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TEXTUAL AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HIJAB IN INTERNET MEMES AND GIFS

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a preliminary report of veil/hijab representation in the modern social media tools of communication; internet memes and GIFs. It bridges a gap in visual communication research by conducting an integrative -textual and visual- framing analysis of 400 memes and GIFs that used the hashtag #Hijab, to unravel the frames and stereotypes of veiled women in such online visuals. Hijabi Muslim women have been visually represented in media in overgeneralized stereotyped ways, being shown as either oppressed and subservient to others with no individual opinions, or as liberated progressives who resist western hegemony (Khan & Zahra, 2015). The research timeframe comes right after the two terrorist attacks on Muslim mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that occurred on 15 March 2019, where an extremist Australian gunman killed 50 people and injured another 50 in the first ever livestreamed shooting video on Facebook (BBC, 2019). Utilizing a visual analysis dual-modality technique, of both textual and visual elements, and through conducting a quantitative content analysis of the most popular, viral, and retweeted hijab memes and GIFs in March 2019, the study contributes to the growing literature of memes and GIFs, and their representation of Muslim women and their body coverage "hijab". It, therefore, allows for a deeper understanding of internet memes and GIFs' usage, the frames they used in portraying hijab, and their stereotypical effects on the image of contemporary veil and veiled women on digital media, specifically social media platforms. The study codes a sample of 200 internet memes and 200 GIFs based on 9 coding variables to analyze both textual and visual elements. Findings highlight how veil/hijab is represented in modern digital communication tools and suggest that, opposite to negative stereotypes of Muslim women in traditional media, memes and GIFs support hijab and depict veiled Muslim women as happy and respected females. The study also shows that internet memes and GIFs are not the same thing and should be examined accordingly.

Keywords: *Visual Communication, Memes, GIFs, Veil, Hijab, Social Media, Stereotyping, Framing Analysis, Content Analysis.*

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Chapter One

Introduction

The internet is among the main forces that managed to revolutionize human communication on a myriad of levels, or as Procházka (2016) so directly explains it, the internet has not only accelerated the speed, ease, and reach of human communication; it has also brought novel communication techniques giving rise to computer mediated (virtual) communities of people sharing the same or similar experience, interests, values, and morals. It is also argued that as more of our world moves into online spaces, social media platforms become a central fountainhead for dispersed communities to share innovative ideas and original artifacts, as well as contribute to the discussions around those ideas (Peppler & Solomou, 2011). Indeed, social media is no longer regarded among mere communication methods, instead it's considered an unprecedented free space for people to learn from each other, discuss, share their ideas, and even sometimes create alternative public spheres for audiences.

Among the most significant tools used for communicating on social media platforms are internet memes, which are popularly known as photos including a unit of information, idea, concept or belief that replicates by passing on via the internet, and GIFs which are bitmap image formats, or low-quality no-sound video clips that are now heavily used online due to their wide support of images as well as animations and portability.

As Fahmy et al. (2014) noted; the emergence of new technologies has made visual information more accessible than traditional media such as newspapers, magazines or radio and television. Internet now is considered the main source of information for huge groups of audiences, and almost all content communicated through that medium is highly visual.

Internet memes and GIFs are among the top visuals used for communicating on social media. They are considered two of the very few online elements characterized by the ability to go viral, reach different cultures and practically span the world in just a couple of hours, or maybe even less. Nevertheless, studies discussing these tools or analyzing their content are scarce in quantity, when compared to internet memes and GIFs' popularity and heavy online usages.

The importance of memes and GIFs does not just lie in being viral tools of online communication; memes and GIFs are used in viral marketing campaigns (Williams, 2000), civic participation and digital persuasion campaigns (Agur & Frisch, 2019), and even within political events (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2018). Recently, they have been attracting public interest, and popular web sites such as knowyourmeme.com, memedump.com, memebase.com, and giphy has been set up by independent audiences as memes and GIFs databases and are ever growing with additions from regular memes and GIFs creators and users on daily basis (Konzack, 2015).

The significance of memes and GIFs is academically understood; Shifman (2013) explains that memes pervasive nature often serves as prisms for understanding certain aspects of contemporary culture. And researchers agree that GIFs became a key communication tool in contemporary digital cultures thanks to a combination of their features and affordances (Miltner & Highfield, 2017). However, most meme researches tackle memetic spread and distribution

(Bauckhage, 2011; Shifman & Thelwall, 2009) or their participation in the digitalization of communication in general (Wiggins & Bowers, 2014; Jantke et al., 2012), but their stereotypical or framing effects remain areas to yet be ventured.

Stemming from that shortcoming in the visual analysis research field and combining that with the salience of deep understanding of the modern communication tools of our current digital era, this study aims to visually analyze popular internet memes and GIFs. Using a dual modality technique to simultaneously analyze both visual and textual elements in memes and GIFs, the study aims to examine the overall visual representation of hijab and find out the frames and stereotypes associated with it in these visuals.

The veil, headscarf, or Hijab – the term used for veil when associated with Muslim women wear- has long been the focus of fierce international media debates. Such debates are currently further fueled by the rise of Islamophobia (the fear or hatred towards Islam and Muslims) within western societies.

On March 15, 2019, New Zealand witnessed one of the deadliest attacks ever in the country's history. An Australian extremist gunman, with the name "Brenton Tarrant", opened fire onto two mosques in the area of Christchurch during the weekly Friday Islamic prayer, managing to kill 50 Muslims and injure another 50. The attacks, that were performed by the white supremacist, came as a shock to international audiences, specifically social media users, as the killer used a head-mounted camera to film the shooting, and live-streamed footage of his rampage to Facebook (BBC, 2019).

The attacks were fiercely condemned internationally, and Prime Minister "Jacinda Ardern" called March 15, 2019 "one of New Zealand's darkest days". As expected, the attacks

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were widely met by international media discussions of Muslims in western countries and the Islamophobia phenomenon, and naturally social media users took part in the discussions.

These discussions included Muslim women and hijab, particularly after New Zealand's Prime Minister, Arden, showed up wearing hijab as a sign of empathy towards Muslims and solidarity with the victims and their families. Soon after, women all across New Zealand donned headscarves as well to show solidarity with Muslims, even Television anchors and newsreaders began broadcasts wearing hijab (The Independent, 2019). All that thrusted hijab into the limelight and made it a significant part of social media discussions tackling the event. People started sharing and retweeting opinions and comments, in which they used no only text, but internet visuals such as memes and GIFs.

There is not a huge abundance in literature available concerning hijab's visual representation in international media in general. That is quite surprising given the current international, social, and political situation towards hijab, from countries trying to ban it, others forcing women to wear it, to politicians using it to impact voting behaviors in political campaigns, not to mention the stereotyped image of oppression that is directly related to it.

The visual portrayal of veil is an issue of current interest worldwide, since the veil is not seen as a personal wardrobe choice of a female anymore; but its perception extends to way beyond that, due to its typically related cultural and more importantly religious context. In an effort to fill that gap and add to the visual representation of hijab literature, the researcher aims to examine the most popular internet memes and GIFs that are circulated online under the hashtag #Hijab, code and analyze them based on set variables, to find out the general tone, frames, and stereotypes related to hijab in internet memes and GIFs.

As a theoretical approach, the present study will follow the stereotyping concept along with the framing theory to highlight the visual portrayal of veil in social media. Hamilton et al (1990) early identified stereotyping as a cognitive structure that forms the beliefs and attitudes about a particular group. While framing theory is often defined as a process in which some aspects of reality are selected, and given greater emphasis or importance, so that the problem is defined, its causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are suggested and appropriate solutions and actions are proposed (Entman, 2007).

Considering that most people gather information or know about foreign places or people through visual media (Perlmutter, 1998), media have long been regarded as a meaningful role-player in the development of racial/ethnic and other group stereotyping. This study seeks to find out to what extent can that media role be applied to GIFs and memes as well, and how contemporary veiled women are portrayed within these viral online tools.

The Problem Statement: The study aims to bridge the gap in visual analysis of modern social media tools by incorporating a dual modality technique to analyze textual and visual representation of hijab in the digital tools; Internet memes and GIFs. It examines the image of veiled Muslim women in social media to add to the visual hijab representation literature and simultaneously find out the frames and stereotypes associated with that representation on social sites.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

1. What are Memes and GIFs?

1.1 Memes

Delving deeper to the origin of the world "Meme", the earliest definition of the term was given by "Richard Dawkins" in his bestseller "The Selfish Gene" back in 1976. The term was firstly coined by the evolutionary biologist Dawkins to describe small units of cultural transformation that are analogous to genes in order to explain cultural evolution (Shifman, 2014). An even deeper look would reveal that the term itself was derived from the Ancient Greek word "μίμημα" which means 'something that is imitated', and it primarily included any cultural unit that can transfer from a person to another through replicating or imitating, from a slogan, a type of clothing, to complex concepts such as God (Piata, 2016). According to Dawkins (1976), memes can consist of anything with the ability to be transferred between people, such as songs, fads, catchphrases, or images. Dawkins describes them as "minimal cultural information units transferred between individuals, and/or generations, through processes of replication or transmission".

Years later, and along with the advancement of technology, the ease of communication provided by the internet, and the prominent role played by social media networks in changing existing modes of communication, as well as in initiating new discursive practices, memes started to expand in meaning, hence, a new term of "Internet Memes" was coined. Internet

memes, as defined by Shifman (2013) are ''units of popular culture that are circulated, imitated, and transformed by internet users, creating a shared cultural experience'' (P.67). Memes can be said to describe more than one thing, including images, videos, and audios, which are quickly shared through social media networks; in this sense, they are often referred to as computer-mediated/ technology-mediated multimodal artifacts. However, the most common and modern idea of the meme is usually a viral picture with a formatted added text message (Gil, 2016) and that is precisely how this present study defines memes.

Internet memes are humorous par excellence; they attest to three key features of humor, namely playfulness, which means readers are invited not to take the content seriously; incongruity, which is humor resulting from two opposing scripts; and superiority, where the users perceive themselves as superior (Shifman, 2011) (For examples, see Figures 1 to 4).

Figure 1. A meme with playfulness as the key feature.

Figure 2. A meme with playfulness as the key feature.

Figure 3. A meme with incongruity as the key feature.
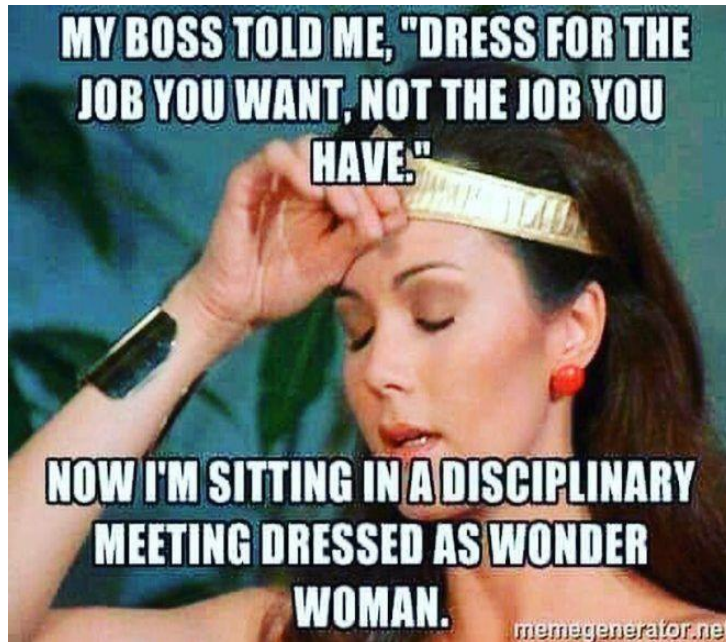
Figure 4. A meme with superiority as the key feature.

Researchers pointed out that internet memes are aimed at "satirical humor for public commentary" (Milner, 2013, p. 2359), as humor is seen as a key feature of them to the point that they should be considered "a genre of humor and creativity" (Dainas, 2015, p. 59).

Recently internet memes gained much salience; to the extent of appearing across different types of social media, ranging from socializing sites like Facebook, to social navigation sites such as Youtube (Piata, 2016). Internet users adopted these memes owing to their significant characteristics of being infectious when they are appealing, satirical, humorous or universal (Huntington, 2013). In general, memes are replicated if they are effective or useful at portraying an opinion, and on the other side, they die out if they are not (Rushkoff, 2010), Martínez (2016) argues for the ability of internet memes to display a condensed, complex political statement in a brief, powerful, effective container that engages people through various emotions, and that's why they are no longer just images, but ideas.

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Memes are often "catchy and widely propagated ideas or phenomena, their nature is often collaborative, cumulative and distributed, and they are generated out of networks of shared interests, experiences, habits, worldviews and the like that pick up on or use texts, events, phenomena, icons, cultural artifacts, etc., in particular if not socially idiosyncratic ways" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). Some researchers argue that the common characteristics of memes can serve a political communication purposes very well; like Decker-Maurere (2012), who argues that characteristics such as font, linguistic style, and inter-textually allow users to build an online identity based on what they like or what they understand from various memes, that is like saying people would use memes in the same way they use bumper stickers or campaign signs to advertise and build a political identity such as Republican or Democrat. If this is true, Facebook users will share and like memes that align with the way they intend to vote in upcoming elections. Memes are then considered to be a form of political communication, and supporters can drive the message through sharing, retweeting, and otherwise disseminating relevant text, images, or hyperlinks (Anderson & Sheeler, 2014).

In her book "Memes in Digital Culture", Shifman (2014) urges the academic field to further study and analyze internet memes, stating that they were utterly ignored in the field of communication and communication researchers often felt comfortable overlooking them, considering them absolutely "irrelevant for understanding mass-mediated content" (P.6), while in fact, according to Shifman, they should be seen as socially constructed public discourses.

Now, the term meme is widely used by Internet users, and according to Google Trends, the interest on the subject of memes has increased since 2011 until today; the term still currently holds a high level of interest.

Academics agree on the undeniable significance of memes within contemporary communication; and there has indeed been growing interest in studying memes within more modern internet research, (i.e. Aharoni, 2018; Brubaker et al, 2018; Hu, 2018; Guenther et al., 2018; Liang et al., 2018; Lobinger et al, 2018; Wiggins et al, 2018; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018). Some researchers conducted qualitative studies of memes (i.e. Bohman, 2017; Montenegro, 2018; Williams et al., 2016, Bellar et al., 2013; Milner, 2013), with lesser focus on quantitative work that analyzes memes and their usages. Liang and colleagues (2018), for instance, analyzed Chinese and Taiwanese memes. They found that memes were used as tools to socially or politically influence audiences; China's supporters utilized memes to discuss nationalism by implicit and satirical content, and Taiwan's supporters engaged in politics through explicit and critical expression. Nissenbaum and Shifman (2018) used meme templates as a lens to explore cultural globalization, by quantitatively and then qualitatively analyzing some of the most popular meme templates in various languages. They found that although meme templates tended to be dominated by the American or western pop culture, that didn't negate the usage of local templates.

Other important findings included that internet memes overall are mostly emotionally disruptive, with a tendency towards more negative emotions like anger or irony. Recent work has also suggested that social media posts are more successful when playing on emotions including humor and anger-evoking cues (Nave et al., 2018). Memes have been both criticized and supported online (Kunst et al., 2018), with their text and image elements often seen as rather consistent in delivering the same messages (Milner, 2013).

In a study highlighting how internet tools, specifically memes, can be used as anti-online censorship techniques in China, Mina (2014) found that "memes, as micro-actions of media remixing and sharing, are particularly important in a censored, propagandized state, which seeks first to isolate individuals who express opinions contrary to state interests, and then to deaden the sort of public debate that fosters a diverse sphere of opinion". Mina suggests that meme culture ended up providing an outlet for new forms of public conversation and community building, which is seen as an important shift in orientation to state media in a country like China. Previous meme literature also suggests that the internet tool have the capability to influence people's political perspectives or opinions (Kadir & Lokman, 2014) and therefore can be utilized not just as a cultural communication tool, but as a marketing or political persuasion technique (For examples, see figures 5 & 6).

Figure 5. A meme with Political Agenda.

Figure 6. A meme with Political Agenda.

2.1 GIFs

Created in 1987 by CompuServe engineer "Steve Wilhite", the GIF is an image file format that uses lossless data compression. The unique characteristic that sets the GIF apart from other static image formats such as the JPEG or PNG is its additional support for looping sequences. The GIF can display frames on repeat within the same image file without being the size or resolution of a video. During the early internet stages, the GIF was an ideal way of adding visual content and movement to a website at a time when bandwidth was limited and video and image-editing software were less advanced, as GIFs have no maximum resolution and can display up to 256 colors out of a palette of millions. (Eppink, 2014).

The GIF, which is simply a snippet put on loop to be shared on social media or added to repositories like Giphy or Imgur, has the potential to be employed in countless new contexts, hence, it is considered a part of a wider landscape of visual social media, participation, creativity, and digital cultures (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). Surprisingly enough, Steve Wilhite, the principal engineer of the GIF, actually pronounced the acronym 'jif'. Engineers at CompuServe are said to have frequently quipped 'Choosy Developers Choose GIF' which is a riff on Jif Peanut Butter's slogan 'Choosy Mothers Choose Jif'. However, as the format caught on, users began pronouncing GIF with a hard 'G' likely due to its derivation from the word 'Graphics'. As the GIF became a popular tool online, on websites like 4chan, b3ta, and Something Awful, new sites emerged to host these GIFs and help users create new GIFs from online videos, and users actually had a space to create and produce GIFs of their own using tools provided on those sites, that's why many sites added watermarks to the corners of the images in black or white text, and GIFs bearing marks like GIFSOUP.COM, HilariousGifs.com, SENORGIF.COM, 4GIFs.com, and gifbin.com could be found (Eppink, 2014).

Some scholars consider GIFs to be part of memes; Heiskanen (2017) argues that memes take multiple different formats, ranging from images, videos, GIFs, and hyperlinks. However, the most agreed upon GIF format is a low-quality soundless video that is repeated on loop and specifically created to be shared on social media (Highfield & Leaver, 2015), and that is precisely how the current study defines GIFs.

GIFs have become one of the most dominant communication tools in contemporary digital cultures thanks to the unique combination of their features, constraints, and affordances. They are polysemic, because they are isolated snippets of larger texts. This trait, combined with

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their endless and looping repetition, allows them to transmit multiple levels of meaning in just one go. The GIFs' unique characteristics that combines some traits of still images, along with some of dynamic videos, makes them an ideal tool for enhancing two of the core aspects of digital communication, which are the performance of affect and the demonstration of cultural knowledge (Miltner& Highfield, 2017). Suffice to notice the wide adoption of the GIF for commercial purposes to understand how they can be employed for different purposes; this GIF commercial use demonstrates the recognition of the tool's key features and highlights how the GIF has transitioned from a user-driven format within niche digital cultures to a visual device with institutional applications and investment (Miltner& Highfield, 2017). GIFs have also been used in high-fashion advertising campaigns and art shows, including an event for the format's 30th birthday held by GIF repository Giphy (Mufson, 2017). In October 2016, Giphy announced it was serving more than 1billion GIFs to over 100million active users every day (@giphy, 2016).

Online users all over the world are choosing to communicate their thoughts with GIFs, and that led researchers to more than one potential reason. Tolins and Samermit (2016) claim that one of the most common uses of GIFs, if not the most common, is the performance of affect. In their examination of GIFs within texting, they found that the use of GIFs aids texters to communicate their exact current reactions or feelings, which would otherwise be prohibited by using just the written format. Additionally, Milner and Shifman (2016) suggest that GIFs share communicative affordances with multiple other visual media, from the inter-textuality of memes to the affective representation of emojis. According to McCarthy (2017), the flexibility of the GIF and its applications to multiple contexts are both key to the construction of meaning with

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GIFs and part of a specific GIF's own lineage. GIFs create new meanings in the process of exchange, and their layers accumulate, bearing traces of where they have been.

The GIF is not the only online tool that offers internet users visual repetition, there are other looping visual media, such as Vine loops and Instagram's Boomerangs (Highfield & Duguay, 2015). Nevertheless, these tools didn't reach the GIFs popularity; they enable different content than the GIF, within their own technical and communicative constraints and features. Vine loops, for instance, enables video and audio on repeat, but they could only be a maximum of six seconds in length.

Perhaps one of the major explanations that can clearly demonstrate the uniqueness and added value of the GIFs to the online users, is what Newman (2016) wrote about, when he argued that GIFs are the tools that finally created the option of quoting from movies and videos.

> "Raymond Bellour, whose close readings of classical Hollywood films like The
> Big Sleep (1946), North by Northwest (1959), and Gigi (1958) schooled several
> generations in moving image analysis, often described the film text as
> unattainable. "The unattainable text" pointed to a key difference between
> literature and cinema when it comes to critical analysis. A literary critic might
> quote from a poem or novel while a cinema critic couldn't" (p. 1).

But now, with the help of online GIFs, movies could easily be quoted; they are no longer "unattainable text", since GIFs allow us to publish criticism of the moving image using the technology of the moving image. Newman (2016) suggests that GIFs are among the most powerful communication tools, as they can communicate so much, without even adding one

word. He gives two examples to further illustrate the importance of GIFs to communication processes without using sentences or explanations; the first is a GIF from the movie "The Craft" in 1996, which Newman shows as a clear example communicating a powerful stride or a confidently striding posse, and the other is from the movie "Ghost World" in 2001, which is a simple eyeroll (an eye-rolling outsider), in a clear communication of sarcastic boredom (See Figures 7 & 8).

Figure 7. A GIF from the movie "The Craft" (1996) portraying a powerful stride.

Figure 8. A GIF from the movie "Ghost World" (2001) communicating boredom.

*Note: GIFs are short moving videos, so all figures included in this thesis are still images of GIFs. The actual GIFs can only be seen on a screen for their motion nature.

Researchers see that any description in language is nothing next to these GIF animations, which not only makes the GIF a great tool of online communication, but also a tool to unique one of a kind expression type, as it repeats an eternal feeling infinitely. GIFs are way more effective than most internet tools or other types of online expressions. Newman adds that GIFs are also silent and brief, which is similar to the earliest examples of cinema, as they capture some of the same magic of life in motion just like early cinema did. He refers to the GIF from "The Craft", which is showing a confidently striding posse, and the one from "Ghost World", which is an eye-roll, expressing that no other form of communication could better-transmit such feelings.

Besides, what makes GIFs great is their ability to be so easily shared, to be utilized for diverse purposes in conversations, expressions, or criticism, or as Eppink (2014) puts it, "GIFs are promiscuous and frictionless, with low barriers for viewing, possessing, and sharing. It is largely because of its limitations that the GIF thrives nearly two decades after its introduction, sustaining a renewed interest in the loop." In 2012, popular bloggers were being interviewed by Forbes magazine, and the interviewer asked the simple question: "why are GIFs funny?", one of the bloggers answers captured the true essence of GIFs, when he said "I think part of it is that you're taking a picture of something that totally doesn't apply to what you're talking about in the broader sense, but once you put a caption on it, a light bulb just goes off and it makes sense" " I mean if you saw a GIF portraying a herd of sheep rapidly circling a slowly moving car, you think it isn't funny by itself, but then if you add the caption "How you feel when you're the only sober person in a bar," and it somehow just makes sense."

The ability of GIFs to make sense to audiences without including text, doesn't necessarily mean that GIFs never include added text. They can come in both forms; if the characters in the

GIF aren't speaking and the visuals suffice for understanding the meaning behind the GIF, then

no text is added (See figures 9 to 12).

Figure 9. A no-text GIF of from "The Tonight Show" communicating happiness.

Figure 10. A no-text GIF of from a "Harry Potter" movie portraying a sarcastic clap.

Figure 11. A no-text GIF communicating shock.

Figure 12. A no-text dancing GIF from the TV show "Seinfeld" communicating happiness.

However, textual elements are added if the character is supposed to be speaking and his/her lips are moving in the GIF, text of the words the character say is super-imposed on the GIF (See figure 13).

Figure 13. A textual & visual GIF from the TV show "Friends".

Text can also be added as a commentary sentence on the visual even if that is not what the character says in the original video, often to have a more humorous effect (See Figure 14). Currently, GIFs are from the most used tools of online communication, to the point that one of the largest social media platforms "Facebook" created a new option to comment using a GIF.

Group projects like...

Figure 14. A textual & visual GIF from the TV show "Malcom In the Middle".

2. Veil Representation in Visual Media

2.1 What is the Veil/Hijab?

Traditionally, a veil just refers to a scarf that can be worn over hair, just like how wedding veils are worn. However, in a more cultural/religious context, a veil is basically a headscarf or a piece of clothing worn by females for different cultural or religious reasons. As for the Islamic veil, that is sometimes referred to as a *Hijab* –which is the Arabic word of a veil-, it is derived from Islam's requirements for its adherents to be modest. Hijab means covering the body from head to ankles, with the exception of the face, hands and feet. Some Muslim women adhere to the *Niqab*, which is covering the whole body along with the face and hands as well, leaving only the eyes uncovered. Niqab is an ultra-conservative option that is not followed by the majority of Muslim women, only a small percentage chose to wear it. Recently the most frequent form of veiling is a long loosely fitted dress and a scarf wrapped around the head to cover the hair (Hoodfar, 1992).

2.2 Veil in Visuals

Most cultures around the world are now familiar with images and news stories of veiled Muslim women because of their constant reappearance within media. But that "constant reappearance" doesn't necessarily institute better understanding. In her study "Veiling the "Other," Unveiling Our Selves", Todd (1998) suggests that media coverage of veiling has gone far beyond the actual piece of clothing; going as far as questioning what it indicates and should it be tolerated within Western societies or not. She states that media coverage of Muslim women is sometimes racist and only portrays certain forms of stereotypes. She also adds that these stereotypes found in Muslim women images in media affect people's attitudes and creates a sense of "us" versus "them".

Historically, there have been negative stereotyping associated with Islam and Muslims in international media (Shaheen, 2001). According to Said's theory of Orientalism (Said, 1978), the Muslim world and its inhabitants are considered backward, barbaric and outsiders to Western society. This "othering" of Muslims is notable in the media in terms of the coverage of Muslim women. Muslim women are almost invariably portrayed as oppressed and veiled, a terrorist threat or exotic, sexualized beings (Posetti, 2006). Additionally, Hijab is often regarded in visual media as a symbol; Muslim women's choice to cover (or not) takes on a symbolic dimension (Bowe et al., 2019). That symbolic dimension may not correspond to the social conditions of the women represented (Özcan, 2015).

Following a deeper visual analysis in her study about the portrayal of Afghan women –
who were mostly not just veiled but wearing full body coverage called "Burqa"- in the
Associated Press wire photographs, Fahmy (2004) found signs of visual framing and stereotypes
towards Afghan women. Her results included that only about 10 percent of the AP images
portrayed Afghan women from a low angle to give them an impression of empowerment,
compared to those taken from a higher angle indicating weakness. That, combined with Fahmy's
findings of the overwhelming percentage of Afghan women portrayed completely covered up in
AP photographs, give an insight about the tendency to depict veiled women as a subordinate who
needs "freeing". It also might explain what Schønemann (2013) wrote, that media coverage of
veiled Muslim women is moderately high on the warmth dimension and relatively low on the
competence dimension. Media is almost communicating that veiled women should earn our pity,
hence a high level in the warmth dimension, but not our respect, therefore a low level in the
competence dimension.

Though Muslim women by nature make a rather heterogeneous group, they are still seen
through a very narrow media focus, becoming the target of uncomplimentary stereotypes in
various visual media types; such as in caricatures that portray Islamic veiled or covered women
as "submissive" and "conventional" (Ajrouch, 2007). Most representations of Muslim women
involve them wearing traditional Islamic clothing such as the hijab, and their role in the media is
generally limited to commentary on issues such as the veil (Posetti, 2006).

Veiled Muslim women are portrayed as weak, uneducated, passives that hold no real
authority over their own lives, thus, stereotyped as passive, incompetent and in desperate need of
saving (Tasnuva, 2013). The heavy representation of Muslim women as suppressive reached a

point that in the 20th century, unveiling became a symbol of modernity, gender equality, and progression in the West (Leila, 2011).

However, this repeated image of Muslim female submission is not always the case in Muslim women representation; studies showed that sometimes, the underlining theme shifts from religious or social to political. In Australia, news stories about the hijab have been triggered by politicians seeking to regulate the wearing of the hijab in schools (Posetti, 2006). Also, in their study tackling the visual coverage of the burkini, a modest swimsuit worn by Muslim women in three leading international newswires including Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, and Reuters, Bowe et al. (2019) found that the visual coverage of the burkini debate subverted traditional stereotypes of the submissive Muslim woman. During that time there were political discussions in European countries to ban the burkini.

Lorber (2002) added a new media stereotype of the veiled Muslim woman as a terrorist, analyzing that it first appeared on screens after the first Palestinian woman suicide bombing occurred, and it portrayed veiled women as aggressive and fundamental. Veiled women are not always linked to terrorism, but as the veil itself gets portrayed in media as a symbol of fundamentalism and terrorism, it's quite possible that veiled women can be seen in the future as terrorists or fundamentalists, just because they choose to wear a symbolic garment (Schønemann, 2013).

3. Stereotyping in Social Media

According to Hamilton et al. (1990), a stereotype is an oversimplified opinion that can be identified by examining the way a certain group of people is being portrayed, it's a cognitive

structure that forms the beliefs and attitudes about a particular group. With the rise of internet, more attention is given to stereotyping on social media than ever before. Social media has been, and still is, taking the communication world by storm, surpassing most traditional communication methods in a variety of life aspects. Consequently, that ongoing social media success has two sides; just as providing people with modern and easier methods of communication, it also makes the online world a suitable place for stereotyping and framing to occur. Those can be seen in social media in many forms, whether through memes, individual posts, or even Facebook groups (Scheufele, 1999). Unlike older generations, nowadays youth prefer the immediacy and convenience of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, to get their news, even more than online news websites and journals, not just traditional newspapers (Bivens, 2015) which suggests that visuals circulating through these modern tools are far more significant, especially to younger generations, than visuals communicated through traditional media channels like TV, newspapers, and magazines. Social media encompass powerful tools for rallying support for a social cause, political mobilization, and social commentary. Fahmy et al. (2014) stated that research shows African Americans are more likely to be represented stereotypically, as involved excessively in sports and crime. The same stereotyping is often seen in social media, because social media and news reporting is affected by each other and feed on one another (Nacos & Torres-Reyna, 2007).

4. Stereotyping in Internet Memes and GIFs

Since the current study's focus is analyzing internet memes and GIFs, the researcher decided to provide a deeper more attentive review of the available, still growing, literature on

stereotyping in memes and GIFs. First of all, it is vital to understand that memes and GIFs are open sources for anyone to create, so naturally they tend to reflect the socio-demographic background of their creators, who have been known to typically be white, privileged young men, and thus, commonly replicate well-entrenched hegemonic stereotypes (Milner, 2013). The required web-savvy skills that are needed to produce memes didn't just somehow limit the creators to Caucasian individuals of a higher socioeconomic status, but they have also participated in women being less likely to create them, meaning that the majority of meme creations come from men (Hargittai, 2008). This could be traced to many reasons, like most women believe their content would not be taken seriously (Bosman, 2005), or that the overall user skill of computers and internet is less proficient in females (Hargittai, 2008). So, all those factors are bound to place various implications on the nature of the memes created.

In a study about gender stereotyping and traits in the 2016 Presidential Primary Campaign in the US, Spencer (2017) found that popular American memes focused more negatively on female politicians' appearance than in male politicians, criticizing and negatively commenting on women politicians' appearances or look. She also found that popular internet

Figure 15. A Sarcastic meme of "Hillary Clinton" circulating at the US 2016 elections time.

memes at the period prior to the elections were more negative when discussing females'

characters, skills, and policies, when compared to male counterparts (See Figures 15 & 16).

Figure 16. A Sarcastic meme of "Carly Fiorina" circulating at the US 2016 elections time.

In a different study about sports related memes, and the racial microaggressions and

perceptions they invoke, Dickerson (2015) examines how internet memes use the bodies of

Black and White male athletes to produce and reproduce ideologies of race and gender. The

researchers examined the ways white athletes were portrayed vs. black athletes, finding that the

unique characteristic about those memes was their ability to make commentary about race

without any overt references to race. Black athletes were portrayed as weak, lazy and always

complaining, while white athletes were on the other hand portrayed as heroes and team players

who knew how to fight and push their limits in order to win (For examples see Figures 17 to 22).

Figures 17-21. Examples of Dickerson's analyzed racist sports memes.

Overall, the literature suggests that Internet memes and GIFs are among the most popular viral tools of communication on social media platforms. And although these tools are user generated, that doesn't necessarily mean they are void of frames or stereotypes. Just as traditional media sheds lights on certain topics in certain ways, internet memes and GIFs as well, were found to have the ability to stereotype particular groups, as seen in sarcastic memes making fun of black athletes.

The immediacy and popularity of internet, specifically among younger generations, make stereotypes that are communicated through these heavily utilized social media tools much more effective and dangerous. And because Hijab tends to have overall negative stereotypical visual tones related, it's of importance to find out its image within modern user generated social media tools such as memes and GIFs.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

The present study utilizes both the stereotyping and the Framing theory to analyze the portrayal of veiled women in internet memes and GIFs. Stereotypes are defined as "static and oversimplified ideas about a group or social category that strongly influence our expectations and behaviors". Generally, Stereotypes emerge out of our cultural and socialization patterns and our various interactions with family, friends or peers, existing within the social institutions where we live, work, and play (Thompson & Hickey, 1999).

While framing is defined as "a process in which some aspects of reality are selected, and given greater emphasis or importance, so that the problem is defined, its causes are diagnosed, moral judgments are suggested and appropriate solutions and actions are proposed" (Entman, 2007). Through both those concepts of stereotyping and framing, this study examines the image of hijab portrayed in internet memes and GIFs, the certain frames from which online users are exposed to veil and veiled women, and whether there are any stereotypical images communicated in those memes and GIFs.

1. Framing

Framing theory is choosing certain aspects of an issue and framing as more salient than others, in order to "promote a particular problem definition" (Entman, 1993, p. 52) and influence

people's opinions about the issue. Within the mass media research field, framing theory is related to the agenda-setting theory, but while agenda-setting theory discusses how the importance of issues is set by the media, framing theory focuses on what specific sides or features are highlighted by media or which frame audiences get to view the issue from. In short, in agenda-setting, the media tells you what to think about, whereas in framing, the media gives you their own interpretation and meaning to understand those given topics (McCombs, 2006). As Gitlin (1980) defines them, frames are "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 7), and as O'Neil (2009) puts it "framing is less about cataloguing what is explicitly said than it is about identifying the implicit understandings that are conveyed by the materials" (p. 6).

Canning (2010) argues that it is of importance to not only focus on what is left in or added to intentional frames to highlight specific features in certain topics, but also note what is left out of the frame; adding that these intentional cuts in a perception can form new opinions as well. As a theoretical concept, framing has been the most popular one used in journalism research in recent years (Weaver, 2007). Scholars often study framing in order to track and identify trends in issue definitions, compare coverage across media outlets, and examine variations across types of media (e.g., Semetko & Valkenburg 2000).

There is still debate about the specific definitions of frames and frame analysis and the similarities between framing and agenda-setting, especially second-level agenda-setting, which deals also with selecting and focusing on certain attributes of issues (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). Despite said debates, frame analysis has been central to examining media discourse for decades. Framing analysis is deconstructing media frames, in an effort to uncover how frames

come into being, what their consequences may be, and who benefits from the frames that dominate the discourse. It allows us to consider how specific chosen communication practices play a role in our understandings of issues and phenomena (Dobson & Knezevic, 2018).

In social media, framing comes in many forms, from users generated memes and individual posts to Facebook groups (Scheufele, 1999). Social media blurs the line between media frames and individual frames, and the sheer volume of content on social media can make data selection processes difficult, nevertheless, frame analysis of social media content is an important research pursuit (Qin, 2015).

Within Framing analysis studies, it is found that researchers often analyze text, with less studies focusing on analyzing visuals. By examining the past fifteen years of framing studies from top communication journals, one would find that only 5% of framing studies directly coded visuals, while 12% generally discussed visuals in the interpretation of frames (Matthes, 2009). That might stem from text-based studies being more ubiquitous, since words are easier to code than pictures (Graber, 1990). This lack of attention to visuals is considered a gap in framing literature (Matthes, 2009), and that is one of the reasons the present study not only analyzes visuals, but also uses an integrative framing analysis technique, that allows for a dual-modality content analysis, so as to simultaneously code and analyze both visual and textual elements of the memes and GIFs.

Visually, framing can be done using a number of different techniques such as camera angles or size dimensions. For instance, camera angles showing subjects from above, below or at eye level, from the side or from the back, creates symbolic relations between the image and the viewer. If audiences look up at something or someone, a certain feeling of power is exercised

over them, and if they look down on the image subject, they tend to feel empowered in relation to what they are looking at. Looking at eye level, however, gives viewing audiences a form of symbolic equality. The way image subjects are portrayed can also give a feeling of involvement or detachment (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

Image subjects' eye-contacts can factor in visually framing images as well; in her study about the portrayal of Afghan women in Associated Press Wire Photographs, Fahmy acknowledges that when women look into the viewers' eyes through a photo, an imaginary contact is established (Fahmy, 2004). Emotions conveyed through images also play an important role in humanizing the image subject, researchers argue that when a subject is portrayed in an image smiling or frowning, the viewer forms a relationship with him/her (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

2. Integrative Framing Analysis

In the context of visual framing, most scholars explained that, as a process, visual framing is considered less obtrusive than textual framing in news, mainly due to the realistic nature of photographs and their ability to imitate the appearance of the real world (Messaris & Abraham, 2001).

The interest in studying and analyzing visuals initially started with early advertising research, suggesting that combining the usage of both text and images influenced audiences' responses to advertising (Fahmy et al., 2014; Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017). Studies within the visual communication effects field suggest that imagery generates much stronger effects on cognition, attitudes, and behavior than words do (Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017). Despite this

interest, there is still an overall lack of visual communication studies when compared to text, which mostly stems from "the lack of a clear theoretical model for visual research in the mass communication field and the ambiguity in visuals—factors that slowed the progress of visual studies" (Fahmy et al., 2014, p. 54). Moreover, much of the framing analysis literature focuses either exclusively on the analysis of words or of visuals (Dan, 2017); studies that tried to incorporate a dual modality to analyze both text and images are rare.

Fahmy, Bock and Wanta (2014) explain the largest challenge is developing a systematic approach that has the ability to merge various systems to fully expand our knowledge of the field of visual communication. Within the digital era, images can rarely be seen, or studied, in isolation; they are usually accompanied by text as well. Dan (2017) advocated for an integrative framing analysis in a six-step approach aiming to analyze verbal frames, visual frames and the interplay between them. In recent years, scholars started studying images and their accompanying text in order to generate deeper insights (i.e. Huang & Fahmy, 2013; Liang et al. 2018; Milner, 2013). In the context of memes, few researchers have analyzed both the image and the overlaid text. Milner (2013), for example, analyzed memes about the Occupy Wall Street Movement and found that memes utilize populist argument and popular texts, intertwining them together to generate a vibrant polyvocal public discourse. Liang and colleagues (2018) analyzed Chinese and Taiwanese memes. They found that memes were used as tools to socially or politically influence audience. This study aims to continue bridging that gap in visual and textual research by conducting an integrative quantitative analysis of image-text memes online.

3. The Stereotyping Framework

The first researcher to introduce stereotyping as a concept was Walter Lippmann in 1922, when he referred to the ''pictures in our heads'' explaining that said pictures or ideas that people hold in their minds are not shaped solely by our personal experiences, but also by what we learn from other people. After 50 years of the existing of stereotyping as a concept, Goffman coined the frame analysis theory, providing a theoretical basis for the stereotyping process (Rodgers & Thorson, 2000).

Mass media is said to weigh heavily on people's opinions since they use it to acquire information, further understand a certain issue, or gain more knowledge about specific groups of people, therefore, any mediated misconceptions may result in misunderstanding of the reality of an environment, especially a distant one (Fahmy, 2004). Mostly minorities are the groups who are affected most with stereotyping, since audiences might not have first-hand experiences with, so they resort to media when desiring to build an idea about a minority group. After all, most people learn about foreign events, places and people through visual media (Perlmutter, 1998).

Stereotypes make us feel safe by allowing us a sense of control over our social contacts, and help us reduce uncertainty and avoid risky situations, which is something that has been largely ignored by most theorists. They are what Walter Lippmann called "maps of the world," as they exemplify the universal human tendency to categorize people into groups, followed by imputing the perceived characteristics of the group to those individuals (Schønemann, 2013). Researchers agree that Individuals' negative stereotypes toward outgroup individuals may lead to social problems, such as race bias or segregation based on color or other features (Jin et al., 2017). Among minorities that are stereotyped are women and currently Muslims in western

countries. Since this study examines the image of hijabi[1] Muslim woman in international memes and GIFs, it's important to cover the different stereotypes faced by women in general, and those faced by Muslims as well, because of mass media.

4. Stereotyping in Visual Media

A Stereotype is described as a cognitive structure containing a set of expectations about a certain group or category; they have been used far more often in individuals' personal judgments instead of judgments made of new and personal experiences alone. Mostly, negative stereotypes or characteristics are placed upon out-groups or minorities; who majorities could easily label "the others", who can be culturally, racially or religiously different (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Media has always been believed to be a tool to increase and fuel such stereotypes by its representations of certain social and cultural groups (Lind & Danowski, 1998).

Stereotyping could have many shapes and forms and could be directed towards various societal groups. For instance, among the prominent stereotypes in media is those directed towards females, who are most times depicted in media as less in value, skills or character than their male counterparts. Ullah and Khan (2014) argued that American media portrayed female politicians such as Wendy Davis, Sarah Palin, and Hillary Clinton in a "colder, more robotic, less intelligent light". Adding to that the fact that men dominate the American political sphere, with

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[1] According to the Urban Dictionary, Hijabi refers to a women or girl who wears the Islamic head-covering respectfully, called Hijab. This is the Arabic word for headscarf but isn't limited to that. It also means "cover" or "protection" against evil things in the surrounding world.

only two female primary vice-presidential candidates in the history of the United States, and no female presidents, they suggest that media has a significant role in that, since "women in power are often depicted as cold, or mean, or only depicted in the media at all for their clothing choices.

In 2008, Michelle Obama was unfairly labeled as an "angry black woman" due to her political views (Ross, 2004), suggesting that independent or different opinions are wrongly labeled if they are of women. Also, White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler's shoe collection was described in a magazine in 2013 (Ross, 2004) giving the impression that fashion is more significant as opposed to actual politics in the female world. But on a total contrast, American male politicians are typically portrayed in the media for their skills, accomplishments or failures (Ross, 2004).

Stereotyping of minorities usually appears from time to time in media to serve a specific function. Some obvious examples of the stereotypes' function are the "lazy and ignorant black slave" that served to justify slavery, and that Asians who were portrayed as the "yellow peril" to exclude Asians from entering the United States. Similarly, the negative "Jap" stereotype was used to arouse anti-Japanese emotions and to justify the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (Ghounem & Rahman, 2013). Stereotypes and propaganda have always been used to incite certain emotion among the public and more times than not they succeed in doing so. 150 years ago, the Irish living in the USA were often met with signs of "No Irish need apply," the same way African-Americans were met with "We serve whites only" up to the 1960, and Arabs/Muslims were met by bumper stickers saying "I don't brake for Iraqis" at the time of the Gulf War in the 1990s (Merskin, 2011).

Visual media, namely TV and movies, was often accused of stereotyping; Entman (1990) argued that TV images of race or ethnicity can misinform audiences about the racial minorities in real life and provide evidence for misperceptions of why they should be seen a specific way. For example, early studies have shown that Black Americans are nearly exclusively seen in sitcoms and crime shows, and Latinos are shown as lazy, less articulate, less intelligent, seductive or hot-tempered people. In their study about Hollywood entertainment, Nacos, Brigitte L. and Torres-Reyna (2007) found that three-fourths of Muslim Americans considered the media to be unfair to them and their religion.

5. Gender Stereotyping in Media

Women have been stereotyped in different kinds of media, since they began operating, Tuchman (1979) argues that "the content of the media distorts women's status in the social world" (p.531). From depicting them as sex objects, submissive humans, to victims, females suffer from negative media stereotypes. Stereotyping research concluded that women, just as elderly and minorities, are either absent from media or depicted in inferior stereotypical roles in which the media use to deemphasize their achievements (Ali & Batool, 2015).

Demarest and Garner (1992) found that women tend to be associated with topics related to lifestyles, parenthood and relationships in media coverage, Morris found that women are more likely to be portrayed in media, especially visuals, as sex objects (2006), Ullah and Khan (2014) established that women portraying in newspapers and TV advertisements promote extreme thinness and exposed bodies of women in contrast to the images of men focusing on their faces. Additionally, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) concluded that men were more likely to be shown in

occupational roles outside their habitat, while women were shown less in occupational roles and more likely to be portrayed as housewives or mothers. And even when women were portrayed working outside their homes, they have been working jobs that have been stereotypically filled by women, such as a secretary or a nurse (Goffman, 1976).

Goffman also found out that women have been portrayed as sexy, dependent, uncompetitive, passive and shy in media (1976). By the same token, Collins (2011) argued that women are portrayed as objects, subordinated and as victims that needs to be saved. In newspaper images, women were usually portrayed as weak and in need of saving; Bridge (1997) stated that women appear more frequently than men in a negative form in front pages of newspapers, in the form of victims who have been abused, kidnapped or killed, and Fahmy (2004) found that although Afghan women in AP wire photographs after the fall of Taliban were portrayed as more involved in their communities, they still were depicted covered and submissive.

6. Muslims Stereotyping in Media

Some researchers argue that stereotyping of Muslims in the media is not that different of that of any other minority group, in fact it is quite similar to how most minority groups are depicted, in a negative stereotypical way, explaining that Muslims stereotyping is not unique and all minorities in the United States have struggled at some point with the media's stereotyping that has forced them into specific roles or described them in a specific way. In the United States, the perceptions of who to consider as outgroups or stereotyped is a continuous process that gets affected by foreign and domestic forces, and has in reality little to do with the specific out-group.

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Previously it has been the Irish, African- Americans, Japanese or Jews that have been among the out-groups, which have experienced negative media stereotyping and currently it is the Muslims' turn to be in the spotlight (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008). While others agree that Muslims in general have been heavily portrayed in media as terrorists who may not only be plotting the destruction of the West from the Middle East but may even be plotting the United States destruction from the suburban townhouse next door (Perlmutter, 1998). Shaheen (2001) presents similar thoughts in a study of nearly 1000 Hollywood movies, suggesting a tendency within the US media, especially the film industry, to portray Muslim Arabs as uncivilized "others".

Representation of Muslims comes often with topics devoted to terrorism and terrorism related stories. In their study about the Images of Islam in the UK, Moore et. al (2008) found that 36 percent of stories about British Muslims overall are about terrorism. They also concluded that the bulk of coverage of British Muslims, around two thirds, focuses on Muslims as a terrorist threat, a problem, or both.

Using visual representations and language in news, movies, cartoons, and magazine stories, the media and popular culture have participated in the construction of an evil Arab stereotype that encompasses a wide variety of people, ideas, beliefs, religions, and assumptions. For instance, audiences often find the most common traits associated with Arabs or Muslims in movies to be cruelty and barbarism (Shaheen, 2001). Merskin (2009) also adds that after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, different types of American media characterized Muslims and people of Arab/Middle Eastern descent as monolithic evil terrorists, and often referred to them using words like "demons," "wanted: dead or alive".

As for Muslim women, research have shown that they are usually visually represented in overgeneralized ways, either as oppressed, subordinate, and submissive others or as liberated progressives who refuse adhering to Western hegemony (Khan & Zahra, 2015). Veiled Muslim women are also portrayed as weak, uneducated, passives that hold no real authority over their own lives, which makes it easier for people to discriminate against them than some other minority groups, because the veil reveals that she is part of the Muslim out-group (Tasnuva, 2013).

According to Schonemann (2013), these stereotypes are dangerous, because in this modern world, people have neither the time nor the will to revise stereotypical beliefs. Therefore, if any of those subjected to stereotypical images of Muslims in media actually encounter a Muslim in real life, it becomes way easier to believe said stereotypes rather than get to know the person. If audiences are presented with TV-shows, news, or personal experiences that correspond successfully with what they anticipated, the stereotype is reinforced for the future (Lippmann, 2007).

Framing and stereotyping are among the heavily studied and applied theoretical concepts within media research, which stems from their wide effect on public opinion. The two concepts are seen as necessary and complementary frameworks to this study, as they both provide guidance for answering the research questions cited in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Research Questions

Based on previous quantitative research on internet memes and the limited literature on GIFs, the researcher poses five exploratory research questions, in order to find out how hijab and hijabi women are represented in internet memes and GIFs, and examine stereotyping roles within social media tools.

Internet memes often employ both text and visuals to communicate messages (Gil, 2016), while GIFs on the other hand can make use of added text or utilize only visuals (Newman, 2016). The researcher inquiries about the visual versus textual elements used in both internet memes and GIFs.

- **RQ1 a:** How are visual versus textual elements used in internet memes?
- **RQ1 b:** How are visual versus textual elements used in GIFs?
- **RQ1 c** How do memes differ from GIFs in utilizing text and visuals?

To answer these questions the study examines each internet meme and GIF within the sample and highlights whether it employs visuals only, or both textual and visual elements.

The advent of the internet gave hope that it would make previously marginalized actors and arguments more visible to a broader public (Gerhards & Schafer, 2010). However, researchers still argue that this visibility comes within certain frames. Since social media blurs the line between media frames and individual frames (Qin, 2015), the researcher sets out to examine the frames from which contemporary hijab is viewed in internet memes and GIFs.

- **RQ2 a:** How do internet memes visually frame hijab?

- **RQ2 b:** How do GIFs visually frame hijab?

To find the answer to these questions, the researcher employs a set of variables for coding memes and GIFs, adopted from previous visual analysis research examining women portrayal. (Fahmy, 2004; Bowe et al., 2019). The variables include visual subordination level, as well as the techniques used to establish an imaginary relation between the women in memes and GIFs and the audiences, like eye-contact or emotional appeals.

Women in general suffer from stereotyping in visual media, often represented as sex objects, dependent, uncompetitive, passive and shy (Goffman, 1976). Moreover, negative stereotyping is nothing new to the image of Muslim women. They have been negatively stereotyped and portrayed as submissive, weak, uneducated, and overall victims (Tasnuva, 2013). The researcher aims to find out whether these negative stereotypes are evident in internet memes and GIFs.

- **RQ3 a:** Do internet memes negatively stereotype hijabi women?

- **RQ3 b:** Do GIFs negatively stereotype hijabi women?

As literature suggests, memes and Gifs are emotional by nature (Kadir & Lokman, 2013), because they rely on gripping the audiences' attention and persuading them to share or retweet. The images users see within these viral communication tools stick with audiences and defines their understanding of certain groups. The study inquires whether internet memes and GIFs portray veiled women in subordinate or submissive traditional roles.

- **RQ4 a:** Do internet memes portray hijabi women in submissive traditional roles?

- **RQ4 b:** Do GIFs portray hijabi women in submissive traditional roles?

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Internet memes and GIFs are sometimes regarded by researchers as the same thing. Heiskanen (2017) for instance, categorizes GIFs as a format on internet memes. Therefore, the study aims to underline the general tone of portraying hijab in memes and GIFs, and highlight the difference, if there are any, between them.

- RQ5: Do internet memes and GIFs differ in tone when portraying hijab?

To answer this question, each internet meme and GIF within the sample is analyzed and coded as supporting or opposing hijab, then the researcher examines the difference between them.

Chapter Five

Methodology

To address the mentioned questions, the present study uses a quantitative content analysis of internet memes and GIFs. The quantitative analysis serves to examine the frames used in memes and GIFs to portray hijab, underline the related emotions of veil and veiled women in such viral social media tools, and find out whether there are notable differences between the portrayal of hijab in memes and their portrayal in GIFs. The chosen method of the study is a content analysis, since it makes for the most suitable system to answer the study's exploratory questions about internet memes and GIFs.

1. Data Gathering and Sampling

In order to achieve so, a purposive sample of both memes and GIFs is chosen from the most popular and re-shared internet memes and GIFs online on March 2019. The data collection period closely followed the New Zealand terrorist attacks against Muslims that took place in Christchurch, where a white supremacist murdered 50 Muslims during their Friday prayer and injured another 50, in what was referred to by the country's Prime Minister "Jacinda Ardern" as "one of New Zealand's darkest days". One of the attacks was the first ever to be live-streamed in real-time on the social media platform "Facebook", which closely relates to the study's concept of the salience and effectiveness of modern social media tools within all aspects of our lives, even terrorism and its propaganda.

Furthermore, the choice of March 2019, as the data collection month was also because it's the National Women's History Month, with the International Women's Day falling on March

8 every year[2]. Both these reasons caused hijab to be a very hot topic for online discussions, making it a perfect time to draw the hijab sample of internet memes and GIFs from within.

Two separate data sets were collected as sample for the study, they accounted to a total of 400 memes and GIFs. First the researcher decided upon the study's population, which was done by searching on all memes and GIFs databases using the keyword "Hijab", then compiling all the memes and GIFs that were tagged using the keyword, in order to draw a purposive sample of the most popular memes and GIFs from that population.

There are no official databases of memes or GIFs available to researchers, since those tools are often considered open sources for audiences to use and create new ones if they desire. However, based on the previous literature, it was found that the two websites that have been used most as sources of data in previous media-related studies concerning memes are "knowyourmeme.com" and "memebase.com". And the most used database website for GIFs is "Giphy"[3].

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[2] According to the UN Official Website, The United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day in the International Women's Year, 1975. In 1977, the United Nations General Assembly invited member states to proclaim March 8 as the UNDay for women's rights and world peace.

[3] knowyourmeme.com and memebase.com are websites that act as huge databases for memes, and Giphy is a database for GIFs. Based on previous literature, these websites are the most popular and academically cited memes and GIFs directories online.

Therefore, the online memes sample is drawn from Google images, knowyourmeme.com, and memebase.com. The researcher chose to use those two specific websites because they are the two largest ones attempting to compile a database of the large amount of Internet memes available (Bo¨rzsei, 2013). Additionally, Google images tool is included as well, since it remains one of the largest search tools that allows one to search the web for various images using different keywords. The sample consisted of the top most popular memes that were circulated online using the hashtag #Hijab.

As for the internet GIFs, their purposive sample is drawn from "Giphy.com", as well as google images, after choosing the "Search include only GIFs" option, for the same reason that Google is considered the largest and most inclusive database for GIFs as well.

Moreover, to be inclusive of the current image of hijab in online media the researcher included 10 percent of the sample from internet memes and GIFs that were circulated on "Twitter", one of the most influential social media platforms, in March 2019.

In order to acquire the hijab internet memes and GIFs from twitter, the researcher employed a new bespoke analysis tool, Mecodify[4], that captures big data from Twitter. Mecodify allows the researcher to choose if the sample includes tweets with images, videos, links… etc.

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[4] According to Mecodify's documentation (Al-Saqaf, 2016), the web search of the tool behaves exactly like the web search function on twitter.com. One limitation of twitter.com's web search is the inability to fetch all the information (such as the time and account) of the retweets. To obtain this information, one would have needed to purchase a premium Twitter API package. However, this was not

The researcher used Mecodify and specified the gathering criteria to include tweets published in the month of March using the hashtag #hijab, and since the study only analyzes memes and GIFs, another search criterion to encompass only tweets with images and videos was added. Once all of the image and video tweets were identified, the researcher manually filtered them to disregard regular images and videos and select only internet memes and GIFs. They were then sorted in a descending order by the most retweeted, to include the most popular retweeted ones within the study's sample.

After identifying the sample, which accounted to top 200 online memes and top 200 GIFs (400 total sample), using the #hijab hashtag, a careful coding analysis, according to a set of variables, was carried out to identify the frames, stereotypes and general tone of hijab portrayal in internet memes and GIFs.

2. Memes and GIFs Coding

A total of 400 memes and GIFs with the hashtag #Hijab were coded, with the unit of analysis being either a single meme or a single GIF, and a detailed set of categories was developed (See Appendix). These categories were adapted from a 2019 study conducted by Bowe, Gosen, and Fahmy, tackling the image of burkini -the modest Muslim swimsuit- in the three leading international newswires Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, and Reuters, as well as another study examining the portrayal of Afghan women in AP Wire Photographs (Fahmy, 2004).

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necessary in our case since we are only concerned with the original tweets, which are captured fully using Mecodify's web search functionality.

Both studies' variables were chosen to be followed as guideline for creating the variables of the present study, due to the resemblance in the nature of both studies and their questions, with the current research.

After altering the coding variables for the present study, the researcher/main coder coded each meme and GIF according to the following variables:

Visual/Textual Elements Availability: Each meme and GIF were coded as including textual elements only, including visual elements only, or including both elements. To be coded as visual including visual elements only, memes or GIFs had to be void of any text and rely only on pictures or videos in communicating online messages. And typically, the category of "visuals including both text and images" consisted of memes and GIFs that rely on both elements in communicating the message (Bowe et al., 2019) (For examples, see Figures 22 & 23).

Figure 22. A GIF using visual elements only.

Figure 23. A meme using both textual and visual elements.

Visibility of Hijab in Memes and GIFs: Each meme and GIF were coded as having hijab

evidently seen in them or not (For examples, See figures 24 & 25).

Figure 24. A meme where hijab is not seen.

Figure 25. A meme where hijab is clearly seen.

Visual Subordination: This variable was divided into two sub-variables, the first being

the *Body Coverage Type* seen in memes and GIFs, where visuals were coded as having women

in hijab, niqab, or including unveiled women. And the second being the *Type of Hijab* seen in

memes and GIFs, where visuals were coded as including women wearing stylish or colorful

hijab, as opposed to women wearing traditional all black hijab (Bowe et al., 2019) (For

examples, See figures 26 to 29).

Figure 26. A meme depicting a Niqabi Woman.

Figure 27. A meme depicting a modern hijabi Woman.

Figure 28. A meme depicting a traditional hijabi Woman

Figure 29. A meme depicting a woman with no hijab on.

Imaginary Relation Established with the Viewer: Here, the relation with viewer variable was classified into two coding elements; the first is the *Eye Contact* of women in the meme or GIF, where visuals were coded as smiling, or starring directly at the camera. And the other is the *Emotion Underlined in the Visuals*, where memes and GIFs were coded as happy, sad, humorous/sarcastic, challenging, inspiring, or neutral (Fahmy, 2004; Bowe et al., 2019) (For examples, see Figures 30 & 31).

Figure 30. A GIF depicting a starring eye contact.

Figure 31. A meme conveying sarcasm/humor.

Point of View: Here as well, that variable had two categories, the first dealt with camera angles, where memes and GIFs were coded as having a high, low, or eye-level angle. While the second tackled the level of women engagement or detachment in memes and GIFs, that included whether women are seen from their front, profile, or back sides. When a subject is photographed at eye level it is often perceived by audiences as neutral, while shots from above eye level are negative and from below are positive (Coleman, 2010).

Camera angle is significant in visual representations because research showed that when a viewer is looking up at an image's subject matter, they are in some way inferior to it; as opposed to if the viewer gazes down on the subject matter, they are given some sense of power

over it; and a relationship of equality is suggested when the viewer and subject matter are at the same level (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The level of engagement is important to examine as well, since research suggests that frontal angles create stronger engagement from viewers than "oblique" angles (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Moreover, when a subject in a photograph is looking directly at the viewer, it conveys honesty (Coleman, 2010).

Social Distance: this variable had two elements. The first one focused on the visual's *Shot*, which is a term used in film language to refer to how much of a figure is shown within a frame. Types of shots are categorized in long shot, full shot, three-quarter shot, medium shot, and head-and-shoulders, and close-up (Monaco, 2000). A medium shot, from waist up, is considered neutral, while a close-up, head and shoulders, is perceived as positive and a long shot, showing the full figure, is seen as negative (Berger, 1981). Thus, in these study internet memes and Gifs were coded as having close-up, medium, or long shots.

When exploring distance of subject matter within images, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) suggested that close-up images of people has the effect of creating an intimate relationship between the subject and the audience. They deliver the impression of standing closer to the subject, so the subject is perceived as being "more liked" than someone photographed from a distance (Coleman, 2010).

The other element of the Social distance variable dealt with dealing with the *Focus*, which relates to how much of the scene is in focus from foreground to background (Monaco, 2000). Lester (2005) suggests that when subjects appear larger in a frame or in the foreground,

viewers often assume power relationships. Therefore, memes and GIFs in the study are coded as portraying women in the foreground or background.

Behavior: This variable had three different ways to code memes and GIFs. The first was the "*Candid Vs Staged*" sub-variable, in which memes and GIFs were coded as having women posing for the camera, addressing the photographer, or being candid and natural. The second coded visuals based on whether women were *Sitting or Standing* in them, and the third was concerned with the *Physical Activity*, in which memes and GIFs were coded as walking, playing sports or running, protesting, or posing for the photograph (Bowe et al., 2019) (For examples, See Figures 32 & 33).

Figure 32. A meme coded as a candid shot.

Figure 33. A GIF of a hijabi women skating, coded in the *playing sports* category.

Previous literature showed Muslim covered women in submissive subordinate roles (Fahmy, 2004; Posetti, 2006), so these variable elements are to examine the different activities performed by women in hijab within analyzed internet memes and GIFs

General Women Portrayal: Within this variable, memes and GIFs were coded according to whether women were depicted alone or with others, to underline the digital identity or persona of hijabi women (Fahmy, 2004) in internet memes and GIFs.

Hijab Support Vs Opposition: This variable coded memes and GIFs, as visuals pro-hijab, anti-hijab, or neutral. Coding took into consideration both the visuals and the text added to them, if available, in order to arrive to the final coding decision (Bowe et al., 2019) (For examples, see Figure 34 & 35).

Figure 34. A collection of memes and GIFs coded as Anti-hijab.

Figure 35. A collection of memes and GIFs coded as Pro-hijab.

After the researcher completed 10 percent of the coding process, a second coder was asked to code the same 10 percent of the visuals (20 memes and 20 GIFs), to check the coding process reliability. The second coder is a Journalism and Mass Communication graduate student at the American University in Cairo, with an academic as well as communication background. The main researcher explained the coding sheet in details to the second coder and familiarized her with the study and sample before the coding process started.

That inter-coder reliability test revealed that for all variables, the rate of agreement by chance was higher than 0.751 using Scott's Pi (see Scott, 1955). Specifically, for Visibility of Hijab in Memes and GIFs, the Engagement Vs. Detachment Level, and the Camera Shots, the rate of agreement was 1. As for the Body Coverage Type, the Camera Angles, the Inanimate levels in visuals, the Focus on women, the Types of Hijab Portrayed, and the General Portrayal of Women, the rate of agreement was 0.90. For the Eye Contact, and the Hijab Support or Opposition category, the agreement rate was 0.85. The agreement rate for the Emotions was 0.75. And for the Level of Candidness, and the Physical Activity Level, it was 0.95.

Following the intercoder reliability process, the researcher completed coding the full sample (N=400) and produced data sets that were later processed through the statistical program, SPSS. SPSS was chosen as the statistical analysis program for this study because of its specialization in social sciences, as it was the most suitable and reliable way to extract results from the study's completed data. Chi square tests were used to reveal differences between GIFs and internet memes in the portrayal of hijab.

Chapter Six

Results

Visibility of Hijab in Memes and GIFs:

Results of the analyzed internet memes and GIFs with the hashtag #hijab revealed that

hijab was not actually seen in all memes and GIFs. The percentage of the memes where hijab

was not visibly seen was way higher than that of GIFs; about 23 percent of memes did not

portray hijab, as opposed to only 3.5 percent of GIFs, A Chi Square test revealed a significant

difference between the visibility of hijab between memes and GIFs, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentages of actual Hijab/veil shown in memes and GIFs (N=400).

HIJAB/VEIL SHOWN	MEMES	GIFS	TOTAL
Yes	154 (77%)	193 (96.5%)	347 (86.8%)
No	46 (23%)	7 (3.5%)	53 (13.3%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)	200 (100%)	400 (100%)

- *Chi-square* = 33.081, *p* < .001

RQ1 a inquired about the visual versus textual elements used in internet memes. To answer this

question each meme was coded to reveal whether it included visuals only or visuals and text. The

vast majority of memes (97%) included both visual and textual elements, while a very small

percentage (3%) of memes showed usage of visual elements only.

Similarly, **RQ1 b** sought to answer the same question in GIFs, and results showed that

most analyzed GIFs relied on visuals only. About 52 percent of GIFs used only visuals in

communicating messages, with only 47 percent using both visuals and text.

Results of a chi-square test revealed significant differences between internet memes and

GIFs in the usage of textual and visual elements (χ = 123.02, *p* < .001), as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentages of Visual/Textual elements of Hijab in memes and GIFs (N=399).

*VISUAL/TEXTUAL ELEMENTS**	*MEMES*	*GIFS*	*TOTAL*
Visual elements only	6 (3%)	105 (52.8%)	111 (27.8%)
Both visual and textual elements	194 (97%)	94 (47.2%)	288 (72.2%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)	199 (100%)	399 (100%)

*Note: For this analysis, one category (Textual elements only) was removed from analysis, as it was only one GIF.
- *Chi-square* = 123.02, *p* < .001

Several variables were utilized to answer **RQ2 a** that examined visual framing of hijab in internet memes. This included analyzing *visual subordination* and the *established imaginary relation with the viewer.* Results found that hijab was portrayed more than niqab and unveiled women in memes. About three quarters of memes in the study's sample (73%) portrayed hijab, while 18 percent portrayed unveiled women, and only 10 percent showed niqab. As for modern versus traditional hijab, results showed that the majority of memes examined (59.5%) showed modern hijabi women wearing colorful veils and stylish downs, while only 19 percent showed the traditional all black hijab in memes.

As for the established imaginary relation with the viewer in memes, most analyzed memes didn't show eye contact, 35.5 percent showed smiling women, and only 13 percent showed women with penetrating stares. Also, about seven in every ten memes analyzed (69.5%) communicated humorous or sarcastic feelings, and the rest of memes communicated emotions like happiness, sadness, and challenge.. etc. (See Table 3).

Table 3: Frequency and Percentages of Framing Variables in memes (N=200).

FRAMING VARIABLES	MEMES
Visual Subordination	
Body Coverage Type:	
Hijab	147 (73%)
Unveiled	18 (9%)
Niqab	10 (5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Modern Vs Traditional Hijab:	
Modern	119 (59.5%)
Not Applicable	43 (21.5%)
Traditional	38 (19%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Imaginary Relation with Viewer	
Contact:	
Smiling	71 (35.5%)
Penetrating Stare	26 (13%)
None	103 (51.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Emotion:	
Humorous/Sarcastic	139 (69.5%)
Challenging	14 (7%)
Sad/Disbelief	17 (8.5%)
Happy	15 (7.5%)
Inspiring	11 (5.5%)
Neutral	4 (2%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

The same framing variables were employed to examine GIFs to answer *RQ2 b*. Results showed that the vast majority of analyzed GIFs portrayed hijab (91.5%), while niqab and unveiled women were only portrayed in 8 percent of the examined GIFs each. Also, most analyzed GIFs (86.5%) showed modern hijabi women, as opposed to 20 percent showing women wearing the traditional black hijab.

As for the established imaginary relation with the viewer in GIFs, more than half of GIFs examined (56.5%) showed women smiling, with only 10 percent showing women with penetrative stares. Happiness was the most common emotion communicated in GIFs; almost four in ten GIFs (38.5%) conveyed happiness. This was followed by challenging emotions, which was found in almost one fourth of the examined GIFs (23%), and the least common emotion communicated in GIFs was sadness, with only 9 percent of GIFs. (See Table 4).

Table 4: Frequency and Percentages of Framing Variables in GIFs (N=200).

FRAMING VARIABLES	GIFS
Visual Subordination	
Body Coverage Type:	
Hijab	183 (91.5%)
Niqab	8 (4%)
Unveiled	8 (4%)
Not Applicable	1 (.5)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Modern Vs Traditional Hijab:	
Modern	173 (86.5%)
Traditional	20 (10%)
Not Applicable	7 (3.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Imaginary Relation with Viewer	
Contact:	
Smiling	113 (56.5%)
Penetrating Stare	20 (10%)
None*	67 (33.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Emotion:	
Happy	77 (38.5%)
Challenging	46 (23%)
Humorous/Sarcastic	22 (11%)
Inspiring	22 (11%)
Sad/Disbelief	18 (9%)
Neutral	15 (7.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

*Note: *None* category was coded for GIFs with no eye-contact

Results of the *point of view*, and *social distance* variables answer ***RQ3 a***, which examined whether hijab was negatively stereotyped in internet memes. Regarding the point of view, it was found that almost nine in ten internet memes (91%) showed subjects from an eye-level equal angle. A small percentage of 5.5 percent showed them from low angle, and 3.5 percent of memes examined showed subjects from high angles. Additionally, three fourth of internet memes (77.5%) showed women from the front, while only 13 percent showed them from their profiles. It's also worth mentioning that no memes showed women from their backs.

Table 5: Frequency and Percentages of Stereotyping Variables in Memes (N=200).

STEREOTYPING VARIABLES	*MEMES*
Point of View	
Camera Angle:	
Equal Angle	182 (91%)
Low Angle	11 (5.5%)
High Angle	7 (3.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Level of Engagement/Detachment:	
Front	155 (77.5%)
Profile	26 (13%)
Back	0 (0%)
Not Applicable	19 (9.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Social Distance	
Shot:	
Close-up Shot	131 (65.5%)
Medium Shot	43 (21.5%)
Long Shot	26 (13%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Focus:	
Subject in Foreground	159 (79.5%)
Subject in Background	18 (9%)
Not Applicable	23 (11.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

Most memes included closeup shots and showed women in the foreground. About 65.5 percent of internet memes were closeups, as opposed to 21.5 percent showing medium shots, and a small percentage of 13 percent with long shots. Almost 8 in 10 of analyzed memes (79.5%) depicted women in the foreground, as seen in Table 5 above.

RQ3 b examining GIFs' stereotypes of hijab was answered using the same *point of view* and *social distance* variables. Results showed that the vast majority of GIFs (98.5%) showed women from their front. Results also showed that 90 percent of GIFs examined were videos shot from an equal eye-level angle, while only 9 percent were shot from low angles.

Table 6: Frequency and Percentages of Stereotyping Variables in GIFs (N=200).

STEREOTYPING VARIABLES	GIFS
Point of View	
Camera Angle:	
Equal Angle	180 (90%)
Low Angle	18 (9%)
High Angle	2 (1%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Level of Engagement/Detachment:	
Front	197 (98.5%)
Profile	1 (.5%)
Back	1 (.5%)
Not Applicable	1 (.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Social Distance	
Shot:	
Close-up Shot	126 (63%)
Medium Shot	51 (25.5%)
Long Shot	23 (11.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Focus:	
Subject in Foreground	188 (94%)
Subject in Background	9 (4.5%)
Not Applicable	3 (1.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

The majority of GIFs analyzed were closeup videos (63%), with one fourth (25.5%) using medium shots and 11.5 percent using long shots. The vast majority of GIFs analyzed (94%) showed women in the foreground, as seen in Table 6 above.

RQ4 a asked if internet memes portray hijabi women in submissive traditional roles. The *Behavior* and *General Portrayal* variables attempted to answer this question. For the behavior elements, the majority of memes (63.5%) were of subjects posing for the camera, as opposed to memes with subjects addressing the photograph and memes with candid shots, which both accounted for 33 percent each.

A little less than half the memes examines (45%) depicted subjects sitting, while 43.5 percent showed them standing. Moreover, almost seven in ten memes (69%) showed women posing for the camera, as opposed to one in each ten memes (11%) portraying women walking.

As for the general portrayal of women in memes, a great majority of memes analyzed (74.5%) depicted women alone, while 20 percent depicted them with others or in groups (See Table 7).

The same two variables above of behavior and general portrayal were employed to answer *RQ4 b*, which set out to find whether women were portrayed in submissive roles. Results showed that almost half of women in examined GIFs (46.5%) were posing for the camera or aware that they are being videotaped, while 37 percent of GIFs included women addressing the photograph and only a small percentage of 16.5 percent were candid videos.

Almost half of women in GIFs were videotaped sitting (48.5%) while 39 percent were shown standing. As for physical activity, the majority of GIFs as well (64.5%) included women posing for the camera, with 17 percent of GIFs showing them playing sports or running, and only

65

6 percent showing women walking. The majority of GIFs (72%) depicted women alone, while

only 25.5 percent showed women with others, as seen in Table 8.

Table 7: Frequency and Percentages of the Submissive Women Portrayal elements in memes (N=200).

SUBMISSIVE WOMEN PORTRAYAL	MEMES
Behavior	
Candid Vs Staged	
Posing for Camera	127 (63.5%)
Addressing Photographer	33 (16.5%)
Candid Shot	33 (16.5%)
Not Applicable	7 (3.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Inanimate State:	
Sitting	90 (45%)
Standing	87 (43.5%)
*Not Applicable	23 (11.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Physically Active State:	
Posing for Photograph	138 (69%)
Walking	11 (5.5%)
Running/Playing Sports	6 (3%)
Protesting	4 (2%)
Not Applicable	41 (20.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
General Portrayal	
Alone	149 (74.5%)
With Others	40 (20%)
Protesting	2 (1%)
Other	9 (4.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

*Note: For this analysis, the *Not Applicable category* included memes in which it was not clear whether the subject was sitting or standing.

Table 8: Frequency and Percentages of the Submissive Women Portrayal elements in GIFs (N=200).

SUBMISSIVE WOMEN PORTRAYAL	GIFS
Behavior	
Candid Vs Staged	
Posing for Camera	93 (46.5%)
Addressing Photographer	74 (37%)
Candid Shot	33 (16.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Inanimate State:	
Sitting	97 (48.5%)
Standing	78 (39%)
Not Applicable	25 (12.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
Physically Active State:	
Posing for Photograph	129 (64.5%)
Running/Playing Sports	34 (17%)
Walking	12 (6%)
Protesting	3 (1.5%)
Not Applicable	22 (11%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)
General Portrayal	
Alone	144 (72%)
With Others	51 (25.5%)
Protesting	5 (2.5%)
TOTAL	200 (100%)

RQ5 asked whether internet memes and GIFs differ in tone when portraying hijab, and results showed that overall hijab was more supported in both memes and GIFs.

Regarding tone, results of a chi-square test revealed significant differences between memes and GIFs in portrayal of hijab ($\chi = 61.59$, $p < .001$). While the portrayal of hijab was generally positive in both memes and GIFs, results showed that significantly more GIFs (75.5%) supported hijab versus only 47.7 percent of memes. Overall data showed significantly less anti-hijab GIFs (7.5%) as opposed to 41.2 percent in memes (See Table 9).

Table 9: Frequency and Percentages of Pro Vs Anti-hijab memes and GIFs (N=399).

PRO/ANTI HIJAB*	MEMES	GIFS	TOTAL
Pro-Hijab	95 (47.7%)	150 (75%)	245 (61.4%)
Anti- Hijab	82 (41.2%)	15 (7.5%)	97 (24.3%)
Neutral	22 (11.1%)	35 (17.5%)	57 (14.3%)
TOTAL	199 (100%)	200 (100%)	399 (100%)

*Note: For this analysis, one meme was removed from coding as the variable wasn't applicable on it.
- *Chi-square* = 61.59, *p* < .001

Chapter Seven

Discussion

This study examined internet memes and GIFs that circulated online using the hashtag #hijab, in an effort to highlight the visual representation of veil in those modern social media tools. The hijab debate has come to symbolize the clash of cultures that was fueled by links to Islamic extremism and 21st century terrorism. Muslim women are portrayed by the Western traditional media either as submissive victims who don't have freedom of choice and require liberating, or as threat to the Western societies in which they reside because of their choice to adopt traditional Islamic dress. Thus, dividing the feminist movement with conflicting claims that hijab is a symbol of both oppression and freedom of expression (Posetti, 2006).

The significance of the study stems from contributing to the growing literature of memes and the limited literature of GIFs, as well as highlighting the current frames and stereotypes used to view hijab by social media, in order to examine the stereotypical portrayal of hijabi women in new social communication tools.

Hijab has been the focus of often fierce media debates, especially over the past decade (Lorber, 2002). Recently, it has been the focus of media discussions after the rise of Islamophobia and the series of attacks against Muslims, the most prominent being the two attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The New Zealand terrorist attacks were a focal point in current media discussions related to Islam and Muslim communities. One of those

attacks was recorded and livestreamed in real time using the "Facebook Live" technique, causing online discussions about Muslims, their integration within western societies, and the symbol of the Muslim women modest veil.

Hijab has been negatively stereotyped in traditional media, as Muslim women were often depicted as submissive, oppressed and abused, and sometimes even as terrorists (Schønemann, 2013; Ajrouch, 2007; Lorber, 2002). However, internet memes and GIFs should not be grouped together with traditional media, as they differ in terms of creators, communication channels, level of interactivity, and usage patterns.

Previous researchers conducted qualitative studies of memes (i.e. Bohman, 2017; Montenegro, 2018), with less focus on quantitative studies that analyze memes and their usages. As for GIFs, most conducted research was explanatory about the GIF phenomenon itself (i.e. Mufson, 2017; McCarthy, 2017; Miltner & Highfield, 2017) and very few studies analyzed GIFs' usage purposes, patterns, or the image they convey of a certain issue. Some researchers even considered GIFs as being a format of internet memes (Heiskanen, 2017).

Guided by previous memes and GIFs literature and the evident gaps within these research aspects, the study used quantitative content analysis as a method to unravel hijab frames and stereotypes in internet memes and GIFs. The study aimed to examine whether that same visual representations of hijabi Muslim women -submissive victims or threat to western societies- are evident in content that is not created for traditional types of media, but rather user generated such as internet memes and GIFs.

The content analysis helped identify the image of hijab in these social media tools and highlight the differences between memes and GIFs in terms of hijab portrayal. Results revealed

that internet memes and GIFs don't show the traditional image of black-dressed hijabi women like traditional media visuals. Instead, it was found that the hijabi women portrayed in internet memes and GIFs examined are often dressed in stylish modern way, with colorful dresses or gowns (For examples, see Figures 36 & 37).

Figure 36. A Meme depicting a woman wearing colorful stylish hijab.

Figure 37. A GIF depicting women wearing colorful stylish hijab.

This comes as a contradiction to the hijab image in traditional media visuals, which often showed hijabi women in black unstylish garments (Posetti, 2006), and the overall coverage of Arab and Muslims with negative and racist tones (Manning, 2004).

This might be traced to two reasons; the first is that internet memes and GIFs are modern tools that just rose to popularity among the internet audiences a few years ago. Therefore, it is not surprising for them to use visuals that comply with the current image of modern hijabi women, especially with the rise of several hijabi models on the covers of fashion magazines, or social media platforms like Instagram.

Studies found that contemporary Muslim women are more aware of creating their own identity on social media platforms like Instagram, regardless of the social interpretation attached to them (Waninger, 2015). Thus, it seems appropriate for modern social media tools like memes and GIFs to adopt the same tone of current online images of colorful stylish veiled women seen on Instagram and other social media platforms.

The second reason might be because internet memes and GIFs differ from traditional media in terms of senders or creators. Memes and GIFs are user generated visuals that anyone can create and upload online, shall they desire. They are popular culture units that are generated, circulated, and transformed by internet users (Shifman, 2013). Additionally, researchers believe that within today's modern online world, the general public are no longer simply consumers of preconstructed messages but people who are shaping, sharing, reframing, and remixing media content in ways that allow them to spread content far beyond their immediate physical location (Scott, 2019).

Still that result is surprising, considering that previous studies found that the average memes and GIFs creators are white Caucasian males of a higher socioeconomic status (Hargittai, 2008), therefore not many females engage in generating content in the form of memes and GIFs, either for the lack of required skills or for the fear of their content not being taken seriously (Bosman, 2005). So, the colorful modern image of hijab in analyzed internet memes and GIFs mostly came through the eyes of the white males with high socio-economic status.

Furthermore, the majority of analyzed memes and GIFs portrayed women in hijab, as opposed to a small percentage showing unveiled women or women in Niqab, communicating an overall less conservative look on veiled Muslim women. That, however, was expected and could

be explained by the fact that the hashtag #hijab was used to collect this study's sample. Therefore, it is not clear whether results would still be the same, had the sample been drawn from memes and GIFs using a different hashtag.

The majority of hijab memes analyzed were found to be sarcastic or humorous in nature, which aligns with previous meme literature suggesting that memes usually employ humor in order to create striking satirical affects, and that they are aimed at satirical humor in order to engage the public (Shifman, 2011; Milner, 2013). However, results have also showed that this is not the case for GIFs. Most analyzed hijab GIFs did not employ humor, but rather conveyed happiness followed by challenging emotions. This result suggests that memes and GIFs, although being two of the most used viral social media tools, are not similar in nature after all.

In traditional media, hijabi women are often seen as shy, sad or submissive (Khan & Zahra, 2015). Thus, the previous findings strongly suggest that the frames used to portray hijab and hijabi women in internet memes and GIFs completely differ from those of traditional media. Internet memes and GIFs were found to portray Muslim females as stylish women who are often seen happy.

Another surprising finding was that hijab is not visibly seen in all internet memes and GIFs that are shared under the hashtag #hijab. Some of the researched internet memes and GIFs that are circulated with the hashtag #hijab included images of unveiled women and sometimes even men (For examples, see Figures 38 & 39).

Figure 38. A hijab Meme with no hijab portrayed.

Figure 39. A hijab Meme with no hijab portrayed.

Results also helped highlight the difference between internet memes and GIFs, suggesting that they can't be treated as one category. The study followed a dual-modality content analysis technique, to examine both textual and visual elements of internet memes and GIFs. It was found that internet memes and GIFs significantly differ in terms of utilizing textual and visual elements. A chi-square test revealed a significant difference between meme and GIFs in employing images and text (Chi-square = 123.02, p < .001). Memes use visual and textual elements together in communicating messages, while GIFs rely heavily on visuals only. Visuals elements were found to suffice for GIFs when communicating ideas without needing added text, but memes mostly combined both elements together to share a viral idea.

This finding aligned with previous literature explaining that memes are social media visuals that are both image-based and intertextual content (Waninger, 2015). They are regarded

as visually expressive results of a re-appropriation process in which small digital annotations transform the relationship between an image and its context communication (Milner, 2016). GIFs' heavy usage of visuals only might be traced back to the GIFs' nature. GIF is a video format, meaning it has the ability to communicate messages and emotions without added text (Newman, 2016).

Studies within the visual communication effects field suggest that imagery generates much stronger effects on cognition, attitudes, and behavior than words do (Fahmy & Alkazemi, 2017). Looking at hijab memes and GIFs holistically (both images and text) by using the integrative framing analysis, the study reveals significantly more pro-hijab memes and GIFs than anti-hijab memes and GIFs, suggesting the lack of negative stereotypes usually associated with hijab in traditional media.

The study found that the visual representation of hijab in internet memes and GIFs surpassed the traditional stereotypes of the "submissive" victim. In fact, a great majority of memes and GIFs analyzed showed hijabi women in the foreground of the images or videos, compared to a very small percentage portraying hijabi women in the background, communicating the impression of importance (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

Also, most of the examined memes and GIFs encompassed closeup shots of hijabi women and showed them from the front using an equal eye-level angle. This suggests a level of respect to the subject in the photo or video and contributes to creating an imaginary relationship with the viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). GIFs were found to include more subject's eye-contact with viewers than memes, which according to Coleman (2010) conveys a high level of honesty to viewers.

Thus, the results of stereotyping variables analyzed do not support past literature arguing that western media played a role in legitimizing and spreading racism and bias against religious communities such as Muslims (see Bullock & Jafri, 2000). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that since internet memes and GIFs are international open sources for all internet users, they can't be grouped with "western media" per se.

The majority of both internet memes and GIFs showed women posing for cameras. However, a relatively higher percentage of GIFs than memes showed women playing sports, running, dancing, skating and playing music. That physically active state in GIFs, and the inclusion of various types of sport and art activities, not just one, conveys the impression of independency and strength for Muslim women portrayed, which directly contradicts with the traditional media portrayal of shy Muslim women in subordinate roles. This result aligns with the previously mentioned finding of challenging feelings being the second most dominant feeling conveyed in GIFs after happiness.

A huge majority of GIFs analyzed in this study were found to support hijab, Nevertheless, when it came to memes only about half the amount of analyzed memes supported hijab. This could be accounted to internet memes usually being used in sarcastic contextual situations, as explained before, and typically sarcasm is more used when communicating humorous or funny messages, which might explain the high percentage of memes opposing hijab.

Gürsimsek (2016) referred to GIFs as one of the ways online visual culture manifests as a changing spectrum of expressions. The percentage of analyzed GIFs that were anti hijab was very low. This result aligns with another finding of the study about the most common emotion

conveyed in hijab GIFs being happiness. It is reasonable for the GIFs depicting veiled women and conveying happy emotions, to also be pro-hijab.

Overall, the study's results showed that both internet memes and GIFs supported hijab and hijabi Muslim women. Although that comes as a contradiction to the reoccurring image of hijab in traditional media, still the result was not completely surprising. That is for one reason; the literature showed that social media posts focus on emotions (Nave et al, 2018), and the study's sample was gathered right after the New Zealand mosque attacks in March 2019, making it an extremely emotional timeframe for social media. The attacks caused people's empathetic responses to Muslims over social media platforms, and since hijab is a concept related to Islam and Muslim women, part of that result might be due to the attacks aftermath.

One of the most significant results of the study is the highlighted differences between internet memes and GIFs. As mentioned, Internet memes differ from GIFs in textual and visual usages, and also in the overall tone of supporting or opposing hijab.

Some of the previous literature regarded GIFs and internet memes as the same, but this study showed significance differences between internet memes and GIFs in supporting hijab (Chi-square = 61.588, p < .001). Therefore, the research suggests that internet memes and GIFs should not to be regarded as one category of social media communication tools, but instead they ought to be treated separately and independently from one another.

Conclusion

Memes and GIFs are among the most popular visual communication tools on the internet. Despite that, they are not well researched within the visual communication field. This study attempted to bridge that gap in the visual communication research of modern social media tools, by conducting a content analysis of the most popular internet memes and GIFs with the hashtag #hijab.

Hijab is often negatively stereotyped in almost all types of traditional media, so the objective of this study was to find out the frames from which hijab was portrayed in internet memes and GIFs. The research also discussed the hijab stereotypes evident in internet memes and GIFs, so as to compare with those found in regular traditional media.

The research here suggests that internet memes and Gifs ought not be grouped with traditional media, at least in terms of hijab representation. Opposite to the past literature of negative portrayal of hijab in traditional media, this study shows that, overall, internet memes and GIFs positively frame hijab and hijabi women portraying them wearing stylish veils and often smiling or generally happy.

By and large, internet memes and GIFs portrayed hijabi women as respected humans who are not shy, but rather seen performing different kinds of activities, which comes as a contradiction to the overall negative stereotypical image of Muslim women often seen in traditional media visuals (Tasnuva, 2013).

In conclusion, the study showed that internet memes and GIFs are different and ought not be referred to interchangeably. Following the integrative -textual and visual- framing analysis of

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memes and GIFs with the hashtag #hijab, the researcher found that by and large GIFs are highly visual while memes significantly employ more text with images simultaneously.

Limitations and Future Studies

The present study was only one snap shot in time, thus, a longitudinal research might generate more significant results. Additionally, the study is considered an exploratory research with a relatively small sample. Future researchers might consider examining internet memes and GIFs with a larger sample. The study examined internet memes and GIFs that circulated online using the hashtag #hijab. Analyzing internet memes and GIFs that portray hijab but use other hashtags might yield different results. Since internet memes and GIFs usually carry messages to make them viral, a deeper look utilizing qualitative methods of analysis will add to memes and GIFs literature and produce more worthy results. Another possible limitation of the study is the sampling timeframe, since the research data was gathered in a time of heightened awareness of Islam related topics, right after the New Zealand terrorist attack against Muslims. Future researchers might get different results, if they collect the data in a time where Islam isn't necessarily the topic of the hour.

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Appendix

<div align="center">**Veil Unveiled- Coding List**</div>

1) **Unit of Analysis**
   1. Meme
   2. GIF

2) **Picture vs. Text in meme or GIF**
   1. Meme or GIF include Picture (visual elements) only
   2. Meme or GIF include words (Textual elements) only
   3. Meme or GIF include both picture and text

3) **Actual Hijab is seen in the meme or GIF**
   1. Yes
   2. No

4) <u>**Visual Subordination**</u>

   a. **Body Coverage**
      1. Meme or GIF show a garment covering all the female body excluding face (hijab)
      2. Meme or GIF show a garment covering all the female body excluding eyes(niqab)
      3. Meme or Gif show a garment covering all the female body excluding hair, face, and other body parts
      4. Not applicable (no Women shown in Meme or GIF)

   b. **Modern vs. traditional hijab**
      1. Meme or GIF showing modern veil (colorful or stylish)
      2. Meme or GIF showing traditional old school veil (all black or no style)
      3. Not applicable (no actual hijab or no women shown in Meme or GIF)

5) <u>**Establishing an imaginary relation with the viewer**</u>

    a. Contact
        1.Smiling
        2.Penetrating stare
        3.None

    b. Emotion
        1. Happy
        2. Sad/disbelief
        3. Humorous/sarcastic
        4. Challenging
        5. Inspiring
        6. Neutral
        7.Other

6) <u>**Point of View**</u>

    a. Camera angle
        1.Low angle
        2.Equality
        3.High angle

    b. Engagement/detachment
        1.Frontality
        2.Profile
        3.Back
        4. Not applicable

7) <u>**Social Distance**</u>

    a. The shot
        1.Close up (head & shoulders or less)
        2.Medium shot (cutting out from waist or knees)
        3.Long shot (showing full figure)

b. Focus
        1.The woman is being portrayed in the background.
        2.The woman is being portrayed in the foreground.
        3.Not applicable

8) Behavior

a. Candid or Staged
        1.Posing for photograph (modeling, product shot)
        2.Acting out in front of camera (addressing photographer)
        3.Candid (going about activity)
        4.Not Applicable

b. Inanimate
        1.Sitting
        2.Standing
        3.Not Applicable

c. Physically Active
        1.Walking
        2.Running/ Playing any kind of sports (skating, dancing... etc)
        3.Posing for photograph
        4.Protesting
        5.Not applicable

9) General Portrayal
    1. Alone
    2. With others
    3. Other

10) Meme or GIF as a whole pro or anti hijab
    1. meme is pro-hijab
    2. meme is anti-hijab
    3. meme is neutral
    4. not applicable