook
P19	Zahra	24	Woman	South Asian (Persian)	USA	Born Muslim	Instagram
P21	Parisa	37	Woman	South Asian (Persian)	Canada	Born Muslim	Facebook
P22	Fiaz	24	Man	South Asian (Indian)	USA	Born Muslim	Twitter
P23	Hakeem	29	Man	South Asian (Pakistani)	USA	Born Muslim	Facebook
P24	Rasheed	39	Man	African American/Black	Canada	Convert	Facebook
P25	Ousmane	25	Man	West African	USA	Born Muslim	Twitter
P26	Mary	34	Woman	Caucasian/White	USA	Convert	Facebook
P27	Masud	28	Man	Arab (North African)	USA	Born Muslim	Instagram
P28	Zaynab	18	Woman	Arab (Iraqi)	Canada	Muslim	Instagram

P29	Halima	37	Woman	African American/Black	USA	Born Muslim	Facebook
P30	Banan	30	Woman	Arab (Palestinian)	USA	Born Muslim	Twitter
P31	Marisol	34	Woman	Hispanic/Latina (Mexican)	USA	Born Muslim	Facebook

APPENDIX H
STUDY 2 INTAKE: SOCIAL MEDIA USE SURVEY[QUALTRICS]

Q1 Are you 18 years of age or older?
Yes
No

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No

Q2 Do you identify as being Muslim or belonging to the Islamic faith?
Yes
No

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify as being Muslim = No

Q3 Are you:
A Revert/Convert to Islam. If so, approximately how many years have you been Muslim?
Born into a Muslim family
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Display If Do you identify as being Muslim = Yes

Q4 Do you identify as currently residing/working/studying in America?
Yes
No

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you identify as being American? = No

Q5 Do you currently maintain an active account on any of the social media sites or apps, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Snapchat?

Yes
No

Skip To: End of Survey If social media site activity = No

Q6 What forms of social media sites do you use online or on your cellphone? Please check ALL that apply.

Twitter
Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn
Snapchat
Other — Please specify.

Q7 This question requires you to think about each platform individually. Please indicate how much you use each one.

	Weekly or less	Few times a week	Daily	A few times a day	Hourly	Multiple times an hour
Twitter						
Instagram						
Facebook						
LinkedIn						
Snapchat						
Other — Please specify.						

Q8 Now, we would like you to identify which social media site *you use most frequently*. The social media site I use most frequently is: _____

Twitter
Instagram
Facebook
LinkedIn
Snapchat
Other — Please specify.

Q9 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform.

In the past week, approximately how much time per day have you spent actively using (platform)?

0 – 14 minutes
15 – 29 minutes
30 – 44 minutes
45 – 59 minutes
60 minutes or more

Q10 Previously, you've indicated (platform) as your frequently-used social media platform.

About how many total friends/followers do you have?

100 or less
101 - 200
201- 300

301 - 500
501 – 1,000

Q11 Considering the social media site *you use most frequently*, please estimate how often you perform the following activities:

	Weekly or less	Few times a week	Daily	A few times a day	Hourly	Multiple times an hour

Post to (platform)
Send a message through (platform)
Read other people's posts or profiles on (platform)
Receive a message through (platform)
Edit something you've posted on (platform)
Delete something you've posted on (platform)
Comment on a (platform) post

Sociodemographic Survey — Qualtrics

Q1 Where do you live?
Urban
Suburban
Rural

Q2 In terms of gender, which of the following do you identify with?
Woman
Man
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q3 How old are you? (in years) age groups

[text entry]

Q4 Approximately, what is your yearly combined _household_ income (before taxes)?
Less than $25,000
$25,000 - $49,999
$50,000 - $74,999
$75,000 - $99,999
Over $100,000

Q5 Below you will see many categories of race and ethnicity. Please review them carefully as you indicate your ethnicity/race you identify with (Check all that apply.)

Caribbean
Afghan
Turkish
Persian
Black or African American
Arab or Middle Eastern (e.g., Yemeni, Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi)
Hispanic or Latinx
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)
White/Caucasian/European
South Asian (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)
Southeast Asian (e.g., Malay, Indonesian, Thai, Burmese)
Multiethnic/multiracial (please specify in the text box)
Other (please specify in the text box)

_____

Q6 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

High school or less
Some college
Post-Baccalaureate

Q7 What is your current employment status?

Employed Full Time
Employed Part Time
Unemployed
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q8 What is your marital status?

Single
Married
Divorced
Other: [Please Specify] _____

Q9 I hope to conduct more research on social media use among Muslims in America in the near future.

If you are interested, *please provide your name, email address, and phone number by answering the question below*. Your contact information will *only* be used to contact you about future research. It will not be shared with anyone.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview about your experience?

[embedded link leading to separate data collection window]

APPENDIX I
STUDY 2 INTERVIEW GUIDE
[*After IRB Information sheet and oral consent are obtained*]

[Before beginning: Before the interview, go over consent form and explain that if participants consent, you will ask them to log on to their social media account used most frequently and share their most recent activities with you.]

Self- and Cultural Identity

***To begin the interview*:**

To begin, I would like to get to know you better. Imagine that you are composing a short blurb about who you are. How would you describe yourself as a person?

PROBES:

What makes you the unique individual that you are?

To tap identity content:

[This question may take some time for you to think over, so feel free to take as much time as you need…]

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were particularly cognizant or aware of the qualities/aspects that make you who you are?

Can you describe to me the context of that realization?

PROBES:

What was the issue, event, or interaction?
Where did this take place?
Who were the actors involved?
Was it a positive or a negative experience?

What about recently? Say within the past 2-3 years or so—have you ever encountered an interaction or a space where you felt uniquely you?

Or an event where you felt different?

PROBES:

What was the context?
What prompted that episode?
How frequent does this happen?

***To tap identity coordinates*:**

What would you say are the most important aspect(s) of your identity?

PROBES:
What aspects of yourself that you would want me or anyone else to identify you with?
[If being Muslim surfaces] *How would you describe yourself as a Muslim? What are the defining characteristics that make you one?*
[If race and ethnicity surfaces] *How would you describe yourself as a member of the race/ethnic group? What are the defining characteristics that make you one?*
[If gender surfaces] *How does gender influence who you are?*
[If cardinal/central attribute (e.g., virtue, trait, motivation, belief, etc.) surfaces] *How does this influence who you are?*

To tap identity gap:

How has your experience been with respect to living as a Muslim in the present political climate?

PROBES:
To what extent has the current political climate influence your life or how you live your life on the day-to-day?
To what extent would you say your experience would have been different had you been living in the [United States/Canada]?
[NOTE: This question will be adapted based on respondent's origin. If the respondent identifies as Canadian, the question will be about the United States, and vice versa.]
How so?
What role do you think your gender identity plays (or does not play) in the aforementioned experience?
In other words, would the current political climate influence your life had you been a Muslim [male/female/trans]? How so?

To tap social media use in identity work:

How has social media—if ever—factored in the process of making sense and managing your challenges/concerns?

[Now, we are transitioning to your use of social media.]

Social Media Use and Affordances

To tap uses-and-gratification and affordances perception:

Can you tell me about your overall experience in using social media? What are the sites/platforms that you currently use?

How often do you use each of the site/platform mentioned?

[e.g., *Hourly? Few times a day? Daily? Few times a week? Weekly? Few times a month?*]

How much time do you spend on each visit?

Looking at all of the platforms/sites you are using, is there a specific platform/site you use more than others?

If so, which one is it?

PROBES:
Why have you particularly chosen this platform over the rest?
What are some of the things you like about using {platform}?
What are some of the concerns you have about using {platform}?
If you were to describe your overall experience of using {platform}, what would you say?

What is the greatest concern you have about social media (in general) right now?

To tap overall social media use and emotional integration of use into daily life:

How does {platform} feature in your daily activity and interactions with people?

How do you think you would feel if you had to stop using it? How would you feel if {platform} were taken off of the Internet?

To tap audience:

Could you describe the types of people you generally interact with (e.g., talk, "like" status updates, monitor and comment on updates) on {platform}?

PROBES:
Any particular individual[s] you regularly follow/monitor on {platform}?

To tap self-presentation behavior and impression management:

What kind of activities do you typically do or spend most of your time on {platform} doing? [*Lurk, scroll through, interact...?*]

PROBES:
Could you verbally walk me through a typical visit on {platform}? [From picking up access device, logging onto account...]
As far as posting and commenting behavior goes, what are the typical topics you normally share or comment on?
What are the topics you typically avoid engaging, posting or commenting on?
Why?

Thinking about your social media account/profile updates, how likely are you to update your accounts (e.g., post new content, status updates) to inform your friends/followers of *positive* life events? [Getting engaged/married, birth of a child, getting promoted at work?]

PROBES:
Which platform would you typically use to post such events?
Why?

On a similar note, how likely are you to update your social media accounts to inform your friends/followers of *negative* life events? [Life tragedies: getting divorced, getting laid off from work, accidents, loss of property and loved ones]

PROBES:
Which platform would you typically use to post such events?
Why?

To tap content, motivation, and goals of platform activity:

[*The following question is tentative upon respondent's consent and availability. Should respondent decline to participate, I will proceed with the closing questions.*]
In the following segment, I am going to specifically ask you to log into your {platform} account and ask specific questions about some of the contents. Would you be willing to participate right now and/or be available to participate at a different time?

Do you mind logging on to your {platform} account now and share with me some of your most recent activities (status updates/comments/likes/direct messages) on {platform}?

PROBES:
What motivated you to post/comment/edit?
What goal(s) were you trying to accomplish by posting/commenting/editing?
Who was/were this comment(s)/update(s) directed to?

To tap personality and self-presentation behavior:

Looking at your {platform} account, what are some of things on your profile that you think signify/signal your personality?

PROBES:
If a random social media user or stranger were to observe your social media profile/account, is there anything on there in particular that would communicate or hint at your personality?

To tap Muslim/ethnoracial identity and self-presentation behavior:

Now, thinking about your identity as a {Muslim/member of ethnoracial group/gender} living in America and your social media presence, is there anything particularly distinct on your {platform} account/profile that signifies your {"Muslimness"/ethnoracial identity/gender}?

PROBES:
Can you give a specific example? For example, a status update, a re-Tweet, a photo/image, a meme?
If it's a status update, do you mind sharing it with me? [Ask if participant is willing to screenshot or verbally quote the update]
What is it about (the trace/artifact) that signifies your {Muslim/ethnoracial/gender} identity?

To close the interview:

Before we end, is there anything that you would like to add or discuss that I may not have asked you during the interview?

When I am done transcribing our interview and begin to review your answers, if I have questions or perhaps need clarification on anything you said to ensure that your perspective is capture accurately, would you be open to me contacting you?

IF YES:
What is the best way to contact you?

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX J
STUDY 2 CONDENSED CODING SCHEME

Consolidated Codes	Definition	Examples
IDENTITY FRAMES (RQ5)	How individuals understand or express aspects of their identities across intra- and interpersonal contexts	I would say Palestinian and Muslim is very important to me, having people know that. I don't wear a hijab, but I take every opportunity to tell people that I am Muslim and that I am Palestinian because I feel like I want people to change perceptions of what they think Palestinians are, and what they think Muslim women are, and to know that we come in all shapes and sizes. We do all types of different things. We're all kinds of different people with different personalities, with different backgrounds. So, for me, I think that's very important.
PERSONAL/SELF-CONCEPT (RQ5)	How individuals feel about and define themselves along coordinates such as personality, religion, gender, age, race, etc.	One of the things that comes to mind is just first and foremost any time I'm thinking about myself and who I am, something that is central I think to my identity is being Muslim. I don't have a long time being Muslim, only a few years. I'm a convert, but I still see it as the most central important part of who I am. The only reason why I'm mentioning that is because before I was Muslim, it's interesting to me because I always identified or aligned myself more with my cultural and ethnic background, or even racial background.
PERSONALITY (RQ5)	This refers to when individuals define themselves along their traits and values.	Patience, perhaps. I don't know if this is too ambiguous or vague but I'm very much values-driven, family-oriented.
AGE (RQ5)	This refers to when individuals include their age when talking about personal identity/self-concept.	My name is Hajar. Currently, right now, I'm 22 years old. I am a computer science and data science student. I'm an undergrad.
GENDER (RQ5)	This refers to when individuals include	I use they and he pronouns, and so that is one way that I use to signal my

	their gender identity when describing themselves or who they are.	queer identity. So, I let people know that I don't strictly see myself as a man, that I recognize that I am gender non binary. And so, I think that really is one of the ways I signify that I'm queer.
RELATIONAL (RQ5)	How individuals see themselves through social roles and interactions—sense of self through relationships with others.	Also, being a father and a husband is a very important part of who I am, too. Provides a lot of meaning in my life outside of work and outside of the public sphere.
ENACTED (RQ5)	How one's identity is created, maintained, expressed through communication and social interactions, e.g., expressing one's affiliations through social media "bios".	Online, I started—there's this app called Wattpad where people write stories and stuff. I started writing a story about maybe one year ago, like early 2018. It was about this Christian boy and a Muslim girl. Basically, it was all about introducing people to what Islam is about. The way I saw it, I was maybe making a difference I hope so.
"BEING MUSLIM" (RQ5)	Encompasses every aspect an individual may define/characterize as essentially related to the lived experience of being a Muslim/follower of Islam.	So, as a Muslim, I would describe myself as always trying to better myself and just … Like a Muslim in an American context
"BEING MUSLIM CONVERT" (RQ5)	Encompasses every aspect of the lived experiences of individuals who converted to Islam.	I've been a Muslim for almost 17 years. I converted back in 2002.
COMMUNAL (RQ5, RQ6)	Society's ascription of an identity, collectively shared element of identity, e.g., Muslim convert, Black Muslim, 1st-generation Muslim Americans.	When we talk about religion when I go to school or when I talk to some of my friends. Sometimes I feel like I live in a different world because the way they see things and the way I see things is completely different. They call me old or something, maybe like the Muslim ways and the way we think and the way we do some things may be different from the West, very different

		from the American mindset. Sometimes I feel like I'm misunderstood.
	ETHNORACIAL IDENTITY (RQ5)	I've always been aware of my culture in society as in, I'm a first generation Mexican-American and I've always identified myself as being Chicana.
SENSE OF PURPOSE (RQ5)	This refers to individuals' motivations and drives in life, particularly drawn from Islamic teachings and traditions.	We're put on this earth to obey and serve and to help one another. Those are things that I always try to keep in mind. "Is this pleasing to Allah? Is this something that's going to help me to get into Jannah?"
TENETS OF FAITH (RQ5)	How individuals define "being Muslim" along established Islamic beliefs.	For me, I was going to say fundamentally, it's a belief that there is a one God and then the prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, is his messenger.
ANTI-MUSLIM HOSTILITY (RQ6)	This refers to data/participants' lived experience with respect to encountering anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia.	After 9/11, yes, I did. I also didn't drive then. I walked everywhere and people would scream at me as I was walking down the street.
POST-9/11 (RQ6)	How individuals indicate 9/11 as a pivotal moment in one's identity	It's very common in American culture that religion was rarely talked about, you don't really bring it up in conversation with friends. That forced you to talk about a little bit more, but also internally you figure out, "Okay, what is it I actually believe? Why this? How could someone misinterpret this and think it's such an extreme level and how do I get there?"
GLOBAL CONTEXTUALIZATION (RQ6)	How individuals contextualize existing challenges/hostilities faced by Muslims living in North America vis-à-vis anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia in other parts of the world.	Subhan Allah this is our time as Muslims that we're going through such a hard time, not just in the US but also everywhere in the world. It's a really important time for us to really step up and really prove people wrong, really prove those misconceptions that people think of us and share that voice of how important our religion is and at some point to have different Muslim role models in every aspect, not just in technology but in government, in law.

		Everything that we do is really important, to really just step up our game and really spread our message of love of Islam and really show people that they're wrong with the misconceptions they have in their heads of us.
CHRISTCHURCH (RQ6)	This refers to data referring to the New Zealand mosque massacres in March 2019.	I remember hearing that Christchurch was one of the more racist cities, because one of my friends who visits Australia frequently told me that. Somebody who lives here told her that. So, I guess I heard that, but I never experienced it and I was just ... Like I'm still shocked by the information. And I'm still shocked by what happened. So, before the terrorist attack, the atmosphere was normal. Everybody was happy, everybody was focused on their studies, everybody had plans for the weekend. I had plans for the weekend. And everything just went downhill so fast.
RESPECTABILITY (RQ6, RQ7)	Adopted from Higginbotham's (1993) work, in reference to specific manners and attitudes that one engages as a Muslim individual as part of identity work. When targeted at the White gaze, such work is a way of reclaiming humanity and appeasing non-Muslim others. When targeted at other Muslims, such work is engaged in ingroup signaling of Muslim identity.	I'm the only Muslim at my institution. Actually, I'm the only Muslim chaplain in the state correctional system. There were two more when I started. They've both since retired. I definitely feel like I have to represent Islam for the whole correctional system, which is a large system which is an honor at times, but also very scary and definitely a burden.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE (RQ7)	This refers to all aspects related to social media use, including particular platforms.	Twitter for me, helped with processing motherhood and womanhood and societal expectations of womanhood. Even the initial platforms that I followed were of women, of mothers.
MOTIVATION (RQ7)	How individuals define their purpose and drives in using social media.	I think it's been an amazing tool. I think through social media I've been able to find folks who are like-minded, and who share my experiences, and are able to empathize with me, and then even expand my views about religion. I don't think, if it weren't for social media I definitely wouldn't know as much about the religion as I do now. And I definitely wouldn't feel as confident in myself as a Muslim, and not having to hide myself.
CONCERNS (RQ7)	How individuals express the concerns and worries about using social media more generally or about specific platforms.	The greatest concern. I think, again, I would go back to when social media is being used to share hateful rhetoric, I think that's a big concern for safety reasons.
MUSLIM SOCIAL MEDIA (RQ6, RQ7)	Distinctly "Muslim ways" of using social media, including motivations, patterns of platform engagement, emotional self-disclosures	I guess in that sense I'm conservative because I don't like to seek out relationships like to have a male friend to talk to, to talk to someone or even initiate contact. Unless, if it's a discussion or a debate that's happening on Twitter, well, then that's fine, but like to privately message someone, no. I don't interact with someone.

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ABSTRACT

THE 'HYPERTEXTUAL' SELF: A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR IDENTITY WORK AMONG MUSLIMS IN NORTH AMERICA

by

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August 2019

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Digital connectivity and social media use have become increasingly commonplace as internet-mediated communication and mobile phone technology dominate our daily communication repertoire. Informed by a multidisciplinary theoretical framework of the cybernetic Big Five theory (CB5T; DeYoung, 2015), Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993), an affordances framework (DeVito, Birnholtz, & Hancock, 2017), and respectability politics (Higginbotham, 1993), this two-phase sequential explanatory mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) dissertation explores some of the implications of social media use for North America's (United States and Canada) Muslims, and how Muslim social media users engage with and communicate through internet-mediated technologies to create, conduct, articulate, and perform their identities in everyday life amidst rising anti-Muslim hostility and Islamophobia.

Taken together, Study 1 (quantitative survey methodology, $n = 435$) and Study 2 (qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews, $n = 29$) underline the significance of sociodemographic factors, personality traits, and cultural identity (i.e., ethnoracial and religious) in influencing social media use for identity work, in addition to revealing the unique sociotechnical communication phenomenon of Muslim Social Media—a distinctly Muslim

way of adopting and engaging social media platforms and SNSs in everyday communication, altogether highlighting the pivotal role and intricate ways that social media platforms; more specifically, and internet-mediated communication; more broadly, offer for users of underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds within the process of identity sensemaking and communicating aspects of identity thereof.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Annisa Meirita Patimurani Rochadiat is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Interpersonal Communication at the University of Richmond. Prior to earning her PhD from Wayne State University, Annisa completed her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore (2002), a Master of Arts in International Relations and Diplomacy from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands (2006), a Master of Arts in Communication Studies from Wayne State University (2015), and had worked as a journalist for The Jakarta Post in Indonesia and a feature writer for GO Magazine in Jordan. Primarily identifying as an interpersonal communication scholar, Annisa's research interests lie at the intersection of identity, culture, and social computing technologies, with a specific ethnographic focus on North America's Muslim population.