

Article

Veiled in Pixels: Identity and Intercultural Negotiation Among Faceless Emirati Women in Digital Spaces

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Abstract

In today's digital world where presence is often equated with personal visibility, the choice of Emirati women to remain faceless on social media presents a powerful counter narrative—one that reveals the complexities of identity, modesty and belonging in a hyperconnected multicultural society. This study takes a closer look at how these women manage their on-line identities by intentionally choosing not to show their faces on Instagram. Using digital ethnography and thematic analysis, this article explores how they navigate the balance between global expectations of self-expression and the traditional values of modesty and honor. Over a three-month period, the study observes their activity on Instagram, analyzing shared images to see how facelessness becomes a form of agency. The findings highlight the tension between Western-centric paradigms of identity and selfhood, proposing digital veiling as a transferable framework for understanding how modesty, discretion and agency are negotiated across digital cultures. This article contributes to the broader conversation on digital identity, gendered representation and intercultural negotiation by foregrounding the silent yet strategic practices of women who remain unseen but not unheard.

Keywords: faceless; women; identity; self-expression; digital identity; representation



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1. Introduction

Over fifty percent of the global population engages with social media (Nesti Willard and Tariq 2021), transforming the manner in which individuals portray themselves and communicate online. On networks such as Instagram, people frequently construct idealized self-representations in search of affirmation. In the realm of global influencer culture, visibility is intricately linked to authenticity and influence (Hurley 2021), where “putting oneself out there” generally involves displaying one’s visage. Reports underscore the persistent demand to conform—be it in appearance, lifestyle, or engagement in trends (Tomos 2024).

This global attitude of visibility interacts inconsistently with local cultural norms. In cultures where modesty, privacy, and familial honor are paramount, especially in the Arab Gulf, the expectation for online exposure of face and body can provide challenges (Hopkyns 2021; Abokhodair et al. 2017). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) illustrates this paradox: although possessing one of the highest social media adoption rates globally (99%), its social fabric remains focused on modest self-presentation and a reputation grounded in Islamic values (Nugrahawati et al. 2019).

In this context, certain Emirati women have innovated a unique mode of online engagement by becoming “faceless influencers.” Instead of sharing traditional selfies, some women deliberately disguise or exclude their faces, choosing instead to display images

of attire, photographs taken from behind on travel, or pictures where emojis, phones, or hands obscure their identities. These approaches align with enduring privacy customs in the region, enabling women to engage in the influencer economy on their own terms.

This study focuses on the subset of Emirati women who consciously choose not to reveal their faces on social media thereby examining how they navigate these cross-cutting pressures. Through the analysis of Instagram posts from 5 Emirati “faceless” influencers, the author aims to understand the strategies of identity negotiation and forms of agency that underpin this phenomenon. This study aims to answer the following research questions: How do the Emirati women who remain faceless on Instagram construct and perform their digital identities, and in what ways do they reconcile global expectations of personal branding and visibility with their societies’ values of modesty? By addressing these main questions, the study sheds light on an often-overlooked mode of online femininity that does not fit neatly into Western paradigms of “empowered” self-display. The experiences of these women offer new insights into gendered representation and intercultural tensions and negotiations in online spaces. Ultimately, the article seeks to contribute to the growing scholarly conversation on digital identity and feminist expression by foregrounding the silent yet strategic negotiations of women who choose to remain “unseen” but defiantly present in the virtual sphere.

2. Literature Review

The concept of online self-representation is grounded in sociological theories of identity performance. Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical framework conceptualizes social life as a stage where individuals manage impressions to different audiences. On social media, this is complicated by “context collapse” (Marwick and Boyd 2010), in which friends, family, and strangers converge as one audience. For women in conservative societies, this collapse requires delicate boundary management: presenting a socially acceptable “frontstage” identity while concealing more personal aspects “backstage” (Zidan and Mellor 2023). Identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey 2005) extends this view by emphasizing how individuals in intercultural contexts balance personal expression with collective expectations. Applied to social media, this highlights the constant negotiation between global norms of visibility and local cultural mores.

Emirati women’s online identities are shaped by a complex interplay of conservative traditions and state-led initiatives promoting female empowerment (Makki and Al-Juinat 2021; Prager 2020). While “state feminism” expands opportunities in education and leadership, cultural norms continue to emphasize modesty, family honor, and reputation (Al Hameli and Arnuco 2023). In digital spaces, these tensions play out in distinctive ways. Social media can provide women with new avenues for self-expression and entrepreneurship (Elshantaly and Moussa 2022; Hurley 2019), offering what Guta and Karolak (2015) describe as a “safe zone” for negotiating identity away from community scrutiny. Women often adopt strategies such as pseudonyms, partial anonymity, or concealing their images to avoid recognition. Studies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE consistently show that female users restrict personal information and visual exposure to align with societal expectations of propriety (Al-Kandari et al. 2016; Alsaggaf 2019).

Within this context, the practice of faceless self-presentation represents a localized adaptation to the global influencer economy. On “Muslim Instagram,” users reinterpret modesty and religious identity through fashion and lifestyle content (Hasan 2022). Emirati women who obscure their faces engage in a similar negotiation: they embrace the affordances of visibility and influence while adhering to cultural values of modesty and privacy (Elshantaly and Moussa 2022).

This strategy can be read as a form of agency. By remaining faceless, women carve out a digital presence that resists Western paradigms equating empowerment with unveiling, while simultaneously safeguarding against social risks such as gossip, surveillance, or family sanction. As [Zidan and Mellor \(2023\)](#) observe, women in the Gulf set their boundaries of authenticity in response to audience expectations and in-group norms. Faceless influencers exemplify this boundary-setting, showing how digital concealment can function both as protection and empowerment.

In summary, the literature indicates that faceless self-presentation by Emirati women is a conscious adaptation to the affordances of social media that permits new forms of self-expression while mitigating social risks. It serves as a protective veil, thereby empowering women to engage publicly without sacrificing propriety or inviting harassment while simultaneously challenging Western assumptions that equate emancipation with literal unveiling. In doing so, faceless influencers demonstrate that a woman can be fashionable, influential, and heard online even without revealing her face. Yet little is known about how Emirati women themselves articulate this practice in everyday life. To address this gap, this study applies a qualitative, observational lens to examine how Emirati women curate their online presence. By analyzing the nuances of their posts, the study illuminates the narrative these women craft about themselves. This negotiation reveals an underlying intercultural tension between globalized ideals that equate empowerment with visibility and local moral frameworks that associate modesty and discretion with respectability. For Emirati women, online self-presentation thus becomes a site of continuous calibration where the desire for expression coexists with the imperative to uphold cultural and familial values.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Objectives

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining visual content analysis with reflexive thematic analysis ([Braun and Clarke 2006, 2019](#); [Rose 2016](#)). The purpose is not to measure the frequency of content but to generate interpretive insights into how faceless Emirati influencers negotiate identity, modesty, and branding within Instagram's visual economy. In line with feminist media studies, the analysis privileges depth, context, and meaning-making over statistical generalization ([Gill 2007](#)). The study pursues three interrelated objectives aligned with the research questions and qualitative design. First, it seeks to describe how faceless Emirati influencers construct and perform digital identity through recurring visual strategies on Instagram. Second, it aims to analyze how these strategies negotiate intercultural expectations between global platform norms and local modesty or privacy values. Finally, the study seeks to theorize digital veiling or empowering anonymity as a transferable framework for selective visibility in online publics. These objectives are operationalized through visual coding and reflexive thematic analysis, detailed in Section 4.1.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Five (5) female Emirati influencers who consistently employ faceless practices in their Instagram content were selected as the study's focal cases (as presented in Table 1). Only public accounts were included; no private or restricted material was accessed, and no direct engagement with account holders occurred. These accounts were chosen purposively ([Patton 2015](#)) to represent a distinct segment of the Emirati influencer landscape. This strategic focus allows the study to illustrate that faceless digital self-presentation is not an isolated or marginal behavior, but one that has garnered a sustained and significant following, suggesting demand for this mode of representation among Emirati and Gulf

audiences. In this sense, the sample functions as evidence of the phenomenon's social legitimacy and audience resonance, not merely as examples of elite success.

Table 1. Profile Summary of Emirati Faceless Instagram Accounts.

Subjects	Follower Count	Bio Description	Meta Verified Account (Blue Check)	Number of Posts in Total (As of Writing)	Images Analyzed (Extracted from 1 May to 31 July 2025)
Account A	636,000	Blogger, Travel, Fashion, Lifestyle	No	7927	134
Account B	541,000	Personal Blog	Yes	3123	25
Account C	230,000	Blogger, Influencer, Photographer	Yes	2687	124
Account D	223,000	Personal Blog, Travel, fashion, Lifestyle	Yes	1492	65
Account E	191,000	Personal Blog	Yes	844	148

Note. This table presents descriptive information for the five Emirati women influencer accounts analyzed in the study. Each case was selected based on consistent faceless practices across posts. The data summarize follower counts, biographical descriptors, verification status, and total posts as of 31 July 2025, along with the number of image posts analyzed during the three-month data-collection period.

The data collection period covered three consecutive months: May, June, and July 2025. During which all image posts from these accounts were monitored. The unit of analysis was defined as a single Instagram post (still image or carousel). Ephemeral content (such as Instagram stories) was excluded due to difficulties of systematic archiving. Reels were also excluded since they introduce additional layers of multimodal analysis (sound, movement, and possible temporality) that fall beyond the scope of this study's visual-semiotic framework. The study therefore prioritizes static visual posts to maintain analytical coherence.

Across the three-month period, the five accounts collectively produced 496 image posts. Rather than pursuing exhaustive coverage, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify recurring visual patterns of facelessness across the corpus. Specifically, the researcher first reviewed the full dataset to map common visual tactics (e.g., back-facing poses, cropped "headless" fashion shots, object substitution such as flowers or coffee cups covering the face, and hands-only or point-of-view imagery). This approach aligns with established practices in qualitative visual research, where sampling is based on thematic richness and analytic utility rather than exhaustiveness (Rose 2016; Banks 2018).

Given the sensitivity of researching Emirati women's online practices within the UAE—a highly regulated and legally attentive environment—particular care was taken to minimize potential risks. Identifiable details, including personal information or content not intended for long-term public visibility, were excluded from the dataset. Screenshots were generally avoided; however, to illustrate themes and demonstrate representative data patterns, select publicly available permanent posts were documented in field notes. Where necessary, images were anonymized, cropped, or adapted to prevent traceability.

Rather than attributing findings to individuals, data were aggregated and analyzed thematically to highlight broader patterns across accounts. This approach is consistent with established ethical practices in digital ethnography and discourse analysis, where safeguarding anonymity is prioritized even in relation to publicly accessible content (Townsend and Wallace 2016; Kozinets 2020).

3.3. Methodological Limitations and Reflexivity

While this study adopts a rigorous qualitative design, certain methodological boundaries merit acknowledgement. First, the purposive focus on five Emirati influencers—each with substantial but community-oriented followings—limits the representational breadth of

the sample. This design choice privileges depth and cultural specificity over demographic generalization, capturing the performative nuances of faceless self-presentation within a particular segment of the Emirati digital sphere. Second, the study excluded ephemeral formats such as Instagram stories due to both archival constraints and ethical considerations surrounding the capture of content designed to disappear. Following the ethical principles outlined by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) in their *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0* (Franzke et al. 2020), the study treats contextual privacy as central to research design and data handling. The analysis therefore was restricted to durable and permanently public and accessible posts. This decision ensured methodological consistency and ethical integrity but necessarily omits certain transient identity performances that occur through ephemeral media. These limitations are addressed reflexively and inform the recommendations for future research outlined in the concluding section.

4. Analysis

4.1. Visual Coding

Given the visual nature of Instagram this study employed visual coding as a primary method for analyzing the sampled posts. Visual coding refers to the systematic categorization of recurring elements within images in order to capture patterns of meaning and representation. It enables the researcher to move beyond impressionistic description towards structured analysis while still remaining attentive to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of visual material. Building on existing frameworks, the coding in this study focused on five (5) interrelated dimensions (see Table 2) derived from scholarship on modest fashion and digital self-presentation (Guta and Karolak 2015; Hurley 2019; Pahwa 2021):

- I. Facelessness Techniques—refers to the specific visual strategy employed to obscure or hide the face.
- II. Cultural Cues—references to Emirati identity or national heritage.
- III. Identity Markers—refers to the object or element emphasized in lieu of the face.
- IV. Modesty Markers—sartorial and compositional indicators or propriety and respectability within Islamic and Emirati cultural codes.
- V. Aesthetic Orientation/motifs—refers to the overall style of the post.

This process follows prior work that combines content analysis with semiotic attention to context (Bell and Milic 2002; Pauwels 2012). To deepen the analysis, visual coding was complemented by image clustering. Once coded, images were grouped according to recurring combinations of motifs both within and across influencer accounts. Clustering enabled the recognition of visual repertoires-pattern constellations of symbols and practices such as coffee culture, luxury handbags, abayas, travel settings- that together form a coherent influencer persona. This approach draws on cultural analytics perspectives (Manovich 2020), which emphasize grouping visual content to reveal shared styles and aesthetic strategies across digital collections. The integration of coding and clustering is particularly suited to this study. Coding ensured systematic attention to detail at the level of individual images, while clustering revealed how these elements coalesced into broader strategies of digital self-presentation. Together, these methods make it possible to analyze how Emirati faceless influencers curate their online identities not through single posts in isolation but through patterned culturally embedded visual practices.

After initial coding, data was analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase approach: (1) familiarization, (2) generating codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes and (6) producing the narrative.

Table 2. Visual Coding Dimensions Across Five Emirati Faceless Influencer Accounts.

Account	Facelessness Techniques	Cultural Cues	Identity Markers	Modesty Markers	Aesthetic Orientation/Motifs
A	Cropped images to cut the head/face from showing for full body shots (OOTDs), stickers over faces especially children, occasional blur	Image of the founding father of the UAE (Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan).	Coffee, handbag, jewelry, hotel scenery, shoes stepping on location marker, modest clothing	Abaya, head scarf (hijab), hip-covering tops, long sleeves, wide leg/maxi trousers, higher necklines	Clean Luxury
B	Face-excluding crops, phone in front of face, full sunglasses, a huge hat to cover the head/face, back shots	UAE location shots, UAE symbolic jewelry	Coffee, bag, jewelry, hotel, hat, modest clothing	Abaya, hijab, loose silhouettes, dusters (<i>jalabiya</i>), hip coverage, some veiled-style frames	Minimalist, clean luxury
C	Chin-down crops, phone-masking, over-shoulder shots, sunglasses	UAE leaders' images in the backdrop, UAE locations	Coffee, bag, jewelry, modest clothing, shoes, food	Abayas, coats, tunics, wide-leg trousers, long sleeves, higher necklines	Minimalist, clean luxury
D	Tight crops, only showing hands at times, obstructions on face, back-of-head shots	UAE symbolic jewelry	Coffee, bag, jewelry, modest clothing, food, art	Long sleeves, covered hips, longline layers, wide-leg trousers, higher necklines, opaque fabrics	Clean Luxury
E	Chin-down crops, over-shoulder crops, phone-masking, stickers and blurring	UAE falcon logo, Necklace featuring UAE leadership insignia	Coffee, bag, jewelry, food, shoes, modest clothing	Long sleeves, maxi dress, wide-leg trousers, higher necklines	Minimalist Luxury

4.2. Themes

Based on the analysis of initial coding and clustering of collective images, three overarching themes emerged: Digital Veiling as Modesty and Privacy, Anonymity as Empowerment and Balancing Tradition and Global Influence.

4.2.1. Digital Veiling as Modesty and Privacy

The first theme demonstrates how facelessness functions as a form of digital veiling, extending established practices of modesty into the online sphere. Influencers consistently employed concealment techniques such as cropping heads from outfit-of-the-day posts (OOTDs), masking faces with phones, large sunglasses, or oversized hats, and using stickers, blurring, or strategic back turned shots (see Figure 1).

The tactics they use are not incidental but deliberate strategies that retranslate cultural expectations of modesty into digital form. Clothing choices further reinforce this orientation. Across accounts, influencers wear abayas (loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress, worn by some women in the Muslim world), hijabs or headscarves, maxi dresses, wide leg trousers, tunics, and long sleeves, with consistently higher necklines and opaque fabrics (see Figure 2).

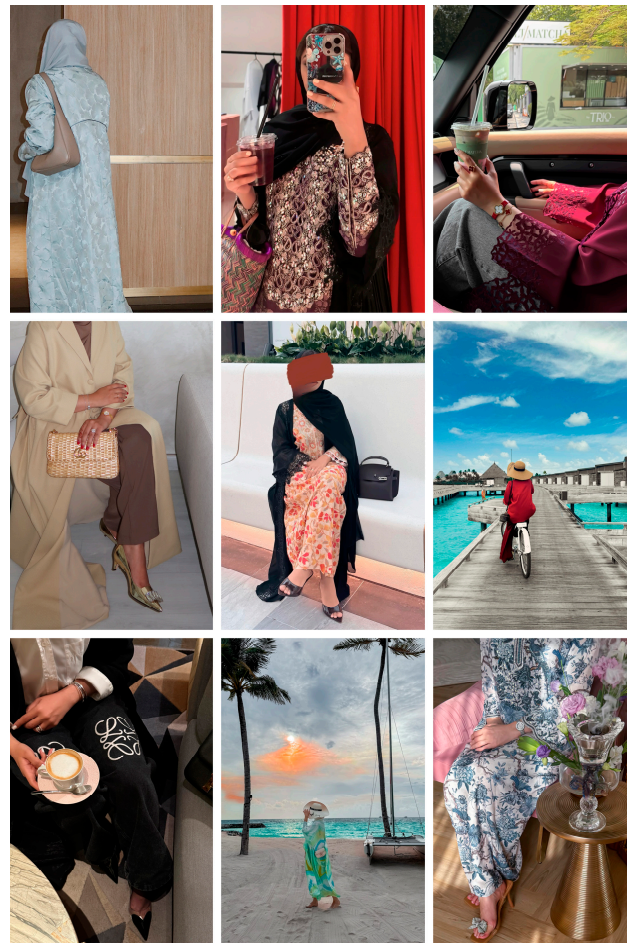


Figure 1. Digital veiling techniques—including face-masking, cropping, face-masking with phones and back-facing poses to conceal facial identity.

In other words, modesty was expressed not only through the concealment of the face but through a carefully curated wardrobe that embodied culturally sanctioned codes of feminine propriety. Equally important is the protective function of digital veiling by omitting their faces, influencers shield themselves from recognition and potential gossip within tightly knit collectivist networks. In this sense, facelessness provides both cultural compliance and personal security. It protects family honor while enabling ongoing participation in a highly visible digital arena.



Figure 2. Modesty-oriented fashion cues that reinforce culturally sanctioned codes of feminine propriety.

4.2.2. Anonymity as Empowerment

The second theme reveals that facelessness is not only restrictive but also empowering. Anonymity allows women to participate in influencer culture while maintaining control over their visibility. One prominent sub-strategy here is the use of objects as identity proxies. This means that instead of centering their facial features, influencers foreground handbags, jewelry, shoes, luxury coffee rituals, travel backdrops, or even cars (see Figure 3).

These recurrent motives become extensions of the self, signaling taste, status, and individuality. The body, partially veiled and often decentered, becomes a backdrop against which lifestyle objects serve as the focal point of digital identity. This reframing also challenges the gendered dynamics of the gaze by withholding their faces, influencers redirect attention away from physical beauty and toward curated lifestyles, aesthetic creativity, and consumer practices. By doing so, they exercise agency over how they are seen and what is valued in their content. Anonymity also creates a safe zone for self-expression. Within a social environment that discourages overt female self-display, facelessness enables these women to experiment with fashion, travel, and branding without fear of transgressing cultural red lines. What appears as concealment is in fact a strategy of empowerment. It permits women to enter spaces of influence, commerce and visibility while preserving autonomy over exposure.



Figure 3. Object-centered self-representation highlighting lifestyle proxies that substitute for facial visibility and signal individuality and taste.

4.2.3. Balancing Tradition and Global Influence Where Luxury Shows Belonging

The last theme highlights the negotiation between globalized influencer norms and local Emirati values. Faceless influencers inhabit a liminal space, simultaneously drawing on global lifestyle aesthetics and grounding their self-presentation in cultural authenticity. Cultural anchoring is achieved through deliberate incorporation of Emirati symbols: Falcon logos, UAE-identified traditional jewelry, UAE passport, and references to leaders such as the founding father of the nation (see Figure 4).

These markers assert national pride and cultural belonging, signaling that the faceless influencers' identity is rooted in local heritage even as it circulates in global digital spaces. At the same time, these influencers fully embrace the visual economy of global social media. Luxury hotels, high-end fashion brands, handbags, cars, and coffee culture dominate their feeds (see Figure 5).

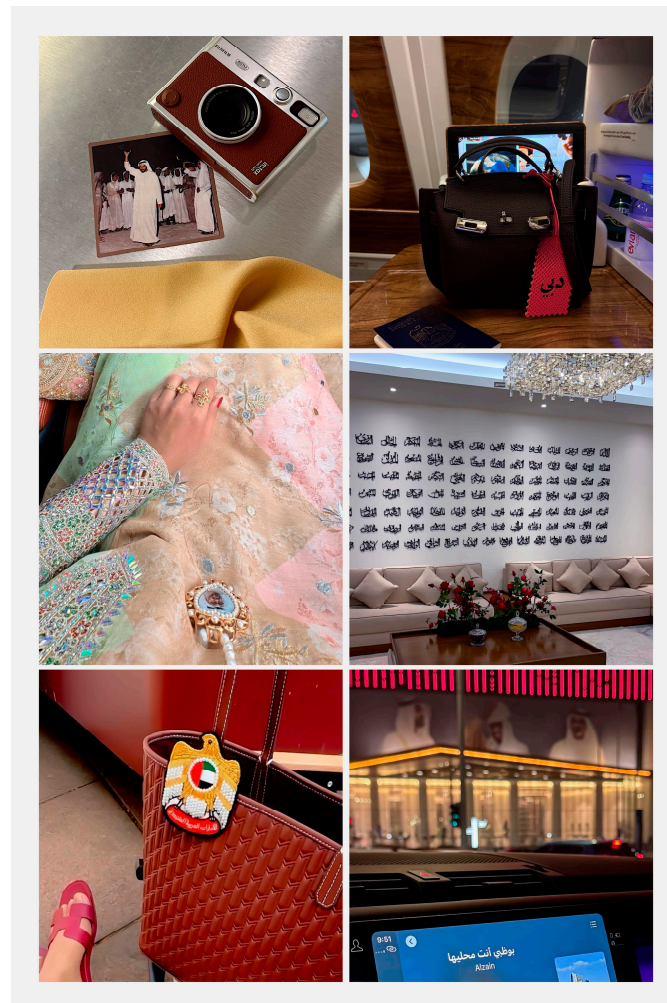


Figure 4. Expressions of cultural belonging and national pride through local/national symbols and UAE emblems situating digital self-presentation within a heritage framework.

The faceless aesthetic does not diminish their aspirational branding; rather, it repositions luxury consumption within the boundaries of modesty. This negotiation, however, is not without friction. The tension between local and global audiences' preferences in subtle ways such as perceived breaches of propriety noted by family members and peers. Influencers continually calibrate their content to satisfy divergent expectations: westernized followers who equate transparency with authenticity, and local audiences who value discretion and cultural decorum. Such negotiations reveal the dual pressure of agency and structure. While the influencers exercised personal choice in curating anonymity, their decisions remain shaped by social norms, family honor, and the moral economy of modesty within Emirati society. In this sense, facelessness operates both as a voluntary aesthetic strategy and as an adaptation to a specific social habitus that rewards visible modernity but polices excess self-exposure (Zidan and Mellor 2023; Al Hameli and Arnuco, 2023). This balancing act illustrates a process of negotiated authenticity, whereas influencers constantly calibrate their digital personas to satisfy both collectivist cultural norms (modesty, family honor, privacy) and global influencer expectations—such as full physical visibility, lifestyle branding and aspirational imagery. Their content reflects the dynamic tension between tradition and modernity, concealment and exposure, cultural specificity and global aspiration.

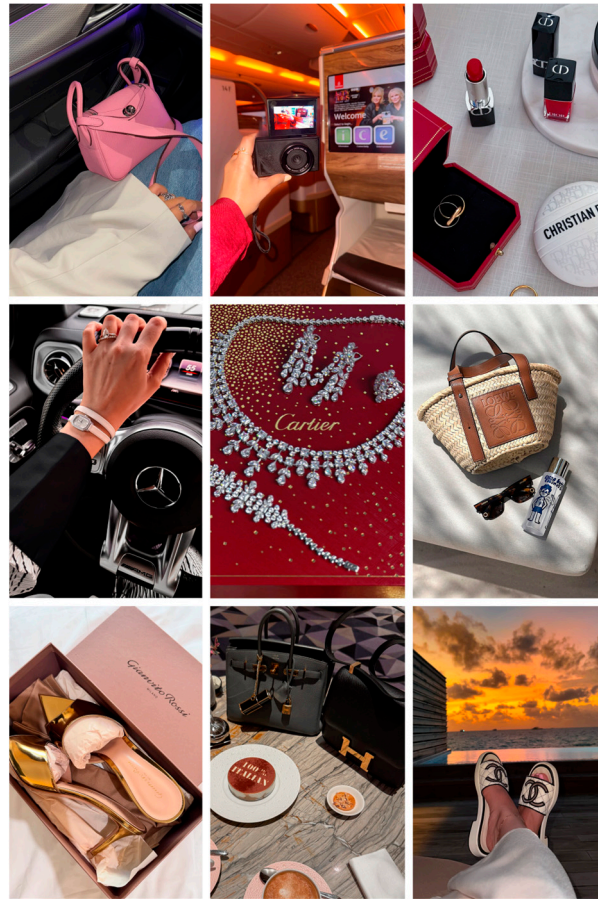


Figure 5. Integration of luxury aesthetics and global lifestyle markers demonstrating the negotiation between modesty, modernity and aspirational belonging.

All these themes therefore reveal that facelessness is not a deficit but a creative adaptation. Emirati women extend traditional practices of modesty into the digital sphere, use anonymity as a means of empowerment, and strategically balanced local cultural obligations with global influencer aesthetics. In doing so, they carve out a distinctive form of digital identity that is simultaneously modest and modern, concealed yet visible, rooted in tradition yet attuned to global trends. This analysis demonstrates that faceless self-presentation is not merely a protective strategy but a form of agency that allows women to define the terms of their participation in digital culture. Far from being invisible, these influencers remain defiantly present thereby redefining what it means to be seen, heard, and influential in an intercultural online landscape.

5. Reflexive Considerations and Recommendations

While methodological boundaries have been acknowledged earlier in Section 3.3, this section reflects on the conceptual scope of the findings and outlines directions for further inquiry. This study provides a focused interpretation of the faceless influencer phenomenon among Emirati women who occupy visible, norm-setting positions in the influencer economy. The choice to examine five (5) high-visibility accounts was deliberate: these women establish the aesthetic and behavioral standards that smaller creators often emulate. Including micro-influencers would likely reproduce similar visual and cultural repertoires rather than reveal distinct dynamics. What emerges as more pressing for future inquiry is not variation in follower scale but the diffusion and reception of this aesthetic. Future research could therefore expand along two (2) complementary lines. First, through audience and brand-focused interviews, scholars may examine how trust, relatability, and

credibility are constructed around influencers who remain unseen. Despite the absence of facial visibility, these women sustain partnerships and consumer engagement that indicate a high degree of perceived authenticity and authority thereby raising important questions about the semiotics of trust in digital spaces. Second, comparative or cross-cultural studies could explore whether non-Emirati or non-Gulf creators adopt similar practices of digital veiling, either as aspirational mimicry or as a strategic adaptation to platform cultures shaped by Gulf aesthetics. Such research would illuminate how the Emirati model of faceless self-representation circulates globally and becomes recontextualized within other moral, religious, or commercial frameworks.

Additionally, this work invites further theoretical refinement. The study's concept of *digital veiling* or *empowering anonymity* may be developed into a broader framework for understanding selective visibility across online publics. Future studies could extend this inquiry into multimodal formats such as Instagram Reels, TikTok and YouTube/YouTube Shorts, where motion, sound and narration introduce new layers and nuance into the discussion. Moreover, comparative analyses across various online social media platforms could further illuminate whether facelessness remains culturally grounded or evolves into globalized aesthetic strategy for managing privacy and attention within visual economies. Expanding this theorization will deepen understanding of how visual absence operates not merely as concealment but as an active performance of identity and belonging. Finally, while this study privileges the visual and semiotic dimensions of Instagram posts, integrating ethnographic or interview-based methods could provide richer insight into how influencers themselves interpret their choices. Such triangulation would help connect visual analysis with lived experience, further grounding theoretical claims about modesty, agency, and digital personhood.

6. Conclusions

The findings align with Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework. Just as individuals manage impressions in face-to-face interactions by controlling what is shown *frontstage* and withheld *backstage*, faceless Emirati influencers carefully curate their digital personas to satisfy multiple overlapping audiences which includes their family, peers, strangers, and global followers. By obscuring their faces, these women draw a clear boundary between the frontstage persona offered to the public and the backstage self that remains protected. In this way digital veiling becomes a dramaturgical tactic—one that allows participation in social media stage performances while safeguarding modesty and privacy. At the same time, the findings resonate with Ting-Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory which emphasizes the dynamic balancing of individual desires and collective expectations in intercultural contexts. Emirati faceless influencers illustrate this process with particular clarity. They assert individuality through fashion choices, lifestyle branding, and luxury consumption, while simultaneously adhering to collectivist norms of modesty, family honor, and cultural belonging. Their practices demonstrate that identity online is not static but continuously negotiated across cultural and global boundaries. Beyond contextual insight, the study introduces *digital veiling* as an emergent conceptual framework for understanding selective visibility in digital publics. Grounded in empirical evidence from the Emirati context, the framework reframes concealment not as absence but as agency—an intentional mode of managing exposure within culturally and technologically mediated environments. While the notion of digital veiling is articulated here through Gulf practices of modest self-presentation, its analytical logic is transferable. It can illuminate similar negotiations of visibility and privacy among users in other cultural or platform settings. Ongoing work by the author is developing this concept into a broader theoretical model connecting visibility, identity negotiation, and mediated privacy across global digital cultures. Together, these

contributions extend current discussions on modest fashion, digital identity, and feminist media studies by demonstrating that women’s strategic invisibility can itself be a powerful articulation of agency, belonging, and self-definition.

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