Social media and empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making: A study among UK Muslim women

Abstract:
Research that explores Muslim women's hospitality and tourism decision-making is limited. This paper attempts to bring a new perspective to the literature on social media and consumption decisions in the hospitality and tourism sector by focusing on Muslim women as a consumer segment. Based on a survey of 791 Muslim women in the UK, it finds that autonomous self-expression, self-disclosure, and reciprocity to self-disclosure on Facebook were positively related to bonding and bridging social capital, which in turn related positively to their empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making. Employment status moderated some of these relations. The paper breaks new ground by bringing together two disparate research strands in the tourism literature: one that focuses on women but ignores religion, and the other that studies Islamic tourism but overlooks the role of women. The findings offer insights into hospitality and tourism marketing strategies aimed at Muslim women.

Introduction

Gender has long been shown to shape how individuals engage with hospitality and tourism (Swain, 1995). Men and women differ on factors such as perceived security of destinations (Remoaldo et al., 2014), and choice of hotels (Kwok et al., 2016). Specifically, the role of women in hospitality and tourism decision-making has been receiving substantial scholarly attention (Henderson, 2003; Morgan and Pritchard, 2019; Wang and Li, 2020).

However, two research gaps exist. One, gender studies seldom focus on Muslim women. These have been predominantly conducted in western cultures, where family dynamics are different compared with Muslim families. Hence, existing findings cannot be generalised to Muslim women. Two, although research on Islamic tourism and Muslims is gaining traction (see Suid et al., 2017 for a review), these works seldom take gender into account. Thus, research that explores consumption of hospitality and tourism by Muslim women is far and few.

Studying Muslim women's decision-making in hospitality and tourism is important due to their unique socio-cultural milieu. Given the patriarchal gender norms, Muslim women's agency in leisure activities is limited (Bakkar, 2017; Oktadiana et al., 2020; Tran and Walter, 2014). They face what Bachrach and Baratz (1962) identify as the invisible face of power, with socio-cultural values limiting their choices. Muslim women are hence "disadvantaged" as holiday decision-makers (Henderson, 2003, p. 449). They seem disempowered in terms of their influence in travel planning as either independent decision-makers or members of a family.

To attenuate this disempowerment, Muslim women could rely on social media. This is because people usually join virtual communities for the purposes of social support and community-building (Brown, 2006; Gruss et al., 2020a, 2020b). There is evidence that social media provides the necessary agency to empower the disempowered (Bühler and Pelka, 2014; Li, 2016; Nemer, 2016). Ratthinan and Selamat (2019) specifically highlighted the potential of social media to empower Muslim women in the context of tourism. However,

51 there is still neither any empirical evidence to substantiate this proposition nor any
52 understanding of the mechanism through which Muslim women can be empowered through
53 social media for hospitality and tourism purposes.
54
55 Hence, this paper investigates the following research question: How can social media
56 communication generate empowerment in the context of hospitality and tourism decision-
57 making? To address this question, a theoretically-informed research framework is developed
58 that maps the mechanism through which social media use generates decision-making
59 empowerment. The framework is validated in the context of Muslim women in the UK—a
60 segment considered disempowered in the literature.
61
62 The paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it breaks new ground by
63 bringing together two disparate research strands in the hospitality and tourism literature: one
64 that focuses on women but not on religion, and the other that studies Islamic tourism but
65 overlooks the role of women. Thus, we respond to recent calls made by authors like Ghaderi
66 et al. (2020) about investigating hospitality and tourism consumption behaviour among
67 Muslim women. As Morgan and Pritchard (2019) explain, gender-based studies on
68 hospitality and tourism still span a limited array of topics. Thus, investigating the hospitality
69 and tourism consumption of Muslim women—an under-researched demographic—will
70 extend the scholarly knowledge in this field. Considering the increasing participation of
71 Muslim women in this sector (Mohamed et al., 2020), such a line of inquiry holds
72 significance for theorists as well as practitioners.
73
74 Second, the paper addresses crucial gaps related to the established discourse on the influence
75 of social media adoption and hospitality and tourism decision-making. It is a response to the
76 call for research on the impact of social media on travel and leisure decisions across different
77 cultural contexts (Wang and Li, 2020; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). While the influence of
78 social media in hospitality and tourism decision-making is well established (Ladhari and
79 Michaud, 2015), recent conceptual studies like Mehraliyev et al. (2020) have called for
80 research exploring how power is generated through social media communication. By looking
81 into the mechanism through which a relatively disempowered segment accumulates power in
82 hospitality and tourism decision-making, the paper contributes to the emerging stream of
83 research on social media-induced empowerment.
84
85 Connectedly, the paper also extends the literature on how marginal communities adopt social
86 media as a community-building mechanism to improve their agency and empowerment. As
87 Shockley et al. (2020: p.3) suggest, "the impact of social media usage on women's voice and
88 empowerment is multifaceted and complex." However, empirical works examining different
89 contexts that shape this empowerment are limited.
90
91 The next section brings together a review of studies from different research streams relevant
92 to this paper. It then develops the research framework. The empirical study is presented next.
93 Finally, implications for theory and practice are discussed.
94
95
96 **Literature Review**
97
98 *Muslim Women's Hospitality and Tourism Decision-Making*
99 Based on social power theory, decision-making power includes a three-tier hierarchy
100 (Mehraliyev et al., 2000). Ability to choose is the most basic exhibition of power that requires

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101 individual resources like knowledge and money. Ability to influence choices is the second
102 level of power where one can fully or partly impose their decisions on others. Ability to
103 provide choices is the highest level of power.
104
105 Socio-cultural structures can restrict individuals' decision-making power, often in an
106 invisible manner (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). The literature abounds with evidence of power
107 restrictions experienced by women in Islamic societies across several decision-making
108 contexts (Henderson, 2003; Khatwani, 2017; Mason, 1996). These power restrictions can be
109 construed as amounting to 'limited ability to choose' or 'limited ability to influence choices'
110 as per the social power theory. For instance, Mason (1996) found that women in Malaysia
111 and Pakistan—predominantly Muslim societies—were unlikely to get involved in decisions
112 such as buying dress and jewellery or whether to work compared with those in India, the
113 Philippines and Thailand.
114
115 This sense of disempowerment is not just limited to Muslim women from low-income
116 societies. Research conducted among Muslim women living in high-income western societies
117 such as the UK also reports limits to their decision-making freedom (Ahmad, 2001; Dagkas
118 et al., 2011; Kay, 2006). According to Arifeen and Gatrell (2020), working British Muslim
119 women, while enjoying considerable freedom, still felt that they needed to abide by the
120 values and restrictions required by their religion.
121
122 In the hospitality and tourism context too, there exists indirect support for the
123 disempowerment of Muslim women in decision-making. For example, in the analysis of
124 blogs written by Muslim women travellers, persuading parents about the need for the trip
125 emerged as a key travel concern (Oktadiana et al., 2020). Similarly, Ratthinan and Selamat
126 (2019) reported how Muslim women in Malaysia require permission from their husbands or
127 parents to travel. There are also other constraints that Muslim women are expected to fulfil.
128 These include eating Halal food, and not staying in a hotel where liquor is served.
129
130 The literature is silent on Muslim women's role in families for holiday planning. However,
131 works such as Mason (1996), Khatwani (2017) and the recent work by Arifeen and Gatrell
132 (2020) among British Muslim women suggest that Muslim women can be disempowered
133 during occasions of family decision-making about hospitality and tourism consumption. They
134 often find themselves in situations where they are either not able to choose from possible
135 options or don't have any influence in the choice process.
136
137 *Social Capital for Empowerment*
138 Social psychology literature shows that when individuals experience a state of powerlessness,
139 they try to cope by adopting a variety of strategies (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Mainiero,
140 1986). According to Jóhannesson et al. (2003: p.4), "crucial to the idea of coping strategies is
141 recognition of agency: people's ability to change, resist, accept, or challenge the social
142 framework they find themselves in." Hence, coping strategies devised by Muslim women will
143 expectedly be directed towards acquiring agency through which they are able to make
144 decisions on their own or influence decisions concerning them.
145
146 In the face of disempowerment, mustering social capital is a popular strategy to increase
147 agency and empowerment (Lewis et al., 2013; Wahl et al., 2010). According to Lin (2001,
148 p.25) social capital refers to "the resources embedded in social networks accessed and used
149 by actors for actions." Two types of social capital exist: bonding and bridging (Putnam,
150 2000). Bonding social capital is characterised by strong ties, mostly between family, friends

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151 and people with the same values and background. Bridging social capital on the other hand is
152 characterised by weak ties, usually with individuals across the boundaries of social identity,
153 age, gender and ethnic group. Both types of social capital can enable disempowered
154 individuals to generate empowerment in decision-making.
155
156 Moreover, research in family decision-making shows that an individual member of a family
157 will attempt to influence the family's decision-making process based on their estimate of the
158 effectiveness of using their power as well as that of the cost associated with using their power
159 (Corfman and Lehman, 1987). Power use effectiveness is dependent on the resources the
160 individual has at his/her disposal (e.g., expertise, credibility, etc.), while cost estimate of
161 power use depends on the estimate of how much the power use could create conflict, the
162 individual's desire to be liked, observe social norms and preserve relationships (Corfman and
163 Lehman, 1987). Using social capital as a coping strategy can aid the individual on both
164 fronts.
165
166 *Social Media for Social Capital Accumulation*
167 Using social media is now one of the most prominent mechanisms to accumulate social
168 capital. Social capital formation is in fact regarded as an inevitable consequence of social
169 media usage (Horng and Wu, 2019). Participation in social media increases both social
170 bonding and social bridging (Chen and Li, 2017; Li and Chen, 2014; Horng and Wu, 2019;
171 Phua et al., 2017). Conceivably, disempowered individuals could turn to social media to
172 accumulate bonding and bridging social capital in order to increase their agency and
173 empowerment (Brown, 2006; Gruss et al., 2018, 2020a; Lewis et al., 2013; Wahl et al.,
174 2010).
175
176 However, save a few exceptions (e.g., Chen and Li, 2017; Horng and Wu, 2019), most
177 studies that adopt this premise consider the general use of social media or frequency of using
178 social media as antecedents of social capital formation (Williams, 2019). But social media
179 activity encompasses a much broader and nuanced communication mechanism (Chen and Li,
180 2017). Extant studies do not explain how one or more of these communication behaviours
181 help build social capital, especially when social media is adopted as a coping mechanism to
182 ward off powerlessness. We plug this gap through our research framework.
183
184
185 **Research Framework**
186 This paper assumes Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model of coping where coping strategies
187 are defined as a process involving several behavioural choices based on the requirements of
188 the context. It proposes that Muslim women develop coping strategies through the
189 mechanism of consciously adopting a specific pattern of behaviour on social media. The three
190 social media communication facets that Muslim women could choose to build social capital
191 are (i) autonomous self-expression through social media, (ii) self-disclosure of hospitality and
192 tourism consumption, and (iii) reciprocity to self-disclosure. Such behaviours can be
193 positively related to the accumulation of social capital in the form of social bonding and
194 social bridging (H1-H6), which in turn can be positively associated with empowerment in
195 hospitality and tourism decision-making (H7-H8)—albeit differently between employed and
196 unemployed Muslim women (H9).
197
198 *Autonomous Self-Expression and Social Capital*
199 Autonomous self-expression is defined as the choice of expressing oneself freely online
200 based on one's interests. On social media, self-expression is not only limited to conveying

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information about oneself but also includes other activities including providing 'likes' and sharing posts. Identity-building is easily facilitated through such activities as self-presentation is one of the most important features of social media platforms (Livingstone, 2008).

Through identity-building, social media generates two types of groups: bonding groups and identity groups (Sassenberg and Postmes, 2002). Bonding groups are formed as members get emotionally and socially attached to others in the online community. Identity groups are formed as members feel a commitment to the online community's shared purpose. Clearly, bonding groups are outcomes of social bonding, and identity groups of social bridging.

According to the common identity and bond theory, one of the main sources of bonding group formation is personal information and attraction through similarity (Ren et al., 2007). Personal information is expected to increase the likelihood of interaction and trust (Yuki et al., 2005). Further, as people identify similarity in their identities, there is a greater impetus for bonding as "people like others who are similar to them in preferences, attitudes, and values, and they are likely to work or interact with similar others" (Ren et al., 2007; p.388). Thus, autonomous self-expression involving disinhibited revelation of one's true identity, interests, values and culture is expected to increase chances of bonding with other individuals who share similar profiles. A free and autonomous expression of self will be easily found out by other members sharing the same socio-cultural background, thereby inviting trust and strong bonds.

Autonomous self-expression can also induce identity-based grouping and social bridging. This is because free and disinhibited self-expression greatly aids self-categorisation, which enables individuals with similar backgrounds—but not directly linked—to identify others as part of their group (Turner et al., 1987). This self-categorisation then spirals up to trigger even more information sharing. A typical example among Muslim women is that of Hijabers in Indonesia (Beta, 2014), which grew out of social media activities of a small number of Islamic Hijab designers in Indonesia and is now an extremely big network of Muslim women in Indonesia who have voluntarily chosen to wear Hijab. Beta (2014) explains how the candid and free self-expressions of a founder of this network, Dian Pelangi, actually attracts a strong following among urban Muslim women in Indonesia.

Hence, the following are hypothesised:

H1: Muslim women's autonomous self-expression through social media is positively related to social bonding.

H2: Muslim women's autonomous self-expression through social media is positively related to social bridging.

Self-Disclosure of Hospitality and Tourism Consumption and Social Capital
Self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption is defined as the sharing of information about hospitality and tourism experiences, feelings and opinions through social media. While individuals may disclose their general identity through social media, there is also the prospect of individuals using focused self-disclosure on specific topics like health (Yan et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2019), or more pertinently hospitality and tourism (Jovanović et al., 2019; Park et al., 2016).

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To gain agency and empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making, Muslim women are expected to increase their focused self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption. The main expectation is to improve social bonding and bridging (Gruss et al., 2018, 2020a). There exists evidence for the use of focused self-disclosure to cope with powerlessness. Döveling (2015), for instance, reports how self-disclosure is often used as a coping strategy by young mourners. Park et al. (2016) found that the motivation to develop a wider friendship group correlated with self-disclosure of pilgrimage experiences.

Focused self-disclosure in tourism consumption is expected to create significant social bonding. Studies have shown that self-disclosure can substantially generate social support (Lee et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2015). Yang et al. (2019) found that self-disclosure can lead to both emotional support from close ties (social bonding) and information support from weak ties (social bridging). Chen and Li (2017) also found a positive relationship between self-disclosure and social bonding as well as social bridging. This is probably because, as Berg and Delraga (2013) contends, receiving intimate disclosure increases trust in and liking for the disclosure. It also helps build trust and favourability from weak ties.

Hence, the following are hypothesised:

H3: Muslim women's self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption on social media is positively related to social bonding.

H4: Muslim women's self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption on social media is positively related to social bridging.

Reciprocity to Self-Disclosure and Social Capital

Reciprocity is the dyadic or mutual effect of self-disclosure (Yang et al., 2019). It is almost a concomitant outcome of self-disclosure, which alludes to the human nature of mimicking the behaviour of people with whom they interact. Reciprocity has significant implications for social capital building. For one, reciprocity to self-disclosure can lead to trust in the context of support building. Reciprocity can inform support-seekers that they are being understood and that others care about them (Yang et al., 2019). More importantly, reciprocity to self-disclosure can provide social comparison information, which is extremely valued in the context of building social capital (Wang et al., 2015).

There is empirical evidence that reciprocity leads to social capital (Lubell and Scholz 2001). The norm of reciprocity reflects embedded obligations created by exchanges of benefits or favours (Gouldner, 1960). According to the concept of social exchange, social behaviour is nothing but the outcome of an exchange process. Social bonding with close ties therefore seems to be an outcome of reciprocity, which usually results in a sense of indebtedness that in turn translates to stronger relationships (Pai and Tsai, 2016). This proposition is supported by the evidence for the role played by member reciprocity in developing online communities within social networking sites (Musembwa and Paul, 2012), including Facebook (Surma, 2016).

Prior research also highlights how reciprocity enhances bridging social capital (Blokland, 2008; Ellison et al., 2014). According to Lévi-Strauss (1969), reciprocity is not always direct but can also be indirect. Direct reciprocity involves the exchange between two actors. Chen and Li (2017) reveal friending, a directly reciprocal action on social media, to be positively related to social bridging. Indirect exchange occurs between two individuals, who eventually

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receive benefit from another actor. Reciprocity to self-disclosure can indirectly create a network of dialogue which provides a wealth of information for the entire online community (Surma, 2016; Yang et al., 2019). This potentially attracts new members to the dialogue and widens the scope of the dialogue, thereby giving rise to bridging social capital. Through reciprocity to self-disclosure, social media therefore could allow Muslim women to engage with not only strong ties but also weak ties.

Hence, the following are hypothesised:

H5: Muslim women's reciprocity to self-disclosure on social media is positively related to social bonding.

H6: Muslim women's reciprocity to self-disclosure on social media is positively related to social bridging.

Social Capital and Empowerment in Decision-Making
Based on social power theory, the paper considers Muslim women's empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making to be linked to (i) their ability to independently choose tourism/holiday consumption alternatives, and/or (ii) their ability to influence such choices that will impact their consumption experience in a group (e.g. family) setting (Mehraliyev et al., 2000). By accumulating social capital through social bonding and social bridging, Muslim women achieve the agency to enhance their influence in these situations.

Extant research supports the idea of social capital as an empowering mechanism, especially for disempowered communities. For instance, Boneham and Sixsmith (2006) explained how older women accumulated social capital through networking to empower themselves on health-related topics. Bühler and Pelka (2014) reported how social capital development through online media could empower people with disabilities. Kumar (2014) illustrated how youth from disadvantaged communities in India empowered themselves through social bridging and social bonding activities in Facebook. Lewis et al. (2013) conveyed how social capital could support the wellbeing of people in palliative care.

With increase in social bonding and social bridging, Muslim women are therefore expected to become more equipped with comparative knowledge about similar contexts faced by women from their background. This in turn will give rise to greater self-competence and self-esteem (Kaye et al., 2017). They will now be in a position to express their requirements more confidently. Social bonding also offers emotional support and advice, which can be extremely effective in increasing Muslim women's influence in decision-making contexts. For instance, Ahmad (2001) showed how young Muslim women in British families used the support of elder women in their extended families to turn family decisions in their favour. Social bridging also improves the knowledge and expertise that Muslim women can use as resources during decision-making (Boneham and Sixsmith, 2006; Crittenden et al., 2019).

Hence, the following are hypothesised:

H7: Social bonding is positively related to empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making among Muslim women.

H8: Social bridging is positively related to empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making among Muslim women.

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350
351 *Employment Status*
352 The relationships among the variables posited in the hypotheses H1 through H8 stand a good
353 chance to be moderated by individuals' employment status. This is because being
354 unemployed is associated with reduced perceived control and self-confidence (Jackson,
355 1999). While employment improves mental well-being, unemployment elevates
356 psychological distress and takes a toll on confidence and self-efficacy (Breuer and Asiedu,
357 2017; Dooley and Prause, 1995). Numerous studies have shown how women's employment
358 status shapes their power in family decision-making (Bala and Monga, 2004; Erman et al.,
359 2002; Kumar and Maral, 2015). This is true for Muslim women too. The literature shows that
360 unemployed Muslim women usually experience greater disempowerment than their
361 employed counterpart (Achour et al., 2015; Lorasdaği, 2009).
362
363 Hence, compared with unemployed Muslim women, employed Muslim women have a head
364 start in achieving empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making through social
365 media use. They are likely to be more confident and willing to engage in the activities of
366 autonomous self-expression, self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption, and
367 reciprocity on social media (Erman et al., 2002; Kumar and Maral, 2015). In consequence,
368 they will be able to accumulate greater social capital and in turn empowerment. Furthermore,
369 employed women have more personal connections, and hence, more opportunity to interact
370 with others outside social media (Erickson, 2017; Nieminen et al., 2008). This will further
371 reinforce their online social bonding and social bridging, thereby strengthening
372 empowerment. The underlying mechanism of generating empowerment from social media
373 use, mediated by social bonding and social bridging, is hence likely to be different for
374 employed and unemployed Muslim women.
375
376 Thus, the following is hypothesised:
377
378 H9: Employment status moderates how Muslim women's social media use relates to
379 empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making through social bonding as well as
380 social bridging such that the moderating relationship is stronger (weaker) for employed
381 (undemployed) women.
382
383 In sum, we propose a moderated mediation model. Social bonding and social bridging are
384 expected to mediate the relations between the three social media communication behaviours
385 and empowerment—albeit differently for employed and unemployed Muslim women. Figure
386 1 shows the research framework.
387
388
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390   Figure 1: Research framework.

Figure 1: Research framework.
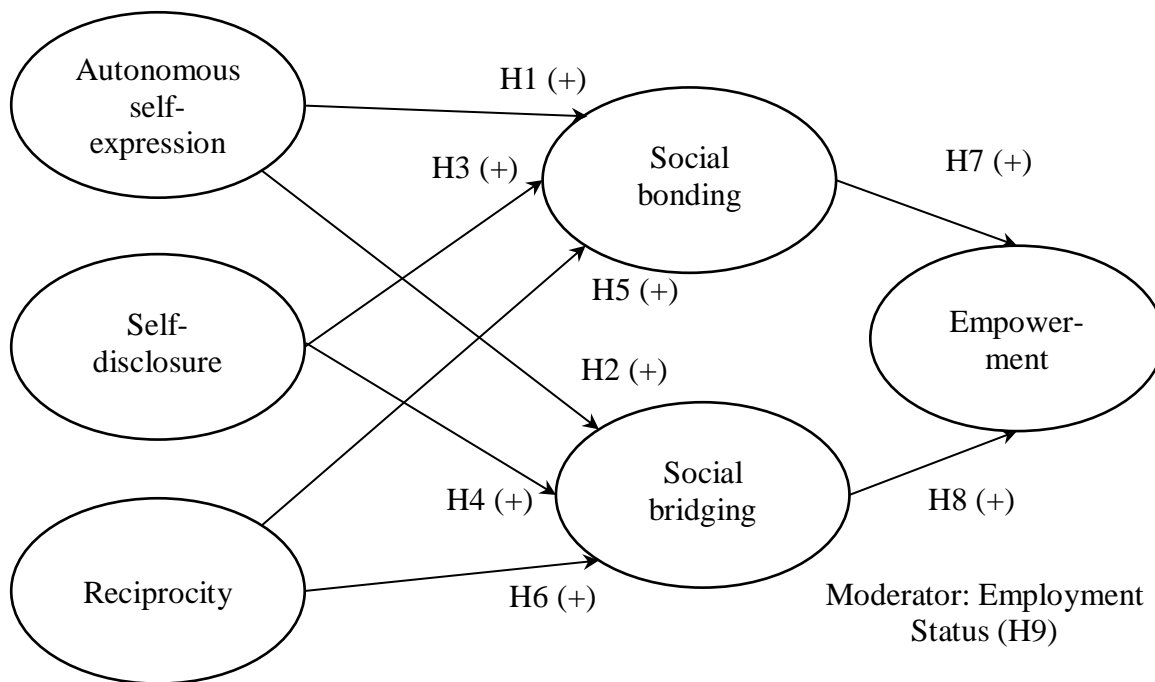
392 **Methods**

Study Context
This paper specifically focuses on Muslim Women in the UK. This socio-demographic
segment has attracted much scholarly attention (e.g., Dwyer, 2000; Ahmad, 2001; Arifeen
and Gatrell, 2020). They are considered to be "continually negotiating and renegotiating their
cultural, religious and personal identities and that these processes operate in complex and
sometimes contradictory ways" (Ahmad, 2001, p.137). As Arifeen and Gatrell (2020)
explain, British Muslim women are very conscious of their 'ethical self', which restricts them
to 'self-disciplinary' behaviours. The literature widely highlights the disempowerment
experienced by this segment on structural, cultural and social dimensions (Rashid, 2014;
Akhtar, 2014). Hence, the segment is worth studying in the context of hospitality and tourism
decision-making.

Research Design and Data Collection
Given that the paper has a deductive flavour with specific testable hypotheses, it lends itself
readily to the use of surveys (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, since scales exist for all the
constructs in the conceptual model, a quantitative data collection approach was particularly
deemed appropriate. As such, a mono-method approach was adopted using quantitative
surveys (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Specifically, a survey was used
because it is a convenient and effective method to obtain and archive quantitative data about
behaviours and perceptions accurately from a large sample (Creswell and Creswell, 2018;
Saunders et al., 2019; Saris and Gallhofer, 2014).

For participation, the inclusion criterion was that individuals must be Muslim women in the
UK who use Facebook. Specifically, Facebook was chosen due to two reasons. One, it is the
largest social network with over 32 million users in the UK alone and 1.65 billion globally
(Revive.digital, 2020; Statista, 2021). Two, recent studies suggest that Facebook is a key

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440 platform for businesses in the hospitality and tourism industry for engaging with customers
441 (Gruss et al., 2018, 2020a).
442
443 Participants were recruited through a combination of convenience sampling and snowballing.
444 The study invitation was disseminated via social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram,
445 LinkedIn, Twitter and WhatsApp. We further contacted Muslim women influencers on such
446 platforms who helped us share the study invitation among dedicated online communities for
447 Muslim women in the UK.
448
449 There were four screening questions. The first two sought participants' gender and religion.
450 This was necessary as the study is focused on only Muslim women. The third asked for the
451 place of residence. Only Muslim women living in the UK were eligible. The final screening
452 question asked if they used Facebook. Those who passed all the screening questions were
453 allowed to proceed to the survey. The final sample included 791 participants: 433 (54.74%)
454 employed, and 358 (45.26%) unemployed. Table 1 presents the sample demographics.
455
456
457 Table 1: Sample demographics
458

Demographic Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
16-19	62	7.84
20-24	215	27.18
25-28	124	15.68
29-32	131	16.56
33-36	82	10.37
37-40	77	9.73
41-over	100	12.64
Employment Status		
Employed	433	54.74
Unemployed	358	45.26
Education		
None	7	0.88
High/Secondary school	50	6.32
Some college or associate degree	200	25.28
Bachelor's degree	301	38.05
Master's degree	182	23.01
Doctoral degree	26	3.29
Other	25	3.16
Income		
£0-£14000	215	27.18
£15000-£25000	134	16.94
£26000-£36000	85	10.75
£37000-£47000	38	4.80
£48000-£58000	15	1.90
£59000-£69000	3	0.38
£70000-over	7	0.88
Rather not mention	294	37.17

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Measures and Analysis

The measures are listed in Table 2. Autonomy was measured using three items adapted from La Guardia et al. (2000) and Burchardt et al. (2012). Self-disclosure was measured using four items adapted from Kwak et al. (2014), Park et al. (2011), and Zlatolas et al. (2015). Wasko and Faraj's (2005) scale was adopted to measure reciprocity using three items. Informed by Williams (2006), social bonding and social bridging were measured using three items each. To measure empowerment, four items adapted from Schuler and Rottach (2010) were used.

All the items were measured on a five-point scale. Kurtosis and skewness were checked—no value was beyond -2 and 2. Covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses. The analyses were done using AMOS.

For common method bias, the marker variable method was used. The questionnaire included three items to measure ethnocentrism, a construct which is not theoretically related to the study. This marker variable was included in the measurement model as well as in the path analysis. It had no impact on the main results. The study constructs showed weak correlations with ethnocentrism (see Table 3). Hence, common method bias was not a concern.

Results

Reliability, Validity and Model Fitness

As shown in Table 3, the study constructs demonstrated sufficient reliability and validity. Moreover, according to the cut-off values recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999), the model fit was excellent (CMIN/DF=2.383; ChiSq=953.295; CFI=0.952; NFI=0.921; TLI=0.940; SRMR=0.048; RMSEA=0.042; PClose=1.000).

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491 Table 2: Measures and descriptive statistics
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Measures	M	SD	Loadings
Autonomous self-expression			
On Facebook, I feel free to be who I am.	2.87	1.29	0.80
On Facebook, I feel free to share my holiday experiences with people.	2.84	1.21	0.86
On Facebook, I feel free to plan my holidays.	3.31	1.23	0.80
Self-disclosure	3.14	1.41	0.90
I always post about my holidays on Facebook.			
I keep people updated on Facebook about what I am doing during holidays.	3.43	1.28	0.91
When I have to say anything about holidays, I use Facebook.	3.42	1.31	0.89
Uploading holiday related posts on Facebook, makes me feel more connected to my community.	3.27	1.25	0.87
Reciprocity			
I know other people will respond to my holiday related posts, so it's only fair to respond to their holiday related posts.	2.83	1.20	0.85
I believe that someone on Facebook will help me regarding holiday decision-making if I need help.	2.70	1.19	0.78
I expect other people to respond to my holiday related posts when I respond to their holiday related posts.	3.17	1.30	0.84
Social bonding			
Friends and family on Facebook provide ideas, excursions, and other leisure activities to do on holidays.	2.57	1.22	0.89
I trust information provided by friends and relatives on Facebook about holidays.	2.47	1.18	0.87
Friends and family on Facebook help in searching for ideas where to go for holidays.	2.85	1.36	0.88
Social bridging			
Facebook has increased the number of people/holiday pages I can contact to inquire about holidays.	2.92	1.25	0.89
After using Facebook, I got to know about new holiday pages.	2.89	1.30	0.89
Other people/holiday pages on Facebook provide ideas, excursions, and other leisure activities for holidays.	2.66	1.08	0.78
Empowerment			
Facebook provides awareness about the sources to improve holiday decision-making.	2.91	1.22	0.84
Online mobility such as seeing holiday places online, contacting people online for information, etc. on Facebook empowers me for a holiday.	3.11	1.17	0.86
Information from Facebook increases my involvement in family holiday decision-making.	3.18	1.20	0.89
Information from Facebook makes me able to make decisions about holidays.	3.19	1.18	0.90

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494
495 Table 3: Reliability and validity of the scale items
496

	CR	α	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Self-disclosure (1)	0.9	0.91	0.69	**0.83**						
Autonomous self-expression (2)	0.79	0.76	0.56	0.75	**0.75**					
Reciprocity (3)	0.85	0.76	0.65	0.58	0.51	**0.81**				
Social bonding (4)	0.86	0.86	0.67	0.55	0.5	0.63	**0.82**			
Social bridging (5)	0.9	0.81	0.75	0.47	0.43	0.58	0.66	**0.86**		
Empowerment (6)	0.89	0.89	0.67	0.73	0.72	0.68	0.68	0.65	**0.82**	
Ethnocentrism (7)	0.87	0.87	0.7	0.18	0.14	0.02	-0.19	-0.03	0.10	**0.84**

497 Notes: CR: Composite Reliability; α: Cronbach's Alpha; AVE: Average Variance Extracted;
498 Bold values in diagonals represent the square roots of AVE.
499
500
501
502 *Direct Relations*
503 In the initial SEM model, the demographic variables of age, education level and income were
504 included as control variables. As they did not impact any relationship, they were excluded
505 from the final analysis.
506
507 With the full sample, autonomous self-expression was positively related to social bonding
508 (β=0.21; $p<0.01$) and social bridging (β=0.11; $p<0.05$). Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported.
509 Self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption was positively related to social
510 bonding (β=0.26, $p<0.001$) and social bridging (β=0.12, $p<0.05$); lending support to H3 and
511 H4 respectively. Reciprocity to self-disclosure was also positively related to social bonding
512 (β=0.52, $p<0.001$) and social bridging (β=0.42, $p<0.001$); thereby supporting H5 and H6
513 respectively. Moreover, both social bonding (β=0.43, $p<0.001$) and social bridging (β=0.40,
514 $p<0.001$) were positively associated with Muslim women's empowerment. Therefore, H7 and
515 H8 are also supported. These direct relations are depicted in Table 4 and Figure 2. Overall,
516 the proposed research framework explained 59.9% of the variance in empowerment in
517 hospitality and tourism decision-making among Muslim women in the UK.
518
519

13

520   Table 4: Results from the path analysis
521

From	To	β	SE	t-Stat.	Sig.
Autonomous self-expression	Social Bonding	0.21	0.07	2.967	.003
Autonomous self-expression	Social Bridging	0.11	0.06	2.030	.042
Self-Disclosure	Social Bonding	0.26	0.06	4.281	<0.001
Self-Disclosure	Social Bridging	0.12	0.05	2.564	.010
Reciprocity	Social Bonding	0.52	0.06	9.187	<0.001
Reciprocity	Social Bridging	0.42	0.05	9.046	<0.001
Social Bonding	Empowerment	0.43	0.04	10.167	<0.001
Social Bridging	Empowerment	0.40	0.06	7.025	<0.001

522
523   Figure 2: Results from the path analysis.

Figure 2: Results from the path analysis.

$$***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05$$
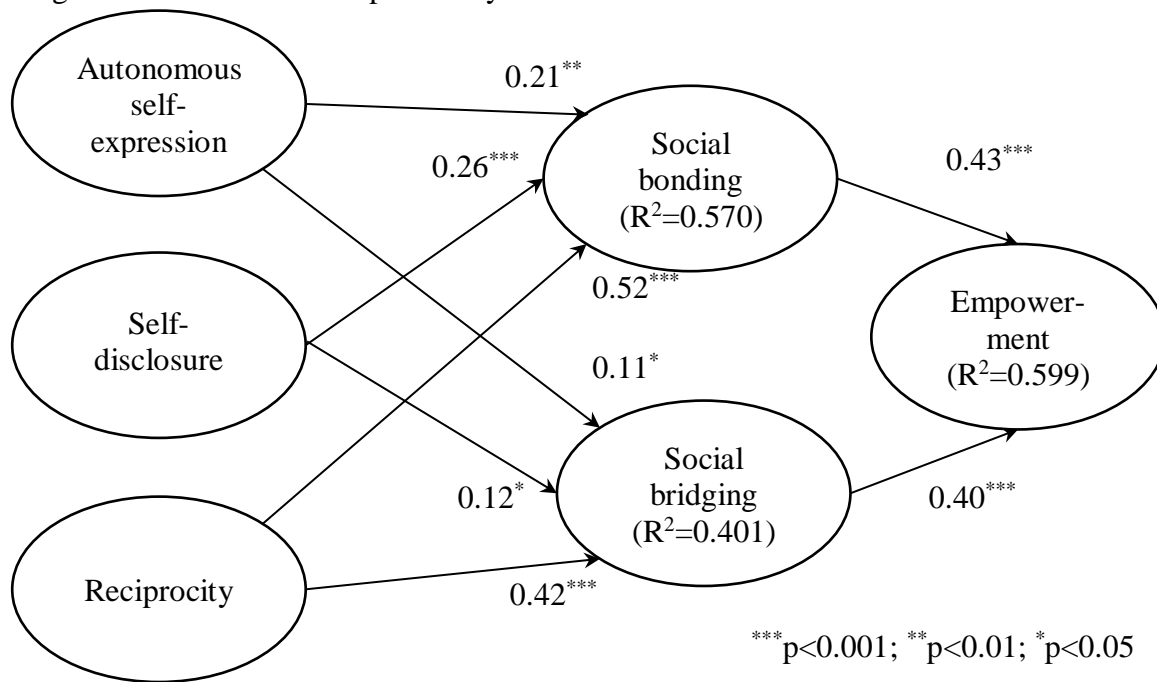
544   *Moderating Effect of Employment Status*
545   To examine the moderating impact of employment status, the sample was divided into two
546   sub-samples comprising employed and unemployed women. Thereafter, separate path
547   analysis models were run on the sub-samples.
548
549   Before testing for the moderating effect, an invariance test was conducted to ensure that the
550   two sub-samples can be compared. The first step was to show configural invariance, which
551   proves that the overall factor structure of the two groups are comparable. A measurement
552   model with the sample divided into two groups was tested. The model showed a good fit
553   (CMIN/DF=2.383; CFI=0.95; NFI=0.92; TLI=0.94; RMSEA=0.042). This shows that the
554   basic factor structure was the same for the two groups (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998).
555
556   In the next step, metric invariance was tested, where the assumption is that the structure of
557   loadings was the same across the two groups. Full metric invariance was established as there
558   was no significant difference between the model for configural invariance and that where the
559   loadings were constrained to be equal across the groups. The difference in the CMIN/DF was
560   non-significant (ΔCMIN/DF =1.19, p>0.1). Thus, based on Steenkamp and Baumgartner

14

561 (1998), we can conclude that the two groups responded to the items in a similar way, and
562 hence the resultant loadings can be meaningfully compared.
563
564 Based on the comparison of loadings, the results indicate a significant moderating effect on
565 some of the relations, thereby partially supporting H9. Employed and unemployed Muslim
566 women differed on the following fronts:
567
568 ● The paths from autonomous self-expression to both social bonding and social
569 bridging were significant for employed women (β=0.26; p<0.01 and β=0.17; p<0.01
570 respectively) but non-significant for the unemployed.
571 ● The path from self-disclosure to social bridging was significant for employed women
572 (β=0.13; p<0.05) but non-significant for the unemployed.
573
574 A few similarities were also noted. The path from self-disclosure to social bonding was
575 significant for both the sub-samples. The paths from reciprocity to social-bonding and social-
576 bridging were significant for both. Also, the paths from social bonding and social bridging to
577 empowerment were significant for both employed and unemployed Muslim women.
578 Nonetheless, the results suggest that social media activities can potentially help employed
579 Muslim women in more ways than unemployed Muslim women when it comes to
580 empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making.
581
582 *Moderated Mediation*
583 To delve deeper, separate mediation analysis was carried out for the two sub-samples. For
584 employed Muslim women, the indirect effect on empowerment via social bonding was
585 significant for reciprocity (β=0.11, p<0.01), marginally significant for autonomous self-
586 expression (β=0.04, p<0.1), and non-significant for self-disclosure. The mediation effect on
587 empowerment through social bridging was significant for reciprocity (β=0.05, p<0.01) and
588 autonomous self-expression (β=0.02, p<0.05), but non-significant for self-disclosure.
589
590 For unemployed Muslim women, the indirect effect on empowerment via social bonding was
591 consistently non-significant for autonomous self-expression, self-disclosure, and reciprocity.
592 The mediation effect on empowerment through social bridging was significant for reciprocity
593 (β=0.09, p<0.01), but non-significant for autonomous self-expression and self-disclosure.
594 Overall, the findings lend support to our moderated mediation model. These results are
595 summarised in Table 5.
596
597
598 Table 5: Summary of the moderated mediation effects on empowerment
599

	Employed Muslim women	**Unemployed Muslim women**
Via Social Bonding		
Autonomous self-expression	β=0.04, p=0.06	β=0.003, p=0.46
Self-Disclosure	β=0.02, p=0.13	β=0.01, p=0.38
Reciprocity	β=0.11, p=0.001	β=0.01, p=0.43
Via Social Bridging		
Autonomous self-expression	β=0.02, p=0.04	β=-0.004, p=0.9
Self-Disclosure	β=0.01, p=0.55	β=0.001, p=0.97
Reciprocity	β=0.05, p=0.001	β=0.09, p=0.001

600
601

15

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper investigated the extent to which social media could empower Muslim women for holiday decision-making. It corroborates the literature by finding support for the ability of social media to empower the disempowered (Bühler and Pelka, 2014; Li, 2016; Nemer, 2016), specifically Muslim women in the UK. It also supports the premise that social capital accumulation is an important coping mechanism against powerlessness (Lewis et al., 2013; Wahl et al., 2010). Consistent with prior research (Putnam, 2000), both bonding and bridging social capital were positively associated with empowerment.

The paper further extends this literature by demonstrating the underlying mechanism through which social media communication can be associated with empowerment in hospitality and tourism decision-making. The results show that through autonomous self-expression, self-disclosure of hospitality and tourism consumption, and reciprocity to self-disclosure, Muslim women in UK accumulate bonding and bridging social capital, which in turn relate positively to empowerment.

This underlying mechanism was found to differ between employed and unemployed Muslim women. For the employed, both social bonding and social bridging served as significant mediators (particularly for reciprocity and autonomous self-expression). However, for the unemployed, only social bridging emerged as a significant mediator (particularly for reciprocity) while social bonding was consistently non-significant. The strength of weak ties seems to matter more for unemployed women compared with employed women who tend to have greater opportunities for harnessing both bonding and bridging social capital.

Autonomous self-expression and reciprocity in social networks seem to give greater rewards (through bonding and bridging) for employed Muslim women than unemployed Muslim women. Employed Muslim women are therefore much more likely to achieve empowerment than unemployed Muslim women through their participation in social networks. For unemployed Muslim women, participation in social media opens up fewer routes to empowerment than employed Muslim women. This could be because employed Muslim women may already be exposed to valuable information such that their social media activity attracts stronger bonds as well as greater attention. This could be due to the 'multiplier effect' (Crul et al., 2017) in social capital where individuals with existing social capital can expect to accumulate more social capital than individuals who lack social capital. Interestingly, regardless of employment status, the indirect effect of self-disclosure on empowerment remained consistently non-significant. This shows that among Muslim women, self-disclosure has little impact on empowerment.

Theoretical Contributions

The paper makes several theoretical contributions. First, it advances the hospitality and tourism literature by bringing insights from different research streams that include gender (Henderson, 2003; Tran and Walter, 2014), religion (Ahmad, 2001; Dwyer, 2000; Suid et al., 2017), and social media (Wang and Li, 2020; Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). It empirically demonstrates the importance of social media in hospitality and tourism decision-making, and maps how social media usage is related to social capital accumulation, which in turn helps a disempowered segment in holiday planning.

Second, by investigating holiday planning behaviour among Muslim women, the paper contributes to the nascent literature in this domain. Save a few exceptions (e.g., Koc, 2004;

16

652 Ratthinan and Selamat, 2019), the literature that looks into hospitality and tourism decision-
653 making among Muslim women is limited. This is a significant deficiency as Muslim women
654 form a significant consumer segment with unique preferences and attitudes (Bakkar, 2017;
655 Mohamed et al., 2020). The current work will hopefully trigger more scholarly efforts around
656 Muslim women's leisure activities.
657
658 Third, the paper enriches the scholarly understanding on social media-induced empowerment
659 among Muslim women in the context of hospitality and tourism. It confirms the importance
660 of both weak and strong ties in generating empowerment for decisions such as where to travel
661 and where to stay.
662
663 Furthermore, the moderated mediation effect of employment status is an important theoretical
664 contribution in the context of research on empowerment through participation in social
665 media. This result tends to support the contention of several authors (e.g., Bala and Monga,
666 2004; Erman et al., 2002; Kumar and Maral, 2015) who have shown that employment has a
667 role in enhancing the self-efficacy and decision-making role of women in society. It also
668 shows that employment creates greater avenues for empowerment via social media among the
669 disempowered. This provides further evidence for the multiplier effect (Curl et al, 2017) in
670 social capital formation.
671
672 The paper finds that the strength of weak ties is more important for unemployed Muslim
673 women compared with their employed counterpart. While social bridging has been studied in
674 the past (e.g., Ellison et al., 2014), this paper is probably the first of its kind that highlights
675 the relatively greater importance of social bridging than social bonding among unemployed
676 Muslim women. Interestingly for unemployed Muslim women, it is reciprocity which helps
677 to develop greater social bridging. This result offers new insights into how individuals who
678 lack social capital try to accumulate social capital by relying on reciprocal behaviour within
679 their networks.
680
681 *Practical Implications*
682 On the practical front, the paper has implications for Muslim women and travel marketers. To
683 Muslim women, the paper shows that social media usage is a great mechanism to accumulate
684 social capital, which in turn can enhance their confidence to participate in holiday planning.
685 Employment promotes their agency through both social bonding and social bridging.
686 Unemployed Muslim women are particularly recommended to proactively leverage the
687 strength of weak ties in order to cope with their powerlessness in holiday planning.
688
689 Moreover, the paper offers insights to develop marketing strategies focused on Muslim
690 women. Hospitality and tourism marketers are encouraged to pay special attention to Muslim
691 women who are woefully under-represented in terms of targeted marketing strategies
692 (Bakkar, 2017). They should seek ways to actively engage with this demographic segment
693 online in order to harness the community value.
694
695 The results also point to the importance of informal social networks with strong bonds in
696 empowering Muslim women. The paper thus highlights the possibility of targeting Muslim
697 women through informal community-based networks. Participation in such community-based
698 networks enable Muslim women to freely exchange information, share views, opinions and
699 build sufficient agency to make decisions. Hospitality and tourism marketers should therefore
700 strive to develop such informal community-based networks for promoting their products to
701 Muslim women. They could also think of developing employed Muslim women as a specific

17

target segment. The paper shows how social networks can provide an effective platform for targeting employed Muslim women.

Furthermore, the paper shows that marketing messages that are geared towards increasing self-confidence and agency among Muslim women can be very effective in influencing Muslim women. The communication should focus on themes that Muslim women easily relate to. It must also respect the unique socio-cultural setting in which this demographic segment operates. Brands could share posts on social media related to Islamic tourism, halal offerings, as well as the two iterations of Eid, namely, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha for marketing purposes. Social media influencers could also be used to catalyse Muslim women's social capital accumulation online. This could work well, like the example of Hijabers in Indonesia (Beta, 2014). All such efforts on the part of travel marketers are expected to support the UNWTO's goal of promoting tourism among Muslim population (UNWTO, 2017).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Two limitations in the paper open opportunities for further research. One, to study how social media can empower the disempowered in tourism decision-making, the paper relied on the use of Facebook among Muslim women in the UK. Caution is recommended in generalising the findings. Future research could compare the perceptions of Muslim women as a function of the site of investigation (e.g., Pakistan versus the UK), the purpose of tourism (e.g., pilgrimage versus leisure), the nature of travel (e.g., family versus solo), and the type of social media (e.g., Facebook versus Instagram).

Two, the paper collected data using a cross-sectional survey. Future research could design experiments to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies could also be conducted to understand how Muslim women's self-esteem and agency in tourism decision-making evolves over time through continuous use of social media. Moreover, given the purely quantitative nature of this study, we could not develop a rich understanding of Muslim women's role in holiday planning. Scholars interested in replicating our conceptual model are encouraged to employ a mixed-methods approach by complementing quantitative surveys with in-depth interviews and/or focus group discussions.

In addition, scholars are recommended to replicate the current study with various disempowered segments of society other than Muslim women. This will help enhance the generalisability of the proposed conceptual model. Future research could also empirically compare how disempowered segments (e.g., Muslim women) differ from identifiable empowered segments in terms of the strength of relationships among the constructs.

18

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