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## Miscellaneous

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## Submitted

January 9th, 2024

## Approved

October 8th, 2024

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Communication & Society

ISSN 0214-0039

E ISSN 2386-7876

[www.communication-society.com](http://www.communication-society.com)

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2025 – Vol. 38(1)

pp. 33-46

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## How to cite this article:

Muñoz Morcillo, D. D. & Walzer Moskovic, A. (2025). *Hijabis* in Spain: their construction as microcelebrities through their YouTube channels, *Communication & Society*, 38(1), 36-46. <https://doi.org/10.15581/003.38.1.004>

## *Hijabis* in Spain: their construction as microcelebrities through their YouTube channels

### Abstract

This article delves into the phenomenon of YouTubers who wear *hijab* and make it a central identity element in their discourse. Specifically, it addresses the relevance they have within their niche community in Spain, taking into account the socio-cultural factors that enable the visibility of these women as well as the communicative practices they carry out specifically on their YouTube channels. The object of study is the videos produced by these women, their practices in the digital environment and, ultimately, the YouTubers themselves. In the face of ignorance, prejudice and the scant media visibility of positive referents, YouTube becomes a means of expression and visibility for *hijabis*, promoting dialogue, exchange and identity configuration. A qualitative and quantitative methodology combining content analysis, interview and discourse analysis is used. The corpus of videos analysed is initially N=102, with a subsequent more in-depth analysis on a sample n=20 videos. Muslim *hijabis* content creators on YouTube play a central role in identity-building dialogues for a community that is often overlooked and lacks positive role models and its own narratives. These women emerge as microcelebrities within their community by creating authentic, intimate, accessible, and frequent content that fosters a deep and affectionate bond with their followers, who progressively develop a sense of identification and connection.

### Keywords

**Hijab, women, identity, microcelebrity, YouTube, discourse.**

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of publishing this article, the author is not affiliated with any institution. However, this article is based on research conducted during his PhD at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a particular aspect of a larger research project (Muñoz Morcillo, 2022) conceived with the general purpose of exploring the nature of audiovisual self-representations generated by Spanish Muslim women on YouTube. It focuses specifically on the *hijab* which has been and is now the object of social controversy, not only in non-Muslim countries but also within the various communities that share the creed of Islam as a religious and socio-cultural cement.

We undertake an analysis here that leads us to insight into the configuration of these influencers as microcelebrities. We employ this concept as a construct that allows us to comprehend a communicative process congruent with the possibilities of digital platforms to facilitate understanding of the modulations of the discourses created and published about the *hijab* and the practices of women creators online. It also takes into account the characteristics of this collective in the Spanish historical-social context and the possibilities that this concept provides for understanding how influence is generated on digital platforms.

The *hijab* is a garment that has gained public visibility with the growth of the Muslim community in Spain. PEW projections estimate that in 2050 this sector of the population will represent between 4.6 and 7.2% (2017). Both the news media and scientific research have reported on the existence of prejudice and discriminatory treatment towards Muslim women who wear a *hijab* in the public space. In addition, academic studies have been corroborating the existence of bias in the way news stories about Islam and Muslims are framed (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Álvarez-Miranda & Esevenri-Mayer, 2024; Calvo & Carrasco, 2020), revealing a tendency to consider these women as subjects without agency, victims of their own culture and as a threat to the processes of modernisation (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). In terms of media information, there is a tendency towards biased framing, for example in relation to the *burkini* (Calvo & Carrasco, 2020) or to denying entry into schools (Ramírez, 2011; Ramírez & Mijares, 2021) or workplaces to women wearing a *hijab* (Ahmed & Gorey, 2021). In the social sphere, the presence of prejudices and a negative image of Islam and *hijabis* within Spanish society has been identified (Aparicio, 2020; Álvarez-Miranda & Esevenri-Mayer, 2024; Khir-Allah, 2021), sometimes leading to hate speech in public spaces or on social networks (OBERAXE, 2024; Zamora, Garrido & Sánchez, 2021), and even to physical aggression, as stated in the *European Islamophobia Report 2022* (Bayrakli & Hafez, 2023).

It is against this backdrop that social networks constitute spaces where it seems possible to exercise a certain appropriation of discourse in order to project narratives conceived from self-representation and no longer solely from the external gaze. In recent years, the number of Muslim women who dress according to religious prescriptions and who make use of digital media such as YouTube to create content relevant to them has grown. Among the diversity of topics published, the following stand out: the meaning of the garment, personal experiences of starting to wear the veil as well as its consequences, and the challenges of wearing it in a context in which they are a minority. Along the way, some influencers become microcelebrities.

## 2. An approach to the Muslim community and its identity construction in Spain

The size and nature of the Spanish population of the Muslim religion is known by approximation since monitoring data regarding a person's religious beliefs or creed is not permitted. Therefore, it has been estimated based on the number of individuals who are from countries where Islam is a majority religion, which is problematic in that not all those born in a Muslim home identify with this religion or are necessarily practitioners. In any case, with these relativities in mind, the *Demographic Study of the Muslim population* carried out by the Union of Islamic Communities of Spain (UCIDE) estimates that in 2023 there were 2,412,344 Muslims in Spain, representing 5% of the total population (UCIDE, 2024). Within this group, the majority nationality is Spanish (45%) and Muslims of foreign origin account for 55%, with a predominance of Moroccans. Although it is true that migratory flows acquired significant relevance at the end

of the last century, it was at the turn of the century when a relatively large immigration process began (Pérez-Agote, 2016). The migrant population went from 0.63% in 1985 to 10.8% in 2005, growing 41.4 times, representing an increase of 5 million people in less than three decades. In this sense, the migratory phenomenon entails the transition from a foreign Islam to one of Spanish citizenry, generating a gradual process of visibility and institutionalisation of the religion that involves new scenarios and demands (Hernando de Larramendi, 2001; Planet, 2018).

Within the processes of integrating the Muslim population, there exist cultural and religious elements that may create tensions. Ramadan (2002) points out that the processes of identity construction tend to be implemented in opposition to what is considered different or otherness. In this sense, one of the historical constants in the shaping of Spanish identity is the image of Muslims, known as “Moors,” as the antithesis of the Spanish (Corrales, 2004; Rodríguez Reche & Rodríguez García, 2020). The construction of a specific nationalist perspective on Spanish national identity necessitated the exclusion of Islam from the conceptual framework of ‘Spanishness,’ a process that can be traced back to the nation’s very origins (Téllez & Madonia, 2018; Dieste-Muñoz & Tena Sanz, 2024). Historically, Catholicism and nation-building have been central to the identity-shaping process in Spain (Planet, 2018; Téllez, 2014; Téllez & Madonia, 2018). This is not only because of its distant roots in past centuries, but also because Francoism promoted a symbiotic relationship between the nation and religious values, producing a national Catholicism whose effects are still felt in the public space and in certain social practices (Planet, 2008). However, in the European context and also progressively so in Spain, the modern differentiation between culture and religion has been cultivated (Pérez-Agote, 2016). In contrast, the connection between the religious and the cultural remains less distinguishable in Arab-Muslim countries (Pérez-Agote, 2016). This factor, whether an identity associated with a religion is maintained or has been detached, can act as a source of collision between the identity worldviews of Spaniards and Muslims who have emigrated from Arab-Muslim countries. Thus, for Muslims in European countries, religion continues to hold a central place as a factor of identification and representation, taking precedence over other elements of a national or ethnic nature (Allievi, 2003; Téllez, 2014).

Research has been carried out that focuses on the analysis of the identity constructions managed within Moroccan associations by new generations of Muslims made up of Spaniards, children of emigrants and third generations (Téllez, 2014; Téllez & Madonia, 2018). Among these new generations, it can be seen that they seek to develop their own identity based on a dynamic dialogue in which traditional religious, social and cultural values and feelings acquired both in the social environment –through social, work and institutional relations– and within the family environment, are sifted (Téllez & Madonia, 2018; Eserverri-Mayer & Khir-Allah, 2022). Within this framework of a search for identity observed both in the Spanish context and globally, we can understand the different proposals associated with the *hijab* in its various forms of expression.

### **3. The hijab from a cultural perspective**

We will approach the *hijab* as a polysemic garment whose meaning depends on the political, cultural and social context. “There is no doubt: among all the cultural symbols of Islam, the most deeply rooted identity element –political, social and cultural– among women is the wearing of the *hijab*” (Checa, 2018, p. 10). However, for this analysis, we will understand it as a form of discourse (Lazreg, 2014), addressing the garment from its cultural value. Arising from the religious precepts, the *hijab* has gradually incorporated a cultural value, which means that today it is claimed by many Muslim women as an important part of their personal identity (Abdeslam, 2018). This is largely due to the semiotic property of the garment, making it an emblematic device that allows any subject to identify it with belonging to the Muslim community, thus acting as a cultural accent (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). This means that, when presented in certain contexts, actions or in combination with clothing associated with dissimilar cultural

expressions (sometimes apparently in contradiction with the values it presents, such as wearing heels, lipstick or smoking), identity and belonging is never called into question (Blommaert & Varis, 2015).

In this sense, understanding the semiotic possibilities of the garment, one of the current globally observable trends –also in Spain– is a form of *hijab* adopted mainly by young women that emerges from the dialogue between conventional fashion reinterpreted within the Islamic ethic, in the form of modest fashion that, in the Western context, where Islam is a minority, makes the hybridisation of Western Muslim women visible. Thus, their aesthetic expression emerges as a process of individualised negotiation in which several variables shaping the identity of these women converge (Tarlo & Moors, 2013). “This changing visual and material landscape is best understood, not in terms of some mythical opposition between Islam and the Western, religion and secularism or tradition and modernity but rather in terms of complex debates about faith, politics, ethics, aesthetics and belonging” (Tarlo, 2010, p. 2). In this complex dialogue there is a confluence of different aesthetic forms with which these women interact both online and offline and “many young Muslim women adopt fashionable styles and combinations of Islamic dress as a means of presenting themselves as contemporary or modern, taking distance from habitual cultural forms of dress favoured by older generations making clear their engagement both with Islam and with contemporary style trends” (Moors & Tarlo, 2013, p. 19). This cultural expression also fulfils the function of making Muslim women visible within the public space, turning their presence into a form of political statement that shows Muslim women as subjects with agency (van Es, 2019). “Precisely because the bodily aesthetic of fashion has historically been so strongly linked to modernity, it becomes an ideal means by which women are able to distance themselves from common stereotypical images of Muslim women” (Moors & Tarlo, 2013, p. 20). However, there are those who counter that the image constructed is actually that of an oppressed, repressed, and muted subject entirely outside of modernity.

The digital media play a central role in the development of this phenomenon, as they make these expressions of identity available, distributable and negotiable, breaking away from the mainstream and finding niches that are nourished and strengthened. In this way, the development of expressive forms specific to minority cultures is consolidated through digital technologies such as social networks. This is because the affordances of these technologies allow for the creation and circulation of diverse images, narratives and ideas (Pennington, 2018; Rahman, 2015; Papacharissi, 2010; 2018) such as, in this case, the meaning of *hijab* and modest fashion (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018) or the *hijab* fashion trend that has emerged as a global and cosmopolitan phenomenon (Boy, Uitmark & Wiersma, 2018), resulting in the concept of *hijabista* coming from the combination of *hijab* and hipster (Williams & Kamaludeen, 2017).

#### **4. Microcelebrity: a localised form of fame in the digital universe**

We address the concept of microcelebrity in order to frame the resources, forms and themes of the discourses that the creators of the *hijab* videos make to convey their feelings and experiences. The concept of ‘microcelebrity’ (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2013; Burgess & Green, 2018; Abidin, 2018) is chosen since its core revolves around the bonds generated between content creators and their niche communities in a digital media environment. Microcelebrities “have their popularity premised on feelings of connection and interactive responsiveness with their audiences; [...] where traditional celebrities may have extensive fame among a large global audience, microcelebrities exercise a popularity that while narrower in breadth is far deeper” (Abidin, 2018, pp. 11–12). It is, therefore, a new form of fame where the connection between the niche community and the content creator becomes the central link in the process of acquiring fame.

In 2008, Theresa M. Senft conceived the concept of microcelebrity in ethnographic research on the use of streaming video by a group of American women. She observed that they performed in front of the camera and interacted with their followers displaying affective work

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with frequent connections in which intimate information was shared, building an atmosphere of intimacy that ends up forging a strong bond with the community of users (Abidin, 2018; Raun, 2018). Marwick points to: “this ‘display of the hidden inner life,’ the act of revealing intimate information, that creates a bond between microcelebrity practitioners and their audiences” (Marwick, 2013, pp. 120-121). Intimacy is therefore a central ingredient in strengthening the bonds between creators and followers. Berlant (2008) observes that the intimate discourses created by people in subaltern positions are perceived from the perspective of affectivity and empathy by subjects in a similar situation, thus: “in other words, an intimate public is an achievement. Whether linked to women or other non-dominant people, it flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*” (Berlant, 2008, p. viii). The action of revealing and sharing personal issues allows us to understand that both public and personal problematics are the product of the same power structure that normativises the subject, and finally, society as a whole (Foucault, 2007; 2002). Ultimately, these discourses generated from subaltern and intimate positions become a form of visibilisation of structural situations that constrain the subject and can forge recognition of others in similar situations, developing a form of solidarity that becomes a bond and, ultimately, a sense of collectivity.

Authenticity –or the appearance of authenticity– is another component of the bond between creators and their audiences. Authenticity and intimacy are closely related (Marwick, 2013; Raun, 2018; Burgess & Green, 2018) as the perception of authenticity in content and creators is a value that leads users to spend more time in front of the screen (Burgess & Green, 2018; Stokel-Walker, 2019). It is one of the characteristic elements of the platform’s initial format (Burgess & Green, 2018; Stokel-Walker, 2019) and therefore, it is considered one of its most valued features (Stokel-Walker, 2019). However, Marwick (2013) sees authenticity as a strategy of the creator to connect with their followers, through which they boost their individual brand or *self-branding* whose marketing strategy is the projection of an image that is perceived as “authentic.” Banet-Weiser argues that there has been a transition “from ‘authentic’ culture to the branding of authenticity” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 5). Thus, authenticity cannot escape the commercial logic in a social context of brand culture which “shapes not only consumer habits but also political, cultural, and civic practices, so that, in the contemporary era, brands have become more what Lury calls ‘logos’ that structures, rationalizes, and cultivates everyday life” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 11). Burgess and Green (2018) use the term *YouTubeness* to refer to “the essence of YouTube,” which balances authenticity, community and relationships with the brands being promoted. For aspiring microcelebrity content creators, it is about generating a balanced projection that –from affective, authentic and intimate work– connects with the community both online and offline over time and that, on the other hand, does not neglect the brand image that enables status and advertising support (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013).

Another central aspect of the bond between content creators and audiences is the possibility of influencing the latter’s decisions. The concept of influencer has emerged from the marketing sector and, specifically, from the sale of fashion and beauty products in digital media (Marwick, 2013; Burgess & Green, 2018; Abidin, 2018). For the digital marketing association IAB Spain, influencers are: “those individuals who are considered to have the potential to create engagement, drive conversation and/or influence the product/service purchase decision of a target audience” (IAB Spain, 2021, p. 5). Abidin, in turn, argues that the influencer is characterised by having been able to achieve success and recognition in digital media for a prolonged period of time, being able to capture and maintain a significant critical mass of users, which positions them as a “critical form of internet celebrity” (Abidin, 2018, p. 71), due to the mobilisation capacity they can develop. Márquez and Ardèvol explain that influencers are actors who mobilise audiences in both online and offline spaces (2018). However, the key factors in their success consist of a combination of two factors: the capacity to generate affective and emotional

links between themselves, products and users, and also the ability to communicate and connect with audiences in a digital technological environment, which leads them to have a mastery of engagement or interaction with their followers.

## **5. Methodology**

This research aims to identify Muslim women creators on YouTube living in Spain whose content relates to the *hijab*. Our goal is to explore the socio-cultural factors and relevant communicative forms that enable these women to forge connections with their niche community through digital discourses and practices on YouTube, ultimately becoming microcelebrities within this context. The object of study comprises multiple components, including videos about the *hijab* created by Muslim women on their own YouTube channels, as well as the creators themselves. A mixed-methods approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative paradigms is employed to enhance understanding and interpretation of these discourses and practices.

Initially, the research adopts content analysis using an inductive approach to explore themes and genres. A total corpus of N=102 videos was identified on YouTube, based on the following criteria: the video title contains the words 'hijab,' 'hijabi,' 'veil,' or 'headscarf'; the videos are created by women living in Spain; they are original materials produced for YouTube channels; and they are in either Spanish or English.

Subsequently, a more in-depth analysis was conducted. A reduced sample of n=20 videos was selected for examination, prioritising those that generate the most interaction. A filter based on thematic quotas and genres prioritises content and meaning concerning gender and aesthetics. In this framework, the methodological tools applied to this sample include discourse analysis to identify the socio-cultural connections and associations that creators establish with the hijab. This analysis draws on a Foucauldian perspective (2002; 2007), viewing discourse as a representation of a system of truth that reflects an order of knowledge and power (Muncie, 2006).

An *ad hoc* analytical instrument was developed, grounded in the understanding that communication and social interaction aim to create audience impressions with specific objectives (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1956), particularly to connect with a niche community. In this context, digital videos on YouTube enhance the potential for performing and shaping impressions on viewers, as audiovisual resources allow greater control over the presentation of both front and back stages (Papacharissi, 2010). The analytical tool categorises resources in these digital videos, defining variables as sound, image, editing, and location (Díaz Moreno & Muñoz Morcillo, 2022). This tool was employed to analyse these variables through content analysis.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve deeper into the creators' interpretations of their videos and practices, followed by discourse analysis of the transcripts. Finally, trends and patterns in the creators' media practices were explored by examining the frequency of video uploads to their channels and analysing subscriber statistics available on the platform.

## **6. Results and discussion**

The results obtained have been structured according to two cores: the first revolves around socio-political and religious-cultural factors that reveal the existence of a clear demand for cultural content, aesthetics and social references from first, second and even third generation Spanish Muslim women. The second core is based on the forms, digital practices and strategies generated by Muslim women creators of digital content on YouTube in order to understand the ties and bonds they have with their niche community.

### **6.1. Hijabis on YouTube: exercising representation and visibility in an occidental society**

In relation to this first nucleus, which encompasses social, political and religious-cultural factors, the perception of a lack of acceptance of this group within the Spanish context can be detected in their discourse. It can also be observed that these creators perceive that there is a

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profound and generalised lack of knowledge about their religious-cultural group in Spanish society. They complain about the scant representation and visibility of this group in social, political and cultural terms. Consequently, they offer their contents to contribute to the process of dialogue and contingent identity construction that emerges in response to the demand for referents and collective imaginaries that deal with their own cultural reality. This is illustrated in the following commentary, which is a video about a microcelebrity who takes off her *hijab*: “It’s like, we already have representation problems, and there are few Muslim women, few Muslim women with *hijabs* who manage to do things where they are visible; and then when one takes off her hijab, well, the rest who are in the background feel a bit more alone” (Ramiaschannel, 2020).

Regarding this idea of society’s general unawareness, along with the lack of references and narratives, it can be observed in the corpus of videos that of the five categories examined (the material aspect of the headscarf, problems related to wearing the headscarf in a Western society, first experiences with the headscarf, the *hijab* in the community, and meanings, reflections, and answers about wearing the *hijab*), the thematic category: “problems related to wearing the headscarf in a Western society” is found in 10 of the 102 videos analysed addressing this relationship of distance and misinformation about this collective. The main topic observed is the difficulty in finding a job with *hijab*. As emphasised in a video: “In many jobs, they don’t accept you with a *hijab*, and so then many women are forced to take it off in order to be accepted for the job” (Zahia EB, 2020). This is a reality with increasing relevance and notoriety, since this is the first generation of Muslim women to enter the labour market. The message revolves around the need to highlight their public presence and show resistance in the face of adversity by exercising resilience and pushing the boundary (Hall, 2011) of what is socially understood as normal. Thus, the message of these creators focuses on the need to gradually normalise their social existence through their public visibility both in the media and social networks and in the offline context. This idea is pointed out in one of the videos: “I wear my *hijab*, and I am Spanish and that is something that society has to understand [...]. This is changing and people are starting to internalise this” (Ramiaschannel, 2016). In the same logic, another interviewee comments on the lack of local references: “I used to follow a lot of YouTubers from the United States and England and other countries where there were YouTubers with *hijab*, and when I started watching those videos, I realised that I couldn’t find any in Spanish. So, I decided to begin myself” (Fatinor, personal communication, November 14, 2021).

It is worthy of note that of the five topics, the one that generates the highest number of interactions and views, and which also has the only video that has truly gone viral is: “Meanings, reflections and answers about wearing the *hijab*,” with 13 videos in the sample analysed. They present a more bidirectional and dialogic communication as they are generated from questions asked directly by the followers: What was the reaction of your friends (when you put on the *hijab*)? Was it your own choice? Were you forced to? (Aminaperfect 2003, 2019). Another of the YouTubers said when interviewed that she decided to create her channel because of the misinformation that is generated about Islam: “My motivation for starting the YouTube channel was a bit to break with the prejudices and stereotypes that exist about the Islamic religion” (Aicha Fernández, personal communication, December 28, 2021). There is an eagerness to show the use of the scarf as a garment that can also dialogue with fashion, something implicit in the topic “The material aspect of the scarf,” which corresponds to 62% of the videos studied, including, for example, tutorials, hauls and product reviews. One of these audiovisuals (Ramiaschannel, 2017) exemplifies this connection between *hijab* and fashion, echoing processes of cultural hybridisation of the first, second and third generations, combining Islamic religious aesthetics and Western urban aesthetics. In the video, the *hijabi* models different sets of modest clothes, using public spaces in the city of Barcelona as a catwalk, presenting different looks in accordance with a lifestyle and a way of being that manifests a process of individual negotiation

in the convergence between the current expressions of fashion typical of the Western context together with the ethical, aesthetic and cultural standpoint of an Islamic nature.

It has been detected that these trends and strategies of visibility and representation of the collective can be internally questioned within the Muslim community, revealing a dispute over the meanings that are being generated within the collective. In this sense, the topic of “the *hijab* in the Muslim community” stands out, which corresponds to 6% of the corpus of N=102, where elements of internal discussion within the community are presented that affect women who wear the headscarf. Among the central issues of the controversy, there are two positions regarding the negotiation of identity in dialogue with fashion and modesty: on the one hand, a positive position, as can be seen in the following fragment: “I mean, they had the added value of being influencers and also being *hijabis*, and that was their added value for us as Muslims because we felt identified with them. We liked them, they inspired us in the way they dressed. And they made us understand that we didn’t have to give up certain things just because we were wearing *hijab*, but that we could still be beautiful and fashionable” (Ramiaschannel, 2020). On the other hand, there is a critical argument, as formulated in another video: “Another issue, the issue of social networks, the issue of the visibility of the *hijab* nowadays. It seems to be very fashionable. Now it’s fashionable to roll up your trousers and show a bit of leg [...]. But I don’t think it’s like that. What happens is that those who cover themselves more are not on social networks” (Cintikart, 2019).

## **6.2. Discourses of closeness: engaging the hijab community through intimacy, authenticity, and meaningful interaction**

As for the second core of the analysis carried out within this research, which emphasises the communicative strategy used by the YouTuber to connect with her followers, the concept of microcelebrity serves as a central construct. Along these lines, we present results based on the following topics: connection with the audience, intimacy, frequency, authenticity and self-branding. Subsequently, we analyse other relevant elements such as: multiplatform presence, influence and transcendence of the online space. Finally, we show the results derived from applying the analytical tool to examine the use of audiovisual resources in connecting with the niche audience.

One of the central elements on which digital practice in social networks revolves is the configuration of the affective bond between audience and creators (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2013; Burgess & Green, 2018; Abidin, 2018), as it is from this nexus that, to a large extent, resources and influence can be obtained (Burgess & Green, 2018). In this sense, all the YouTubers interviewed, regardless of the size of the channel and the frequency in uploading and the strategies in their practice, reported feeling supported by their audience and that they understood the relevance that this connection has in their digital practice. One of them commented: “I shared a few stories on Instagram commenting a little about my situation, without going into details, and in a matter of 24 hours I solved that problem, thanks to the mobilisation of the community” (Aicha Fernández, personal communication, December 28, 2021).

Another key element in the configuration of this connection is the frequency of uploading content. In this respect, 7 of the 24 channels in the corpus provided 57% of the videos and these same YouTubers account for 82% of the subscribers and 88% of the views of the total universe studied. This confirms the centrality of frequent production in the creation of content (Senft, 2008; Raun, 2018).

In order to create a sense of closeness with their audience, *hijabis* use a specific selection of topics and content, as well as the forms and resources employed. In relation to the former, we can observe the combination of private and intimate stories marked by complex situations when wearing the *hijab* in a society tending towards secularisation (Pérez-Agote, 2016) and with a lack of knowledge about this religion, which situates them as an alterity to the norm. This can be clearly seen in the topic “My first experience with the headscarf,” a category that

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encompasses 10% of the videos analysed and which deals with what it is like and what it means to wear the *hijab* in a context such as the Spanish one. The problem is shown through a first-person narration of the facts, generating identification and, therefore, creation of affective ties and the strengthening of the YouTube channel community. This is what Berlant (2008) conceptualises as “intimate publics” and which, on the other hand, can enable that “point of suture” as part of a collective (Hall, 2011) that could lead these women to understand each other and embody in their praxis the narrative of the subject “Muslim woman in *hijab*.” This idea of belonging can be observed in a dialogue generated in one of the videos as a result of the decision of a microcelebrity to remove her headscarf: “It can be that when a person who is a reference for us, someone who has inspired us, who has guided us, decides to take it off, you feel a bit of frustration, pity, sadness and a bit of incomprehension. [...] It was someone who was the flagbearer. Well, it was a bit of a symbol” (Ramiaschannel, 2020).

At the same time, it is interesting to observe how mechanisms are generated to transmit the sensation of an intimate dialogue that also makes it possible to enhance the bond with the audience. In this case, we are dealing with audiovisual resources that favour a private and intimate visual atmosphere, highlighting the genre of “confessions to camera,” with 10 of the n=20 videos analysed; and which is also used in all the videos on the theme of “my first experience with the scarf.” There we observe an austere use of visual resources to emphasise the oral discourse and, thus, the communication of the message. The medium shot predominates in which the microcelebrity looks and speaks directly to the camera, generating the sensation of a dialogue with the audience. A total of 85% are filmed totally or partially within the domestic sphere. Regarding this idea of intimacy with the receiver, one of the creators points out in the interview that while she was talking to the camera, she imagined herself talking to a friend or group of friends (Aminaperfect, personal communication, November 22, 2021).

Another of the central elements observed in the videos is the idea that the creators engage in their practice from a position of authenticity. The idea is that the character that performs in front of the camera is the best version of the subject behind the device. This was the main interpretation in the interviews: “the image I am showing is always my best version” (Cintikart, personal communication, March 30, 2022). In terms of the technical processes involved, the use of switching from colour video to black and white is observed when a mistake is made or an unexpected situation occurs. This resource is used to signal a reaction to something unexpected by making a spontaneous reaction visible. It bridges the distance between the backstage and the stage (Goffman, 1956; Papacharissi, 2010; 2018), creating the impression that nothing is hidden from the audience.

As for the strategy of self-branding and how they portray themselves, these women have no objections to promoting products, as long as they embody similar values to those that the channel represents, aware that their reputation and credibility are at stake. This is why the products recommended are generally modest clothing. In this sense, the presence of videos dedicated to the processes of purchase evaluation and product review stands out, such as the genres observed in the corpus of N=102, “product review” and “modelling,” both with 3% of the total number of videos. In these videos, the clothing chains where the products have been purchased are named and, in some cases, certain brands and garments are even promoted by offering discounts.

The problem of self-branding lies in the difficult connection that creators have to make between showing themselves as authentic and being perceived by their audiences as close to them without relinquishing the possibility of making a profit through their digital activity (Burgess & Green, 2018). One of the creators points out: “these collaborations that I do, whether it is for stationery, clothing or such things, are always very specific collaborations and very much selected by me. [...] Because imagine if I recommend an online shop. One of my followers buys something there and then it turns out to be a rip-off. What I lose because of having recommended that shop is people’s trust. And trust is something extremely valuable

that, once it has been lost, cannot be regained. For me, it is very important that the people who follow my content are people who know that they can trust me” (Aicha Fernández, personal communication, December 28, 2021).

An observed element that goes beyond the concept of microcelebrity and approaches the generic idea of Internet celebrity (Abidin, 2018) is that female creators have a multi-platform presence, adapting according to the possibilities of the networks and their specific audiences (Abidin, 2018). This enables them to have greater online visibility, increasing their opportunities to obtain resources. Regarding the form of this “translation” of content between platforms, the creator of the video: “¿Me obligan a llevar el velo? –Preguntas y respuestas sobre el velo,” refers to how she would do it for her Tik Tok channel: “The veil topic can be presented in a humorous way. Am I forced to? And do it with a double meaning. And that way there are a lot of people in the comments who interpret it that way. They understand it, they read the message” (Aminaperfect, personal communication, November 22, 2021).

In relation to the elements observed through the application of the analytical tool on the corpus of n=20 videos, it can be seen, in the sound indicator, that 18 of the 20 videos use live sound to capture mainly dialogues and monologues; while a little less than a third, specifically 8 out of 20, make use of music. This shows that sound is used to encourage oral communication with the audience.

In terms of image, the talking head looking directly at the camera was the most predominant shot used in 90% of the videos. It is also relevant that 13 out of 20 videos, 65%, had the same framing throughout the material, while only a quarter of the 20 videos make any camera movement. These photographic resources are aimed at strengthening the feeling of having a conversation with the audience.

In relation to editing, the vast majority, 95%, make some form of cut in the editing, either by jump cut or other forms such as a dissolve. In addition, 16 of the 20 videos, 80%, use titles. These resources have the functionality of generating clear and efficient communication. Furthermore, it can also be observed that 70% of the videos add other types of images to the main video, either in the form of another video, photographs or other visual forms. In this way, the ideas pointed out in the central video can be visualised, making the communication absolutely clear.

As for the location, 85 % of these videos are recorded partly or entirely in the home. The living room is the space most frequently used as a location, as it was employed in 60% of the cases. This choice of a private space such as the home creates an atmosphere of intimacy that makes it possible to generate bonds between the creator and the audience, leading to the development of trust.

## **7. Conclusions**

In the material analysed, it could be observed that there are positions in favour of a *hijab* in dialogue with current fashion trends, regardless of the fact that they may seem contradictory to more modest values. These cultural forms respond to hybridisations that integrate Western fashion aesthetics with the visibilisation of Islamic religious values and are therefore a proposal for the intertwining of the two. It is clear, as we have seen, that this process, which takes place in the social praxis, is not free from contradictions and that, as such, encourages a certain degree of discussion within the collective itself.

On the other hand, more traditional positions can also be observed in terms of Muslim dress and aesthetics in their public appearance, which highlights the prioritisation of modesty, characteristic of Islamic religious ethics. These expressions show how distinct aesthetic visions are taking shape, responding to the different ways of being and understanding oneself that are being generated within the community. They are proposals that find the necessary spaces for dialogue, negotiation and visibility in the digital media as they search for their own narratives and roles that allow them to guide their identity praxis in the public sphere.

In relation to the central elements of microcelebrity that lead to creation of this community bond, the core aspect consists in the ability to connect with their niche audience, who demands references that enable forms of social praxis with which they feel identified and affirmed. When observing the strategies followed by the content creators to generate this tie, several typical elements of microcelebrity can be identified that allow this nexus to be strengthened, such as: the need to generate content continuously and frequently on different platforms, fostering a form of communication that is perceived as authentic and that makes it possible to establish this connection based on identification. This happens through personal accounts and intimate experiences –usually difficult ones– that many women within this group have gone through by making themselves visible as Muslims in the public space. By becoming public, they lead to identification with peers, allowing for a special connection of representativeness and belonging.

On the other hand, within the strategies observed, we also perceive the importance of generating an aura of intimacy in the ways of generating content. To this end, a performance is constructed as if it were a video call, simulating a conversation with a friend or friends or through the use of intimate spaces within the home, such as the bedroom, and short shots looking at the camera. All these elements within a context of demand for their own models and narratives make a strong connection possible that allows these creators to be extolled as microcelebrities within the Muslim community.

To conclude, the new generations of Muslim women in Spain are demanding cultural production with which they can identify, as well as references and models that guide their social and identity development in the first quarter of the 21st century. This group is engaged in a complex and ongoing process of negotiating their diverse cultural, social, and religious identities within their daily practices. As a result, they are actively generating content that allows for an analysis of their own circumstances and the challenges they face. In their search for models and references to foster dialogue, various formulations emerge from both aesthetic and ethical perspectives, reflecting the hybridisation of their religious and cultural identities, as well as potential paths for sociocultural development.

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