

How South-Asian Diaspora Women Utilize Instagram As A Platform For Activism And Monetization

A Qualitative Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

South-Asian diaspora women are a marginalized group in the countries where they reside in. This marginalization has led to their voices being unheard or ignored within their own community as well as in the culture they live in. This merge of two cultures is also known as hybrid culture. Moreover, the representation on South-Asian diaspora women has been lacking in mainstream media and because of this a trend on Instagram is seen with the appearance of accounts that promote South-Asian diaspora culture, which is mostly centered around the diaspora women. These accounts are considered activists because they encourage their agenda as to how the South-Asian diaspora community can be bettered, especially for women. On this activism they monetize as well because they create art, merchandize, and curated boxes with products that represent their hybrid culture, and sell those to their followers. Furthermore, this research is a qualitative content analysis about digital activism and its monetization on Instagram. The research question is: How is Instagram used as a tool for digital activism and monetization by women of the South-Asian diaspora? In this research three case studies, @browngirlgang, @thepakistanimarthastewart, and @hatecopy were examined in order to answer the research question. The data gathered were Instagram posts by the aforementioned accounts, which includes the visuals and the caption in the post. The sample consisted of 165 posts. Additionally, the data has been analyzed following the process of thematic analysis and was assisted through a theoretical framework based on theories of hybrid culture, voices, and visual activism. What was found in this study is that the case studies indeed used Instagram as a platform for their activism because of the convenience it offers when it comes to content sharing and follower engagement. They also all partook in the monetization of this activism by offering their own products for sale and also promoting other (female-owned) South-Asian brands. What could be further concluded from the findings that was noticeable from the case studies, was that they shifted the narrative and portrayal of South-Asian women as victims and helpless to independent and taking up space to be heard. This ranged from career freedom, not adhering to gender roles, and speaking up.

KEYWORDS: *South-Asian, Women, Activism, Instagram, Monetization*

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Popularity of South-Asian Women on Instagram

In this thesis, I want to showcase that South-Asian women's Instagram accounts are examples of activism because they perform a particular type of social and cultural work, and do so through visual activism. This type of activism is based on the online articulation of dual identities which will be referred to as hybrid identities that help these women make sense of their social and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, this type of activism capitalizes on the notion of hybrid identity by selling merchandise and art that arguably appeal to other women with a similar cultural background. Moreover, women of the South-Asian diaspora are underprivileged within their cultural community and their residing country, because they are constantly faced with their own limitations. An example, which will be further elaborated on later, is a comic featured in one of The Pakistani Martha Stewart's posts. In this comic, a South-Asian woman with tanned skin and long black hair is seen conversing with a white woman who has pale skin and long blond hair, which emphasizes that the two women are from different cultures based on looks alone. In the text bubble of the comic, the South-Asian woman expresses how she is only allowed to go to the grocery store by herself in comparison to the white woman she is talking to, who went backpacking by herself in Europe. This thesis focuses on the experience of certain women of South-Asian origin while living in Canada, the United States of America, and Australia. Because of their gender, immigrant status, language barrier, and cultural differences, which causes hardships with integrating into the culture of the country they live in, but do not originate from (Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004).

The underprivileged status of South-Asian diaspora women causes them to be underrepresented and unheard in their daily lives (Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). However, through Instagram, the voices of these women are heard, and their cultural issues can be addressed their online profiles with fewer restrictions or backlash from peers in real life, as a form of activism. There are fewer restrictions through social media because the account owners can choose to be anonymous. They can also decide who will view their content by putting the account on private or on public or blocking accounts to refrain them from viewing the content. They get their voices heard by consistently posting their content on Instagram, which helps build a following that is exposed to it. Their content consists of anti-racism, misogyny, homophobia, patriarchy, and activism topics. Additionally, Instagram allows for this type of content to be spread faster online. Nonetheless, South-Asian women are not a homogenous community on Instagram and therefore their voices are not exclusively heard on

Instagram only. This research focuses on their voices on Instagram, however they are most likely active on other social media platforms as well.

By creating posts on their Instagram accounts, which are then spread around the internet by people who relate to them, these women gain popularity. This is how they establish their own online communities, which consist of people who face similar marginalization, have a similar background, and thus come together online to form a community (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007). After they establish this online community, they transform their activism into a business and monetize their accounts and user-generated content (UGC) to profit from their work. As van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) already mentioned, to monetize their accounts, a self-professionalization of the UGC takes place. Self-professionalization refers to when social media influencers incorporate market logic into their cultural content. The usage of this concept is important because it showcases how social media influencers grow with their content and how that can alter their account, especially in regards to the monetization of their account. This research will focus on three popular Instagram accounts managed by diaspora South-Asian women: The Pakistani Martha Stewart (@thepakistanimarthastewart), Hatecopy (@hatecopy), and Brown Girl Gang (@browngirlgang). The Pakistani Martha Stewart and Hatecopy both create art on their accounts while Brown Girl Gang focuses more on the accomplishments of South-Asian women. Nonetheless, they all center around South-Asian culture with women as their target audience. Within their accounts, a pattern is noticeable that starts with the creation of art, selling said art through merchandise, among others, and hosting events or other external activities. All of the ties mentioned above together answer the following research question: How is Instagram used as a tool for digital activism and monetization by women of the South-Asian diaspora?

1.2 Social Media Influencers

A social media influencer (SMI) is a third party person that positions themselves in between a consumer and a brand (Freberg, Graham, Mcgaughey & Freberg, 2011). This position allows the SMI to shape the consumer's attitude through a textual and visual narration of their personal life, which they post about on social media platforms (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). This type of content is referred to as user-generated content (UGC), which is defined as all forms of content created on the internet by its users (Mohammad, Quoquab, Thurasamy, Alolayyan, 2020). Moreover, because SMI's create user-generated content (UGC) from a personal stance, they are perceived as more honest and truthful to their

audience when they showcase their opinion. Even though SMI's also create UGC as part of paid advertisements, which can be observed when looking at the case studies. Thus SMI's influence comes from their position that is relatable enough to their audience as well as independent enough from a brand to discuss it.

As mentioned above, Hatecopy, The Pakistani Martha Stewart, and Brown Girl Gang all have their community on Instagram, their followers, and those who interact with their posts. Online communities are defined as a virtual space where people make use of online non-private conversations (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007). After a certain amount of time spent on those conversations they grow sufficient human feelings to the point that the relationship can be considered a social relationship. Considering all the Instagram accounts of the case studies are public accounts and the topic within these communities do touch upon human feelings in the sense that a relationship can be seen, this definition is befitting. Hatecopy, for example, refers to herself as "didi" to her followers, which translates to "big sister" from Hindi and thus implicates a more personal relationship.

1.3 Digital and Visual Activism

Stornaiuolo and Thomas (2017) define digital activism as an online practice that includes political, civic, cultural, and social action that aims for social change and or transformation. The cultural issues of South-Asian diaspora women have quite a broad scope, ranging from identity issues to religious matters or political differences. Women face both the challenge of being unheard in society at large and difficulties in negotiating their own identities. An example of an identity issue could be an Indian woman born in the United States: would she consider herself to be American or Indian, or both? She looks South-Asian, so she will always be viewed as such, however, she was also born and raised in the United States, therefore she is American. In this case, the concept of hybrid culture appears and will be elaborated on later in the second chapter (Bhatia & Ram, 2004). Martin, Hanson and Fontaine (2007) propose the idea that an individual's use of Instagram to post about their daily life is activism because it stimulates awareness to reflect in one's own life. Therefore, in this regard when South-Asian women call out about their cultural issues, rally for change, and claim space for their unheard voices on Instagram, they perform activism. This is the main focal point of argumentation within this thesis as well and thus will be discussed further through the results and conclusion.

The goal for these women is to help others within their community break free from prejudices that stop them from excelling, offer relatability with their user-generated content

(UGC), and make them feel that they are not alone (Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). They offer inspiration to people with the same background by discussing similar issues that they face. Nonetheless, they also offer practical change whereas it is possible. Hatecopy does this by inviting people to her shows and engaging in conversations with them. The Pakistani Martha Stewart does this through organizing events targeted towards South-Asian women in particular. Brown Girl Gang provides relatability by personally interacting and telling the stories of their followers. This is done through sharing the tales of their daily lives, but also sharing their business and becoming a mediator to showcase that South-Asian people are entrepreneurs too, and not only the stereotypical doctor, lawyer, and engineer types (Rajiva, 2013). Therefore, there is more representation and thus relatability within their user-generated content. This includes all forms, such as video, audio, written, and combinations of those mentioned earlier. In this context, it can be concluded that activism means the aim for social change in the daily lives of these women, such as not being treated differently from their male siblings or having to be expected to marry at a certain age, and being able to lead aspiring lives outside of having a husband and children. How these women aim for social change manifests into South-Asian women standing up for themselves and others when faced with dilemmas. This is where the concept of hybrid identity, which is a third space mixture of the two cultures that South-Asian women may identify as, comes into play (Mishra, & Shirazi, 2010). Thus, the mixture of their dual identity. For example, they are asked about where they are really from, which dismisses the hybrid identity because it implies they do not belong to the space, culture, or country they live in. It can be seen later on that examples from the case studies are witty replies to this, such as saying that they come from outer space to avoid the micro-aggression. They aim to create space for themselves where they can live and can learn because they have been denied that and also been denied to let others know who they are. Ultimately, this resorts to creating a more inclusive South-Asian society in the West that is less patriarchal and more feminist in the regards to that women are more likely to have an equal footing as men. This is a conclusion that emerges from the collected data as well, which is a desired social change.

Furthermore, Echchaibi (2013) explains how Muslim women in the US use blogs to create small, and everyday changes. The case studies follow this as well because they focus on personal interactions and generalizations that cause negative emotions in the daily lives of South-Asian diaspora women, such as not having the liberty of making their own choices without taking their parents, family, and community in consideration, or being told that they should not go out in the sun because it will make their skin darker and that is unfavorable.

There is no radical social change to have been found (yet). However, there has been consistent postings about awareness and being able to voice issues without being dismissed or not taken seriously. This can be seen in the various topics that are being discussed in posts to de-normalize gender roles, for example the pressure of social expectations that a South-Asian woman has to get married before a certain age as well. Expectations of South-Asian parents are also mentioned, which are then mocked for being unrealistic, and that it is alright to not adhere to them. Therefore, these South-Asian women are providing the comfort that the follower is not alone in their struggle. Additionally, raising awareness about that is an important point on these Instagram accounts, especially, because this adds to the relatability of their content.

Besides, the scientific significance of this study and the connection to the Media & Business master is the concept of visual activism, which is a type of activism that allows people to create their visual narrative online (Cornet, Hall, Cafaro & Brady, 2017). This is also connected to the creation of online businesses, because it shows a more behind the scenes side towards influencers. Nonetheless, this visual narrative usually goes against the status quo by using images and focuses on untold stories. Visual activism is the foundation of this research because that is how the case studies grew their accounts. This concept is in line with what van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) mentioned in their study about the professionalization of Instagram influencers. User-generated content (UGC), which is prominent on Instagram, is becoming more professionalized, depending on the account holders, especially when they collaborate with brands, yet still want to remain authentic and appealing towards their audiences. Examples of visual activism are artwork that showcased White people asking if it is acceptable for them to wear ethnic South-Asian apparel because they think it makes them cultured or foreign. Also, LGBTQIA+ representation is seen through women kissing or the pride flag being shown. The latter is connected to a more commercial setting in the sense that LGBTQIA+ people are seen as a valuable potential consumer (Peters, 2011). Therefore, when they create content that is LGBTQIA+ related then these consumers will be more inclined to favor the brand or buy the products because the business supports them. Thus besides human rights, there is also a lucrative business side to this type of representation. All in all, these examples affect social change and cause transformation because they bring about normalization of LGBTQIA+ people existing in the South-Asian community as well as for non-South-Asian to question what the background and cultural attachment are of clothing they want to wear.

1.4 Commercialization of Activism

Additionally, van Driel and Dumitrica (2020) describe how both this group intermingles with brands, who are also active on the social network, with their visual content, by tagging brands in their posts or hashtags. Consequently, it is fascinating to uncover how these case studies cooperate with brands and create content surrounding that. An example of this is Hatecopy who collaborated with Nike by designing shoes and a brooch that her Canadian fans then could buy. Thus, she is making revenue with her Instagram content through her work with Nike, and her product connected with her brand and was affordable enough for her audience (Gupta, 2019). Therefore, they purchased it. Nonetheless, that she collaborated with Nike hints that her work has professionalized regarding either the quality of her work, the message she spreads through her work, or her increasing audience, especially with the rise of sneakers amongst young South-Asians (Laitasalo, 2016).

Moreover, as a social media platform, Instagram facilitates this development and allows its users to gain financial means when their accounts become popular. Instagram is chosen because it is a photo-sharing social network. Lee, Lee, Moon, and Sung (2015) mention how Instagram itself is a popular social network. The authors claim that in 2014, 53% of young American internet users in-between the ages of 18 to 29 years old use Instagram. This age and the locational group uses Instagram for social interaction, self-expression, and escapism of the aforementioned cultural issues. Therefore, this platform is prominent among women of the South-Asian diaspora that are being studied in this research specifically, since they fit into this age category. Hossain and Veenstra (2016) study the uses of social media among the South-Asian diaspora in the US and mention that immigrants are more prone to use (social) media as a means for communication to be able to transition into a new culture. For diaspora people, this entails that social media allows them to be able to connect to the culture that they immigrated from, which can be done by keeping up relationships with people that live abroad or consuming foreign media like films and music.

1.5 Social Significance and Previous Studies

The social significance of this study is that it offers insights on how social media plays a role within the South-Asian diaspora community, since previous studies are more dated and have focused on South-Asian women as victims of patriarchy, domestic abuse, or as ethnic outsiders, such as Raj and Silverman (2003), Chaudhuri, Morash, and Yingling (2014), Gill (2004), and Durham (2001). Above all, these studies add to how they break out of their victim roles and empower themselves and others through their Instagram behavior

(Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004). From a feminist point of view, which focuses on the inequality between men and women as well as the inequality between South-Asian diaspora women and other ethnic groups in the country, they are a marginalized group and thus are less privileged in society. This marginalization causes a difference in behavior, such as women being more sheltered and controlled by their families. And as is mentioned earlier, other societal groups enforce their stereotypes onto these women. Therefore, this is intersectional feminism. What intersectional feminism indicates is that multiple systems are oppressing South-Asian diaspora women (Carastathis, 2014). In this case, its gender, education, and language are all intersecting factors as to why these women are marginalized. Nonetheless, this concept is worth mentioning because the case studies do spread feminist content.

Furthermore, Instagram is a tool of empowerment because it gives these marginalized women a space for their voices: space where they can address their cultural issues as part of the diaspora when their voices might be overlooked within their community in real life (Peterson, 2016; Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). This space can reassure the women that they are not alone and that others face the same problems as well as that it could lead to more social awareness to the more privileged women within the community and men. Consequently, it makes this study an intersectional study because the research revolves around immigrant women's position, and they are a marginalized group in the country they live in and are, therefore, activists through their Instagram behavior.

Other studies have focused more on diasporic media usage, gender in a business media perspective, or hybrid culture of South-Asian diaspora (Werber, 2004; Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Cornet, Hall, Cafaro & Brady, 2017). All of these studies are relevant in the sense that they discuss the South-Asian diaspora and thus provide an initial framework that this study builds further upon. These frameworks established the contextualization as to why the South-Asian community faces specific problems, such as the unequal power balance between men and women, as well as the struggles, the South-Asian community faces externally when in contact with other ethnic groups. External problems refer to problems that they do not face within their community, but only outside of their community. However, none of these three themes have been combined as it will be in this study. This thesis will merge the themes mentioned above, which are the underrepresentation and stereotyping of South-Asian women in media, society, and influential positions that give them agency and voices, as well as how these women use their Instagram to build their businesses. This study places these themes in a digital setting because that is where the case studies have gotten popular and made their

name on. Hence the focus on influencers on Instagram. Hence, the focus of this study will give a perspective on how South-Asian diaspora women use their hybrid culture to put out UGC that is relatable to others from a similar background and gain financial benefit from that popularity. In the second chapter, previous research and theories are explored to answer the research question. The third chapter will elaborate and explain the methodology of this study. This is then followed up by the fourth chapter, where the results will be given and analyzed with the fifth and final chapter providing a conclusion.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is build up into three sections: voices, hybrid culture, and activism. The first section called Voices points out what is means to have a voice. In the section Hybrid Culture, the vocalization of voices is elaborated on through a cultural lens, which also mentions the dual culture and identity South-Asian diaspora women live with and how that impacts them. In the third and final section of this chapter, Activism, Social Media Activism, Visual Activism, and Commodity Activism theories are discussed with the purpose understanding how activism is used in the context of the case studies. The commodity activism theory illustrates also how the concept of monetization plays a role in the activism of Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart. Then lastly, the implications of activism and the constraints and opportunities of Instagram are discussed.

2.1 Voices

Nick Couldry (2008) defines the concepts of voices as a representative for a group, which leads to that group having a chance to discuss decisions that affect them. Thereupon, they form a voice for themselves. In his other study about the reinvention of culture, Couldry (2020) mentions that people might find solidarity in the thought that voices have value, and that this value plays a role in changing society. Within the scopes of this research explanations are given as to why certain studies on culture need to be reinvented again now, in order to adapt to new social and political ecologies as well as culture and the links all of these have towards technology. This theory fits with this research, because as mentioned above South-Asian women are a marginalized group in the United States, Canada, and Australia and they lack representation in society because of that. However, within the younger generation that is active on social media, it has been more noticeable that they speak out more frequently in what they believe in, in comparison to older generations. This fits with what Couldry (2020) debates about that: voice has value and can perhaps lead to change. Moreover, this attributes to the notion that certain culture studies should be reinvented and take in the perspectives of marginalized groups, namely South-Asian diaspora women. Instagram can aid to be a starting point of incorporating more of these voices and the duality their voices have of partaking in multiple cultures, which will be discussed as the notion of hybrid culture in the next section.

Additionally, Couldry (2008) also mentions that in order to be critical on how media allocates voices and representation there must also be studies done outside of media in order to ask pertinent questions. The author proposes this as a de-centered approach because the

voice of media is also affected when the voice of political and economic institutions is altered. The reason that these are connected is because political institutions need to formally provide voice to its population and thus representation. To give this voice legitimacy for representation two factors are counted on: the state's decision-making and the voice of those who are affected by the processes of daily decision-making. In the latter they provide their opinions and why they have formed such an opinion. These two factors within politics are both influenced by internal and external forces within a country. What this entails is that what is happening outside of a country is also influential towards the politics as what is happening within the country. The influence of transnational corporations is an example because of their capital influence that can outweigh that of a national state. For that reason, politics is also being more driven towards the demand of said-so corporations and not necessarily to fulfill the requests of voters themselves (Couldry, 2008). This part of the theory is relevant to this topic because this showcases that media, politics, and the notion of voice and representation are entwined, but also that they can be altered depending on what ideals and products corporations want to sell to their consumers as well. Therefore, the political stance of consumers has an influence on what they purchase, which is where commodity activism, defined as consumer behavior mixed with social and political aims and will be discussed further below, comes to play (Mukherjee, & Banet-Weiser, 2012).

Nonetheless, representation is also connected to political institutions in regards to those who represent a certain group in decision-making processes and how they represent the symbolization of said group within a society. Therefore, those who are the people representing a group that can cause change within political institutions and how is that group that is represented is displayed within society. As was mentioned in the introduction that South-Asian diaspora women are underrepresented, this extends also to political representation (Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). Consequently, to return to media, the way that those that are affected by the daily decision-making processes are portrayed and identified in narratives related to the state and thus political institutions is also because of media. Couldry (2008) refers to this process as representation-as-symbolization. Media have historically been a means for voice, which continues onto social media and Instagram nowadays as well because they extend the range of voices that can be heard and the legitimacy of them. On traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers the amount of voices heard is more limited and the narratives that are told are not necessarily representative in favor of social groups or framed towards the demand of voters as is done with political institutions

also. Therefore, social media is used to display voices of different narratives that are left out with traditional media.

2.2 Hybrid Culture

This research uses Homi Bhabha's theory on hybrid culture, which entails that there is a space between two identities that allows them to overlap and thus create a hybrid culture or third space (Easthope, 1998). Hybrid culture or third space appears to connect with the case studies as well, because of how references from one culture mix with visuals from another. Such as a repost from a drawing of @emmenjaan that was posted of two hands held together donned in henna, which is usually worn by brides on the day of their wedding as decoration with the initials of the spouse-to-be hidden within. Nevertheless, in this version it references the lyrics “thank you, next” from an Ariana Grande song with the same name. The song focuses on self-love and cutting loose relationships that do not work out. These lyrics in the henna detail also focuses on the same message, but in a cultural blend because in South-Asian culture women are taught to serve others and to not focus on themselves (Ludhra, & Chappell, 2011).

However, this theory did not address media and was developed before the arrival of social media. Nevertheless, it is still relevant for this study, because some Instagram accounts have become the third space for some South-Asian diaspora women where they can negotiate their hybrid culture. They merge the languages of the culture they were raised into and currently live in, for example, and discuss differences between both as well. In the case studies, it becomes clear that they portray what it is like to be a South-Asian woman in North America and Australia, and the many situations they face in their daily lives. Therefore, understanding their hybrid culture is an essential component of understanding how these women perform their activism.

To understand the activism South-Asian diaspora women partake in, it is first essential to understand the issues they face to comprehend why they find it problematic and call for change in a theoretical sense. Peterson (2016) mentions the representational challenges that Muslim women face, such as negative stereotypes of Islam projected onto them and their fashion being policed. As a result, they are always under surveillance. These challenges can be applied to women of the South-Asian diaspora, too, because they are all women from an immigrant background. A portion of this group is also Muslim, and they face prejudice in a foreign country because of how others perceive their culture. What this entails is that the dominant ethnic group of the country the diaspora women live in create certain

expectations as to how the diaspora women should look, behave, and be. Therefore, they are perceived as a marginalized group. Wheeler (2014) states that marginalized groups have lesser opportunities to have their voices heard because they have less social and financial capital in their residing country.

Consequently, this is also why diaspora women turn to the internet because they can create a presence there with a voice that will be heard online that is denied to them in real life. The concept introduced earlier by Couldry (2020) that people believe that voices are valuable because it can lead to change introduces the argumentation that diaspora women look for change through the internet. Furthermore, Bhatia and Ram (2004) give additional reasoning as to why these women go online. They call women of the South-Asian diaspora "transnational," meaning that their culture and day-to-day activities are shaped by several connections to multiple nations and cultures, because of travels, technology, and media (p.226). Because of their transnational identity, it is a necessity for these women to partake in both cultures and since they cannot always do that in real life, they emulate late online. Therefore, transnational identity is similar to the concept of hybrid identity from the introduction (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010).

2.3 Activism

2.3.1 Social Media Activism

Digital activism does not fit into the same category as offline activism. Due to differences in behavior on social media platforms, theories regarding activism and social movements do not fit well with digital activism (Cornet, Hall, Cafaro & Brady, 2017). Also, Kaun and Uldam (2017) describe digital activism as a broad and vague term, and they mention that the definitions can range from different forms of hacktivism, hashtag activism to all digital media that is used for political purposes. Since their definition ranged through multiple topics that are not discussed or relevant to the topic of this thesis, such as hacktivism, this definition will not be used. However, for this research, I shall use Stornaiuolo and Thomas' (2017) definition for digital activism: Online practices that include political, civic, cultural, and social action that is aiming for social change and or transformation. The description of the concept fits best with the case studies, because they showcase South-Asian women's issues mostly, and how these women confront political, civic, cultural, and social challenges in their posts. This once again stresses the intersectionality of this study. George and Leidner (2018) however also critically acclaim in

their research that digital activism amongst marginalized groups does not offer its potential of increased representation nor political power for said groups.

2.3.2 Visual Activism

Moreover, Cornet, Hall, Cafaro, and Brady (2017) mention the concept of visual activism, which is defined as the examination of the practices and behavior of activists who highlight socio-economic and political contexts of a cause by means of visuals. The authors state that in digital form, visual activism is mainly prevalent on Instagram because of the platforms allows users to tell a visual narrative by posting photos and videos (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015). All of the case studies in this research are categorized under visual activism because Instagram is the used platform and is reliant on images, such as artworks. The visual narrative in this context is produced for other South-Asian women who face similar challenges because that is their common element of interest. When South-Asian women follow these South-Asian activist accounts, the formation of a community happens (Plantié & Crampes, 2012). Because of their commonalities, these women have gained a following and become a micro-celebrity—a person who strategically creates a profile to generate a following to advance their online status through their Instagram postings (Marwick, 2015; Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). Since an influencer is someone who positions themselves in-between a follower and a brand of sorts, then an influencer that has a following is also a micro-celebrity. Consequently, within the case studies when the sense of micro-celebrity is combines with activism this connects to what was discussed earlier from Driel and Dumitrica (2020) regarding the professionalization of the content (Zulli, 2017). Professionalization of the content is especially noticeable when comparing the older posts with the newer ones. The rising level of professionalization in content also leads to SMI's engaging in more business activities on their account with other brands or even the creation of their own brand(s) that are connected to the image they have curated.

2.3.3 Commodity Activism

Commodity activism is the merging of consumer behavior with social and political goals (Mukherjee, & Banet-Weiser, 2012). What happens is that the social and political goals of an individual or a group becomes marketable in the form of consumer products (Repo, 2020). As can be seen with artworks from The Pakistani Martha Stewart and Hatecopy, which challenge social norms and political stances, but are at the same time also for sale to consumers. This showcases how digital, visual, and commodity activism are interrelated

within this context. Every account from the case studies all push their own narrative on activism and do it in their manner, but always visually. This is their account of creating representation and creating a voice through visualizing scenarios that are relatable for South-Asians, but in particular the diaspora because these scenarios often showcase the social issues living in third space causes. The Pakistani Martha Stewart and Hatecopy both draw comics expressing a call for social change for various causes and the popular comics are also available for sale through print or on clothing. Therefore, this is where the visual activism on Instagram relates towards commodity activism because they become products that are being sold. In the case of Brown Girl Gang, the relation differs because in the content they post on their account, third party brands and services are collaborated with and promoted. These promotions are sold under the notions of South-Asian women supporting South-Asian brands and thus supporting their own community. All in all, visual activism informs my perspective on this research more than commodity activism because of the reliance on visuals. Despite the fact that consumer products are not the main focus of the case studies' content, it does have a role and therefore should be mentioned.

How the three women from the case studies monetize their accounts is dependent on the amount of attention their posts get (Drenten, Gurrieri & Tyler, 2019). The more engagement (likes, comments, and shares) on a post, the more popular it is. The number of followers per account matters for this as well, because this will increase the chances of engagement. Therefore, their work on their accounts is part of the attention economy, where attention is a scarce and valuable resource. What this entails is that if there is more attention focused on a post, then this post becomes more marketable and financed, and they can profit from posting. When profiting becomes an option, collaborations with other micro-celebrities, brands, blogs, and sponsored content are more likely to appear within the accounts. All three case studies, for example, have been featured in news articles from BBC, Vice, Huffington Post, and Brown Girl Magazine (Makalintal, 2019; Sawhney, 2019; Shah, 2019; Qamar, 2017). Another pattern that is seen is the creation of merchandise that those within the community most likely will purchase. Two women from the case studies—@thepakistanimarthastewart and @hatecopy—already offer merchandise. Their art from their postings can be found on clothing, jewelry, and tableware sets.

Moreover, within the framework of commodity activism it is also important to reflect upon the genuineness of the accounts when it comes to performing activism. All of the accounts have a business aim; and their activism and business aims are connected. This is the most noticeable with Hatecopy and The Pakistani Martha Stewart, because they physically

showcase their products often on their page and refer to external websites where their products can be bought. This leads towards the next point of where the authenticity of their activism is questioned, because they also make revenue out of it. As mentioned in the introduction social media influencers' (SMI) followers put a certain amount of trust into them, because they display themselves in a personal manner on their account. How this plays into commodity activism and the sales of activist art is that, because of South-Asian diaspora women are a marginalized group and therefore, do not have a lot of commodity or available products related to their own culture and subsequently turn to what these women are selling. This makes the products more valuable, because there is a gap in the consumer market: the products are one of a kind, as in no other brand will sell them, and they also display hybrid culture, which makes them personalized. Therefore, the followers might rely on the authenticity of the SMI's enough to not question it as long as it follows their personal experience and can relate to it.

Therefore, the framework that will aid in understanding these accounts require both theories from commodity activism as well as hybrid culture. However, the focus lays more onto hybrid culture, because this theory allows the context of each post to be dissected, since they are about third space and both cultures need to be studied to understand the third space. Commodity activism in this theoretical framework builds on hybrid culture theory, because it puts a critical view on the authenticity of the SMI's and their activism as well as what role the followers and build-up community has in the sales. The more authentic a SMI is perceived, the more their voice is legitimized because their content and products are seen as a voice that could cause change, especially when the SMI's collaborate with larger brands and corporations (Couldry, 2020; Freberg, Graham, Mcgaughey & Freberg, 2011). However, this can also backfire when the audience does not favor the brand that is collaborated with.

2.3.4 Implications of Activism

All in all, the implication of activism of South-Asian diaspora women on Instagram is that a symbolic voice is being created in order to establish a narrative around these women that breaks them out of the helpless victim role that they are placed in (Peterson, 2016; Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). The notions of social media influencers (SMI) and micro-celebrities have aided with the aforementioned because these concepts showcase how people can raise a following online and benefitting of that financially. However, in order to gain that, SMI's need to be open and vulnerable with their audience to gain trust, which in the context of this study is done through openly praising and critiquing South-Asian (diaspora) culture. It

is being praised in the sense to nullify stereotypes and to showcase other perspectives and critiqued for its patriarchal features that deny women equality. These opinions are already shown on the respective Instagram accounts. However, through commodity activism, consumers purchase the products with the messages and therefore breaking them out of the digital barrier alone and exposing them in the daily setting of their lives. This can lead to more questioning and discussion on South-Asian (diaspora) culture.

2.3.5 Constraints and Opportunities of Instagram

Instagram offers several constraints and opportunities to be used as a platform for activism and monetization. One of the constraints of Instagram is that the amount of voices heard can be cluttered and overwhelming because there are so many accounts (Ross, 2019; Manikonda, Hu & Kambhampati, 2014). Anybody with internet access is able to make an account and post whatever they please as long as they follow the guidelines of the platform. As a consequence, the legitimacy of accounts posting on Instagram can be questionable because these accounts start out as a single person posting content. The account would not have the same legitimacy for example as an already established account that is related to a media agency has. However, this is combatted by making the intentions of the account clear from early stages in order for potential followers to give an understanding. For example, Brown Girl Gang started out as an account where South-Asian people are represented because according to her they were underrepresented in media (Nagesh, n.d.). In addition, Brown Girl Gang saw that the symbolic representation that was mentioned above surrounding South-Asians was not diverse enough. As Couldry (2008) mentioned that the representation of groups of those that are part of the daily decision-making processes and their symbolic representation does not necessarily align or may not be well known. Therefore, through Instagram a different narrative can be created. Another constraint of Instagram is that even though messages are spread online, it does not mean that there is a guarantee that it also transcends into real life. Digital activism in this context focuses on awareness, however the implications could only remain in a digital form as well because change is an intangible concept and therefore how it should be measured is ambiguous.

Although Instagram has some constraints, the platform also offers several opportunities such that posts can be shared cross-platforms from Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook and others social media platforms. Therefore, social media influencers (SMI) are not limited towards creating their own content on a single platform. This allows SMI's to post visuals of tweets from Twitter for example as The Pakistani Martha Stewart and Brown Girl Gang both

do. They incorporate takes from people within and outside of their community in this way and continue to create electronic word-of-mouth by exposing ongoing topics to their audience. It allows them to open up dialogues and create awareness through their account because of the visual narrative they are telling through the posts. As a result, this can also increase the legitimacy of their posts and inform their followers to critique on their own culture and achieving recognition, which is the start of change, and thus activism.

Additionally, another opportunity of Instagram is that it allows those with a business account to build an in-store reference to products that the account is selling or wants to sell. This feature allows the sales of products to be more convenient for the consumer to purchase as well as for the seller to sell. Therefore, products that align with the topic of the account are connected and stimulates commodity activism because the business aim of the account is directly linked to the products.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter will discuss how this qualitative research on visual activism and its monetization amongst women of the South-Asian diaspora on Instagram was conducted, using the case studies of Brown Girl Gang, The Pakistani Martha Stewart, and Hate Copy. These accounts are approached here as representation of the mainstream because of their popularity. Therefore, it qualitatively analyzes Instagram accounts. First, there is an outline of the research design. Second, the sampling details are provided, and a summary of the case studies is given and why they were selected. Followed by the operationalization, which is how the concepts are measured, and then the data collection and data analysis. Lastly, the reliability section showcases the trustworthiness, ethicality, and the role of the researcher of this study.

3.1 Research Design Outline

For this research, I conducted a qualitative study. This method has been chosen because it permitted me to answer the research question of how this group of women views Instagram as a platform, how they use their activism to gain influence and then commercialize their platform. According to Brennen (2017), qualitative research is about meaningful relations that are to be interpreted. Within the scope of this study, the same will be done, focusing on how women of the South-Asian diaspora make meaning of Instagram within their social context. Thus, they view their reality on Instagram because reality is socially constructed and can be different when looking at factors such as gender and ethnicity (Wheeler, 2014). An example is that women who belong to the South-Asian diaspora face other cultural challenges compared to women of a European background even though they reside in the same country. Qualitative research aids in understanding and analyzing this reality, because qualitative research studies the experience of people or in this case South-Asian diaspora women and their experiences shape their view of society. Therefore, this method allows an intricate approach to study as to how these diaspora women make sense of their culture and identity on Instagram. Especially how they rebel against the status quo, critique their own community, partake in activism, and profit of all of the before. With the usage of three case studies in this research, specific examples can be analyzed within this context.

Furthermore, this research consists of a content analysis, which can be defined as a method to study empirical and controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke, 2004). Hence, that there is such an emphasis on

hybrid culture within this research because it ensures that the comprehension of the (visual) texts of the sample data is accurately interpreted. Because posts often discuss third space subjects, understanding context is a necessity otherwise the meaning of the post may be lost, such as puns that consist of multiple languages. With third space subjects is referred to topics that are created, because of hybrid culture, such as the American rapper Cardi B wearing a bindi, which is a colored dot worn by Hindi and Jain women in religious fashion. Another example using Cardi B is her holding a carton of *Shezan* mango juice, which is from a Pakistani brand. This image only exists, because of hybrid culture and the merge of American and South-Asian culture, therefore becoming a third space subject. Both languages need to be understood to comprehend the pun and its message. Additionally, in the analysis, the images and captions were coded to look for patterns. This is known as thematic analysis, a type of analysis where the research data is coded, rearranged, and then examined for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes are essential to understanding the context, situation, and occurrence of digital and commodity activism within a gendered South-Asian cultural setting. Because of the multi-layered situation, the thematic analysis allowed the data to be compartmentalized. This was done so that each specific facet of the research question that is interrelated can be studied. The thematic analysis will showcase the similarities and differences that all the accounts have. The similarities will highlight what issues they find more vital because it assumedly it will appear more often than issues they find less relevant.

3.2 Sampling

For the sampling, purposive sampling was used in this research, which is a method of sampling where the sample units are selected based on how much the unit is associated with the research topic (Flick, 2007; Babbie, 2011). For this reason, Brown Girl Gang, The Pakistani Martha Stewart, and Hate Copy were selected. They are all advocates for the change against patriarchy and (South-Asian female) representation through their platforms. It was established that these accounts advocate against patriarchy because that was explicitly mentioned in multiple posts in their captions and on visuals that instigated the desire for social change, such as “Fight the Patriarchy” and “Aunties Against Patriarchy”. Moreover, the units of analysis are the posts that are going to be analyzed. Therefore, one unit is one post, the combination of a visual and caption. Thus, the studied units of analysis are the posts on Instagram pages of the three accounts mentioned above. These three accounts are all owned and run by women who are part of the South-Asian diaspora that target an audience of a similar background. The sample size for the thematic analysis is 165 Instagram posts,

which includes the image(s) and the caption, and includes the hashtags. From each account, 55 of their posts will be used. Also, all of the accounts are run by a single person.

The units of analysis were chosen based on popularity as well as the message of the post and how it related to the accounts' form of activism. The dates of the selected posts ranged from April 2016 until April 2020 on Instagram, because a difference in the way the content was curated was noticed such as the professionalization level. As well as the prevalence of topics regarding social discussions the more the accounts grew and the creation of sellable products related to them. These posts were also chosen based on if they fit into the next three criteria, whether they discussed stereotypes, personal experience, and anything brand-related. A stereotype is an assumption made about a group and in this context South-Asian women, which can lead to projecting beliefs upon said group without considering them to be individuals with agency (Patel, & Crocco, 2003). These can be identified through seeing if the word “stereotype” was used in the caption of the post and whether the post discussed a subject to be lacking in representation. When there is a lack of representation a stereotype can form, therefore that is how it was recognized as well. One that was commonly used within the sample was skin complexion and that South-Asian women come in all colors ranging from pale to dark. Personal experience was noticeable when stories were told that directly related to the owners of the accounts and brand-related refers to any visual and textual mention to brands.

In the first criteria, I looked for posts that addressed gender, racial stereotype, or homophobia. For example, posts that had a longer caption with an anecdote as The Pakistani Martha Stewart did more often or words such as “equality”, “fight” and “patriarchy” appeared. Also, posts that discussed inclusivity showcasing women of a similar origin but with different appearances, LGBTQIA+ related posts, and other posts regarding women’s issues, such as posts celebrating international women’s day. With the second criteria, posts that discussed stories about the experiences of the accounts owners' or a followers' personal life were selected. The creators mentioned that this was their own experience. The third criteria were about if a brand is mentioned within the post or caption. Customer reviews about sold products are a part of this as well. Lastly, these posts will be categorized in sponsored and non-sponsored content because Instagram users have to disclose when a post is sponsored or not sponsored (Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun, 2017). It is relevant to mention whether a post is sponsored or not because the engagement on sponsored and non-sponsored posts can differ, and the attitude of the people engaging with content could change with sponsored and non-sponsored posts. Therefore, studying this can provide more depth to the

monetization of posts and how much the SMI has created themselves or if it were commissioned for another brand. If there is an abundance in sponsored posts then that means they were paid to make the post in comparison to their other posts that were not paid for.

3.3 Instagram Accounts for Thematic Analysis

3.3.1 The Pakistani Martha Stewart

- <https://www.instagram.com/thepakistanimarthastewart/?hl=en>

The Pakistani Martha Stewart is run by a Pakistani woman called Saher Sohail, who resides in the United States of America. Her page has a following of approximately 105.000 as for June 2, 2020. In her posts, Sohail discusses controversial topics with a quick wit, which is how she gained popularity (Qamar, 2017). Her artwork is a personal reflection of issues that she or women within her community had to tackle in the USA. Sohail's page is significant for this research, because she addresses women of the South-Asian diaspora, and often takes a feminist perspective. She also is openly feminist. This perspective is interesting because South-Asian society is known to be patriarchal and Sohail adheres to an anti-patriarchal feminist approach in her content. Therefore, the critique she showcases in her posts follows an opposite route as to how reality is. content. Through her work, Sohail acknowledges issues and dilemmas the diaspora women face from their own community and those outside of it. Thus, on her page her activism can be viewed and how the South-Asian community can progress for the benefit of women.

3.3.2 Brown Girl Gang - <https://www.instagram.com/browngirlgang/?hl=en>

Sanjana Nagesh, who is from Australia, started Brown Girl Gang when she saw talented South Asian women (who also call themselves Brown women) excelling on Instagram in their own respective fields, and wanted to create a platform where they all could be found as a collective (Nagesh, n.d.). In addition, people of South-Asian descent as a group call themselves Brown as a reference to their skin color (Gupta, 2019). The notion is a base word for their identity. The collective started out as only an Instagram page, which has 61.900 followers as for 2 June 2020. However, Nagesh now runs a blog with the same name, which is an homage to badass South-Asian women around the world, according to her Instagram bio. The blog will not be looked at in this study. Her page is selected as a case study for this research because it represents South-Asian women from different walks of life and promotes businesses owned by South-Asian women, which makes her page diverse and

exciting to study. Brown Girl Gang is a reflection of all the South-Asian women who do not usually get the limelight but still break boundaries.

3.3.3 Hatecopy - <https://www.instagram.com/hatecopy/?hl=en>

Hatecopy, also known as Maria Qamar, has a following of 197.000 people (Pasquarelli, 2017). She creates her art in a distinctive pop-art style and comments on the many problems South-Asian women face in a satirical manner. Qamar has also written a book *Trust No Aunty*, which is filled with personal anecdotes about growing up as a South-Asian girl under the watchful gaze of female elders (aunties) in Canada, where she lives in Toronto. Similar to Sohail, Qamar touches upon the challenges South-Asian women face in the countries they live in. Her account is a prime example of visual activism, because she often goes against the status quo in her artwork actively calling out for change and to fight patriarchy. Besides, she is able to make a living of her artwork, through her book, art for hire, and merchandise she sells on her website.

3.3.4 Case Study Similarities

All in all, the biggest similarity that the three case studies have are that they are all run by South-Asian diaspora women living in Anglophonic countries. They are popular accounts as can be seen through their follower counts as well as them being mentioned outside of Instagram for their content and what they are trying to achieve: letting the voices of South-Asian women being heard and putting them more to the forefront of society. This also adhered as to why Brown Girl Gang, The Pakistani Martha Stewart, and Hatecopy were selected as part of the case studies and no other accounts. Besides posting comics and the stories of others, the women running the accounts, also put themselves to the forefront in a personal manner to solidify what they stand for, which social media influencers do to make themselves appear trustworthy. They do this through organizing events, virtual and in real life, as well as the sales of their own merchandise and art. Another reason as to why the three accounts mentioned above were chosen is because their success is tangible beyond the numbers of followers they have. Hatecopy for example has written a book and is creating art for gallery shows and influential magazines. Brown Girl Gang has created a place on Instagram where South-Asian female-owned business were shown and appreciated, which did not exist before. The Pakistani Martha Stewart caters towards South-Asian women who want engage with their South-Asian heritage, but in a modern fashion. Hence again how hybrid identity fits in here because she sells merchandise with clever texts in Hindi and Urdu. Therefore, there is a possibility that these accounts do not cater towards stereotypes unless it

is to mock them. Also that they appear to be the only ones who sell merchandise based off on their content. For that reason, they combined the activist part in their content and profiting of that content too.

3.4 Operationalization

The process of what was measured is defined as the operationalization (Babbie, 2011). To be more precise, it is how the concepts mentioned in the theoretical framework were measured and which codes were used to start the analysis with. In the theoretical framework the concepts of hybrid culture, activism, and monetization were the focus, therefore the operationalization focuses on those also in order to showcase how those concepts were coded. Hybrid culture addressed the merger of the two cultures South-Asian diaspora women live in and that they create a third space to balance either culture. Activism took an aim at social media activism with visual activism as its most important part because Instagram is a platform centered on visuals and that is what the content of the case studies consists of. Therefore, activism was defined as working towards social change and transformation (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). With regards to monetization the concept of commodity activism was used because consumer behavior is combined with a social and political agenda (Mukherjee, & Banet-Weiser, 2012). In the operationalization is going to be explained what codes refer back to how the case studies make use of monetization through commodity activism.

Recurring words and tropes that I was expecting to find in the analysis were the usage of pop culture and references towards memes, which is why I coded those too because they are immediate examples of hybrid cultures. An example of these references were when the title of a song by Ariana Grande was referenced called “thank u, next”. This song indicates when one is done with a relationship, one says “thank u, next” to indicate that the relationship is over. Brown Girl Gang posted this, but then with the image of women’s hands decorated in traditional henna and then had the title of the song written on her palms. Ariana Grande was also tagged in the post. Other reoccurring tropes I expected were the mentions of gender roles, gender bias, and how South-Asian diaspora women are so limited in their agency and their voices, especially in comparison to men.

3.4.1 Hybrid Culture

Hybrid culture measured visual and textual references towards the popular culture of Western and South-Asian influences, shown in the characters on the art in the posts. Any

time a reference was made an open code was created because the images are being broken down into details at this stage of the coding process (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). For example, political figures, such as Donald Trump, were used as well as prominent figures from Bollywood. This showcased the presence of topics from both cultures within the posts and the stance the women hold regarding certain politicians. In the code tree, which can be viewed in the appendix, this started out with general codes in the manner of “celebrity”, “pop culture reference”, and “political figure”. But also “Cardi B” and “Ariana Grande” were codes for when these music stars were the topic of a post. Then the way these celebrities were portrayed was coded as well. For example, Cardi B was displayed whilst wearing a bindi on her forehead and traditional South-Asian clothing. Therefore, the codes “bindi” and “ethnic wear” were added to the code tree because this was also how South-Asian women were portrayed. Additionally, the usage of different types of language made the concept of hybrid culture also measurable because within the captions and the speech bubbles in the comics there was a clear mixture of English with Hindi, Urdu, or Punjabi. However, there was not a consistent usage of the same phrases of words found in the text.

3.4.2 Activism

To start with activism, which was measured in the research data through text for the majority because there was text in the visuals that encouraged a call to action, such as "fight, beti" (that means daughter). Also, the captions of the posts occasionally provided a short message regarding the previous example. Nevertheless, also longer and detailed captions describing an issue, why it is problematic, and how a difference can be made. This is in line with the definition of activism I am adhering to in this study, which is to make social change on a micro day to day level (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). Codes such as “gender roles”, “call to action”, “revolution”, “representation”, “social change”, and “empowering” were words found within the texts and thus used as open codes to start the analysis with. All of these open codes were used directly in the posts either in the visual or in the caption, except for “call to action”. That code was used to indicate when a post wanted the viewer to actively perform an activity, for instance Hatecopy communicating to her Canadian followers that they need to vote during the election. However, since the activities did not overlap, it is used as an overarching code for a call to action amongst the case studies.

3.4.3 Monetization

The final concept monetization was measured by counting the amount of times products that are for sale, were mentioned within the sample. This was done by using the open codes “product”, “promo”, and “advertisement”. These three codes are all slightly different because “product” is meant when a product is shown in a post and “promo” is when a product is mentioned and pushed for sale. Essentially product promotion is when an influencer showcases a product in an appealing manner (Ginsberg, 2015). Therefore, whether these products were explicitly mentioned or not is worth speaking off because if they were mentioned, then it would be considered product promotion. As for “advertisement”, this open code refers to when the Instagram post is an actual advertisement for a brand. As mentioned before social media influencers (SMI) have to disclose when they post paid advertisement, therefore these posts were identifiable. Mentions of specific brand names were looked after, too; this could be a brand the influencers collaborated with, owned, or promoted, such as Bombay Sapphire which is an alcohol brand. Thus, the reliance on visuals is highly necessary for the analysis in order to understand the context of communication mentioned before and to understand how they portray products and brands, whether it be their own brands or not.

3.5 Data Collection Method

The data was collected through the web version of Instagram, specifically from the accounts of @thepakistanimarthastewart, @browngirlgang, and @hatecopy. Instagram was accessed through the computer to look at their pages to see which posts fit the sampling criteria. All of these accounts are public accounts, which means anyone with internet access could view them. After a scan of the content, the posts that fell within the sampling criteria of the units of analysis were screenshot with the caption and stored on my laptop. Sometimes the caption was too long to fit in one screenshot, so multiple were made. Therefore, I looked at the captions and the image(s) of the posts, but not the comments, because they may not be posted by public accounts and are randomly shown according to Instagram's algorithm. Therefore, the comments itself were not necessarily relevant within this thematic analysis. However, the number of likes and the number of comments will be accounted for to acknowledge the popularity of a post because it counts as post engagement.

3.6 Data Analysis Method

The preferred method for analysis in this research is thematic analysis because it centers on reporting and identifying key patterns in the gathered data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen in favor of critical discourse analysis because power

relations were not exclusively researched nor the main topics of the case studies (Carvalho, (2008). Semiotic analysis was also excluded because the case studies provided overarching themes in their posts that turned out to be related to each account. If semiotic analysis were used, then this discovery would have not happened because this type of analysis focuses on signs and thus more the details and not the overarching themes (Berger, 2011). In the thematic analysis the images and captions from the Instagram posts were analyzed. None of the accounts used similar hashtags consistently, therefore this was not looked at. However, occasionally a hashtag was featured as part of the caption. These hashtags were also incorporated into the analysis because they helped provide context to the caption and to activism.

For example, in fig. 3.1 Hatecopy used #DECOLONIZETHOSEPORES when she made a comic about her skincare routine. To analyze this post, I started by looking at the text written in the visual, which discusses relationship struggles because the woman depicted puts emphasis on her physical beauty through face creams but the man she is into still made her appear to be an idiot. “Ullu” translates to idiot. Then I read the caption where the author further emphasizes to her followers to not look like an idiot. Lastly, four hashtags are used in total that are related to the topic that was asked of her, a skincare routine, and the answer she provided, do not look like an idiot. #FUDDUPROOF means idiot proof. With the hashtag #DECOLONIZETHOSEPORES, there was an emphasis put on the decolonization of beauty standards and to be aware of those, such as that a fair skin tone is not more beautiful than a darker complexion (Echchaibi, 2013). #MUA (make-up artist) and #SKINCAREINFLUENCER is a link towards SMI’s on Instagram who commonly promote their skincare and beauty routines. #SMOOTHLIKEHRITIKSCHEST is a comical reference to Bollywood actor Hritik Roshan’s chest and that her face is as smooth. Furthermore, it is relevant to discuss that a South-Asian woman here is portrayed in the comic, which can be deduced because of the black hair, the traditional ethnic clothing worn, and the bindi once again worn on the forehead.

The topics of the text in the comic were coded as “heartbreak” and “beauty standards” because the woman is seen crying and she claims to look like an idiot because of a man despite her usage of face creams. This implicates that despite making herself beautiful and adhering to beauty standards, it did not stop her from being a fool. Then the physical characteristics she dons are coded as well in “bindi”, “ethnic wear”, “earrings”, “dark hair”, “brown eyes”, “red nails”, and “pink lips”, which are common features of South-Asian women and fashion trends within South-Asian culture. This was done for every post in the

analysis. Because a Bollywood actor's name was referenced that was coded as "Bollywood". The usage of English and Hindi in the face cream bottle, text bubbles, caption, and hashtags was coded as "hybrid culture" because is it a characteristic of those living in third space cultures to use a mixture of the multiple languages that they speak or have knowledge of. Lastly, because Hatecopy referred to herself as a make-up artist and skincare influencer the code "social media influencer" was used. All in all, this post takes a humorous and relatable aim towards SMI's about their content and heartbreak that women go through with some activism mixed into it as well with the subtle appearance of decolonizing. Hatecopy makes use of an implicit method to raise awareness on this topic without actually mentioning an issue and letting her followers interpret what it means for them.

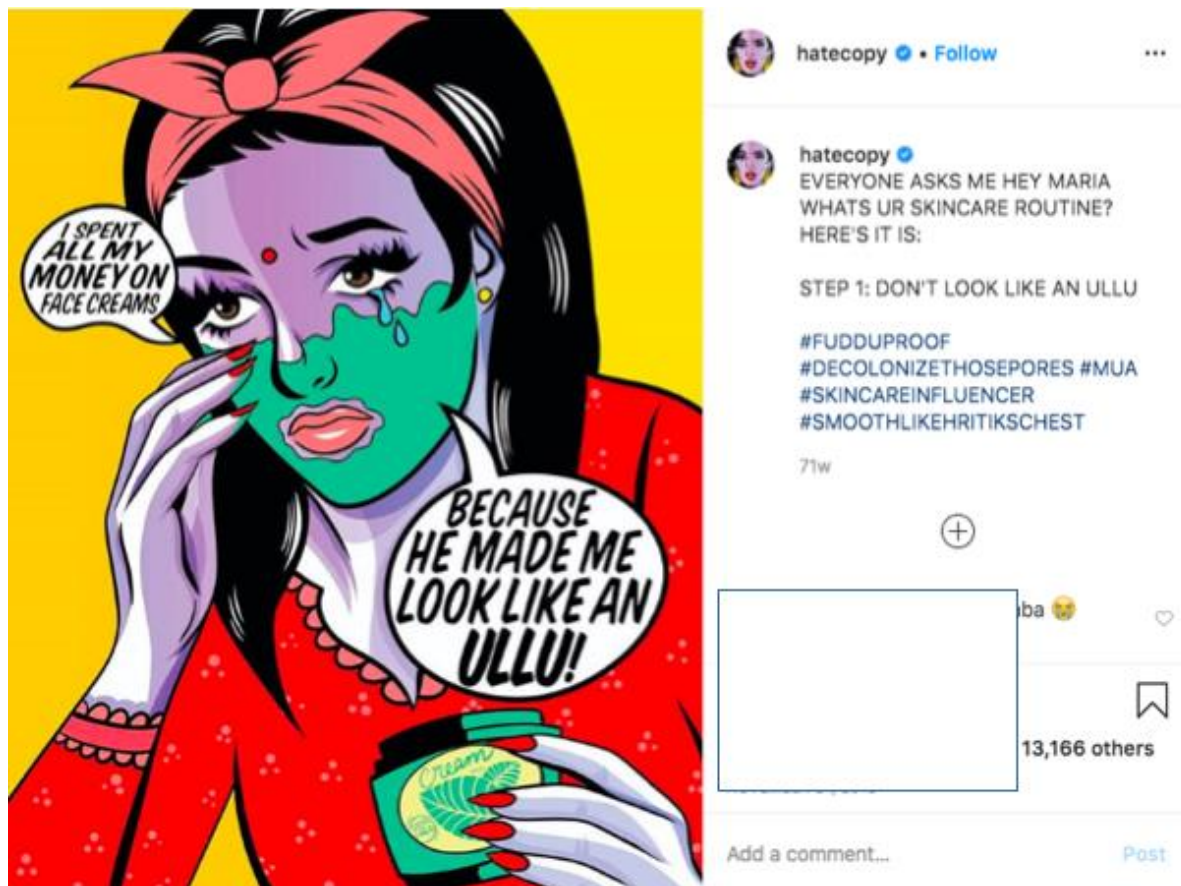


Fig. 3.1

Moreover, in the analysis six themes were discovered through the three case studies: A bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women, Creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels, Normalizing the voices of South-Asians, Cooperating with commercial enterprises in order to

enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact, The critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society, and the last theme, Using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-platform operated business. Creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels, and the critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society are the two themes that come from the theory mostly in comparison to the other themes. Previous studies by Mishra and Shirazi (2010), Ludhra and Chappell (2011), and Raj and Silverman, (2003) all discuss the position of South-Asian diaspora women and how they are a vulnerable group, therefore they add to the themes. The other themes were discovered through the analysis.

Hence, that this thesis uses both an inductive and deductive processes, because new patterns were discovered through thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). However, not all of them were completely new and were connected with what was found in the theoretical framework already, such as hybrid culture, representation, and voices. After the patterns were identified, they were compared to each other in order to be able to divide them into themes that disclosed the data's connection to the research question. Aside from the established categories of data, new patterns were classified and then rearranged into sub-themes as well, such as other people being credited in posts. ATLAS.ti was the software that was chosen to uncover the themes in, because of its ability to set up a clear overview of the data as a whole and fragmented. Selective code 1 from case study one regarding the bottom-up relationship together with selective code 1 from case study 2, which can be seen in the Appendix are all inductive codes that are related because they are about South-Asian women expressing their voices that follows an empowering narrative and not a victim one as previous studies have portrayed them to be. They are about breaking stereotypes and social boundaries. Selective code 2 from case study 2 and selective code 1 from case study 1 are both also inductive because they focused on the usage of brands to express their activist agenda. As for selective code 2 from case study 1 and selective code 1 from case study 3 they are deductive because they were based on already found concepts of South-Asian culture with its patriarchal roots that enforces gender roles.

The data analysis consists of a codebook, which can be found in the appendix, which showcases the process in three steps: from open codes to axial codes to selective codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These steps were followed to fragment the data, examine it individually, then compare it together, and conceptualize the data in order for the themes to become apparent. For the open codes I looked for words that were prominent key words in

the caption, such as “inspiration”, “girlboss”, and “social media influencers”. I would also create open codes for characteristics as to how the South-Asian women in the posts were visualized, because this was done in a similar manner that they all had dark hair and dark eyes. However, there were also differences here that women with different skin tones were showcased, different hairstyles with long straight hair as the most prominent. There was also a difference that Brown Girl Gang showed real women and Hatecopy and The Pakistani Martha Stewart drew women.

As for the axial codes, a connection was looked at for between the open coding. In order to find this connection, I looked at the codes in the posts once again and then through the theoretical framework again to see if overlap could be found or not. For example, the open code of “inspiration” and “girlboss”, because these two were grouped together into the axial code of “awareness towards South-Asian diaspora women and their career achievements as role models” for Brown Girl Gang. The reason being that posts that were coded with these open codes focused on the women’s career achievements, praised the companies and charities they started and were thriving in. As well as that they can succeed with having successful careers while being a woman of South-Asian descent and thus breaking stereotypes such as being portrayed in a victim role (Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004). Therefore, they were positioned as role models to look up to. There was a focus on South-Asian women who work in charities, such as Malala Yousafzai, and what kind of social change she has already implemented and continues to work on.

The final stage was creating the selective codes. To construct these, I once again looked at the open codes grouped together and in the ATLAS.ti to double verify the axial codes. After that was done the axial codes were grouped together to see what kind of relationship they formed. “awareness towards South-Asian diaspora women and their career achievements as role models” went together with the axial codes “intersectional equality” and “the multicultural merge of using humor in art as a manner to display the social issues that South-Asian diaspora women face and combat”. The reason being that they both touch upon how art can be used to inspire others, that they are equal regardless of their gender, culture or sexuality, and that is something to be proud of. Hence, why I connected this group of axial codes with the selective code “creating safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels. On Instagram these women are encouraged to share their stories, which they all uplift as a community. Therefore, creating a safe space for each other where they can discuss each other’s careers, cultural identities, and call out the problems they face in order to perhaps come to a solution.

In ATLAS.ti one can add codes to specific aspects of the selected visuals. Codes were added to all 165 posts and their captions. The codes that appeared the most then were discovered then. Through this reoccurring patterns were discovered. Next, I was able to create the codebook through the open codes created in Atlas.ti, and the following step was to look for patterns within the provided open coding. After this stage, the patterns were to be compared to each other in order to find differences and similarities that overlap to answer the research question. This was done to uncover overlap in codes so that a common theme could lead to an axial code. Moreover, this was repeated with the axial codes, too, until selective codes were discovered.

Therefore, the thematic analysis identifies the varying factors that contribute to how South-Asian diaspora women use Instagram to perform activism and monetize through that according to different categories. There were six themes uncovered and they ranged from what corresponded with the theoretical framework, such as a bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women, creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels, normalizing the voices of South-Asians, cooperating with commercial enterprises in order to enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact, the critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society, and using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-platform operated business. The majority specifically focuses on South-Asian women, because those were the most common topics found in the posts.

3.7 Reliability

Reliability is a concept that is used to verify the quality of the measurement methods mentioned in the operationalization and the trustworthiness of the research method in general (Brennen, 2011). To start with the content of the case studies found on Instagram, which, as mentioned above, were public accounts, which entails that anyone can access them. Thus they are open access, and this increases the reliability of this study. This also entails that there is no breach within ethicality in this research. Comments that were posted by third party Instagram users that could be seen in the posts have been censored as well in order to protect their privacy, because there is no certainty that they would give permission to be used in public research.

Furthermore, the data used within this research was considered reliable because it followed a pattern, and therefore multiple cases of the same phenomenon, such as both The

Pakistani Martha Stewart and Hatecopy promoting their own merchandise on their Instagram account. As for my positionality as the researcher of this study, I myself am part of the South-Asian diaspora as well. Therefore, this position allowed me to discover patterns in the data quicker, because I was aware of social issues and thus knew where to look. Also, I was able to comprehend the posts as they are intended for a woman from South-Asian descent would understand them. Because I could translate the posts myself and thus was not dependent on an external translation. Lastly, this study is meticulous and is not a generalization of South-Asian diaspora women. In this research the experiences of a small group of specific women were studied. Their narratives were discovered of how they partake in activism in the South-Asian community and this not data which when reproduced would create the same results necessarily. All in all, throughout this methodology section every detail of this research has been explained and reasoned, thus making this research as transparent as possible.

Chapter 4 Results

In this chapter, the results of the content analysis will be provided through four separate sections. Six themes were discovered during the analysis: A bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women, Cooperating with commercial enterprises to enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact, Using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-platform operated business, The critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society, Creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels, and the final theme, Normalizing the voices of South-Asians. The first three themes focus on the relationships with followers and how brand collaborations can lead to increasing social media influence as well as how to create a business out of Instagram. The latter three themes focus on the position of South-Asian diaspora women and how it can be bettered. All of the themes from the case studies all fit equally in each group mentioned above, therefore the overlap is equally distributed and there is not one case study who is set apart.

Furthermore, each case study will be discussed separately in each section starting with Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and lastly The Pakistani Martha Stewart. Then in the fourth and final section of this chapter, an explicit comparison will be made. The choice was made to separately examine the case studies because during the analysis I discovered that although they overlap in their topics and depictions of women, each case study has their own way of doing so. Their messages are more nuanced when looked at in the details and that difference is important enough to highlight. Moreover, every case study section consists of the two selective codes that came out of the content analysis. The codebook can be found in the appendix. Of each case study, the prominent themes will be discussed first as well as the open codes that appeared the most. These will both provide an introduction as to where the focus of the analysis comes from.

4.1 Brown Girl Gang

The themes that most prominently arose when analyzing Brown Girl Gang's account was that they showcased the daily lives and accomplishments of South-Asian diaspora women and how they have a bottom-up relationship with their followers and encourage user interaction by providing a safe space, which are also the selective codes. The open codes that

appeared the most were “representation”, “organization mention”, “credit”, and “inspiration”. This showcases that the content on Brown Girl Gang focuses predominantly on the representation of South-Asian diaspora women and the organizations they work in or started. They tag their names and the organizations they are tied to in their posts as well, which can be seen in the figures below. Brown Girl Gang furthermore posts this kind of content to uplift the women and put them up as inspiration for others. This in return leads to more representation of South-Asian diaspora women and thus becomes a full circle. Lastly, the open codes were then combined into the axial codes: “portrayal of South-Asian women”, “creating an inclusive and diverse narrative to post”, the involvement of the target audience into BBG’s content”, “awareness towards South-Asian diaspora women and their career achievements as a role model”, “intersectional equality”, and “the multicultural merge of using humor in art as a manner to display the social issues that South-Asian diaspora women face and combat. These axial codes will be further elaborated on below by discussing the selective themes.

4.1.1 The Daily Lives of South-Asian Women That Showcase a Bottom-Up Interactive Relationship

The selective code that discovered the first theme of Brown Girl Gang is a bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women. Since this theme includes narratives that each deserve individual attention I am going to break it up into three parts: first the bottom-up interactive relationship with followers, second the daily lives of South-Asian women, and then how they are connected. First, social media influencers (SMI) gain followings, because of their honesty and relatability of their user-generated content (UGC) (van Driel & Dumitrica, 2020). Brown Girl Gang does this by interacting with their audience since they promote and celebrate other SMI’s or South-Asian women who have achieved career milestones. This is a bottom-up interactive relationship because the posts mostly come from third parties and not necessarily Brown Girl Gang’s own personal content that they created. Also, it is a bottom-up relationship because the content and interaction on the account are heavily dependent on the followers who are other Instagram users in comparison to the account owner that is one person. Therefore, this platform is used to amplify the voices and accomplishments of South-Asian women from in a bottom-up manner. Brown Girl Gang focuses on highlighting the accomplishments of other South-Asian women. The sale of products related to their own culture is highlighted. As can be seen in fig. 4.1 the visual in the post is a collaboration between Brown Girl Gang and an

artist names zhkdesigns. In fig. 4.2 the bottom-up interactive relationship is seen in that they curated a special box filled with products that they knew their following would appreciate and thus purchase, through being interactive with their online community (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007). Which fits with the axial code of the involvement of the target audience into BGG's content. Moreover, the box is filled with products that represent South-Asian women and are made by South-Asian women, therefore it creates representation and supports women within the South-Asian community across the globe according to the caption. This is a larger part of the South-Asian audience that lifts up a single person each time because of their consumption in products or in attention to their art or Instagram accounts. Consequently, this makes the box feel more personalized in that sense as well, which adds towards the authenticity of Brown Girl Gang as an account, but also as a business.

As for the second part of this theme; the daily lives of South-Asian women and the connection with the bottom-up interactive relationship. In fig. 4.1 the post is an announcement for a second account, called a sister account, of Brown Girl Gang. This account is inspired by another account @humansofnyc, but then @humansofbgg is an exclusive space for South-Asians to share their everyday stories. This is an example of third space within hybrid culture because it is a merge of an already existing Instagram account, but then one catered specifically towards South-Asians. The original account @humansofnyc showcases stories of the everyday lives of New Yorkers and @humansofbgg took this already existing concept and adapted it for English speaking South-Asians. Hence, that it is an example of third space within hybrid culture because @humansofbgg is a cultural merge of the two identities that South-Asians live in and that is exclusively for them but also accessible for viewing by non-South-Asians.

Additionally, @humansofbgg becomes an account where the voices of South-Asians can be heard. As mentioned earlier, the people belonging to the South-Asian diaspora are a marginalized group, because of cultural differences, language barrier, and their immigrant status (Bhatia & Ram, 2004; Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004). These are factors that can make their voices go unheard, however, @humansofbgg offers a direct solution to this issue, by providing these people a platform online. Fig. 4.2 stimulates the representation that is lacking and provides products such as holiday cards and a poetry book for South-Asian women. Therefore, this box has products that are tangible evidence of what South-Asian women can create. Within the analysis no explicit mention has been given by Brown Girl Gang that indicates that they feel that they live between two different cultures, however, this can be spotted in the content they post. They launched @humansofbgg because they wanted

more relatability and representation regarding everyday moments from South-Asians. Once again in fig. 4.2 on the white card in the center of the image the text “call me chai tea one more time” has been written, which refers to the “masala chai” drink. However, people in Western countries call it “chai tea” and in Hindi, this means “tea tea” and thus to South-Asian people, this sounds as if people are repeating the word “tea” twice. Therefore, the card is making a joke out of people using that term, so this indicates that there is some awareness to the creators that they live in two different cultures.



Fig. 4.1



Fig. 4.2

4.1.2 Safe Space for South-Asian Women in Society

The second selective code and theme located on Brown Girl Gang’s account is creating a safe space for South-Asian women at all societal levels. It is a safe space because these women feel comfortable to being able to confide into the content of Brown Girl Gang because they might be persecuted within their own family for the same (Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). This adheres to the patriarchal nature of South-Asian society where women are not supposed to make a change, but obey the heteronormative status quo of get an education, get married, and have children. Therefore, Instagram is a safe space because of the platform that Brown Girl Gang provides for the amplification of voice of South-Asian women.

Furthermore, this theme comprises out of the two axial codes: intersectional equality and the multicultural merge of using humor in art as a manner to display the social issues that South-Asian diaspora women face and combat. Both figures below are examples of these codes. In fig. 4.3 three South-Asian women can be seen protesting during the women’s march. This is also a safe space because they are a younger generation wanting to break with the social boundaries of their culture and the women’s march is a place where women from

all backgrounds protest for rights they are currently lacking with their social standing. All three women have been publicly tagged and credited in the post, implicating that they want to be credited as the ones protesting. The fact that they are young women who look well-off means that they use their privilege of being able to go to a protest to create more awareness and rally for change, which would also further the lives of South-Asian women who do not appear to be well-off. They hold up posters with texts regarding social issues within the South-Asian community. The sign on the upper left which has written “my dark side is my best side” refers to South-Asian beauty standards where colorism is still an issue and having a darker skin complexion is frowned upon.

Additionally, the sign in the middle is repeated in the caption “bad betis against patriarchy”. Bad betis means bad daughters and talk about South-Asian daughters who are seen as bad because they do not abide by the standards from the community. The poster also mentions that these bad betis are against patriarchy and are actively voicing out that they want social change, and thus can be called activists (Stornaiuolo and Thomas, 2017). They go against the status quo, which is patriarchy as well as the expectation within patriarchy as to how women are supposed to behave, which is obedient with the focus on family (Chaudhuri, Morash & Yingling, 2014). The women in fig. 4.3 using the term “bad beti” rebels against that expectation and that South-Asian women should be able to decide for themselves what they want. Which is a recurring theme in this research that relates to the notion of voices from Couldry (2020) and how South-Asian women should have more influential voices. This is further reflected in the next discussed post as well.

In fig. 4.4. two South-Asian women are viewed kissing, which fits under the axial code intersectional equality because as can be read from the caption of the post-it mentions that being a queer South-Asian woman is something to be proud of. This focuses on three aspects of marginalized groups: LGBTQIA+ people, South-Asians, and women. Here specific referrals are seen to take up space, to have a voice and that representation of their identity is something that will come. There is also mentioned that this post was originally from the @humansbgg account and now also posted on the main account of Brown Girl Gang, because of the positive reactions it got. All in all, this means that Brown Girl Gang is a safe space for South-Asian women regardless of their status, identity, and sexuality, their voices will be heard and their stories will be told. In fig. 4.1 Brown Girl Gang referred to @humansbgg as a space that is for South-Asians that they can relate to, is uplifting, and where they feel comfortable enough to share their own stories, hence the usage of safe space.



Fig. 4.3



Fig. 4.4

4.2 Hatecopy

The themes and selective codes on Hatecopy's page were more about normalizing the voices of South-Asians and collaborating with companies and brands to make her work available to a larger audience. The open codes that appeared the most on her page were "hybrid culture", "organization mention", "credit", "red lips", and "tikka". Hybrid culture appeared the most often because in her art and her captions Hatecopy often uses multiple languages to make a joke or point out issues. Organization mention is mentionable because she promotes and credits the galleries and restaurants where she displays her work in real life. The majority of women in her comics are donned with red lips. This is seen as beautiful according to South-Asian beauty standards (McLoughlin, 2017). Additionally, the majority of the women in her comics are also South-Asian and they very much resemble typical South-Asian women too with dark hair and dark eyes. Moreover, Hatecopy gave the women a tikka to wear as well, which is a piece of traditional South-Asian jewelry that Hindu women wear on the forehead that can extend into the hairline (Mittal & Thursby, 2010). This is an interesting find because this implicates that the majority of women represented in her comics are Hindu.

The axial codes that came out of the open codes were: "portrayal of characters in artwork and comics", globalized culture from a South-Asian female perspective", "display of repertoire and how fans can contribute", and "fight against injustice regardless of social ethnic or financial background".

4.2.1 Normalization of South-Asian voices

The first selective code, normalizing the voices of South-Asians, consists of two axial codes: portrayal of characters in artwork and comics and globalized culture from a South-Asian female perspective. Hatecopy and The Pakistani Martha Stewart both hold a female perspective to their work, yet also mention men in it, in comparison to Brown Girl Gang, which focuses more on women. The first example comes in fig. 4.5 with the presentation of the Canadian politician Jagmeet Singh, who is the leader of the country's New Democratic Party (Kohli, 2020). He participated in the election to become the Canadian prime minister in 2019 as well, which is what Hatecopy was trying to make happen in her post by showing her followers that she supports him. In the speech bubble, he says "apna time ah gaiya!", which translates to "our time has come". Time for a man who belongs to a South-Asian minority group to become prime minister. She points out that voting for Singh also means voting for indigenous rights, equality, justice, and dignity for Canadian citizens. Hatecopy is here seen creating user-generated content to showcase her political opinions, and what social change

she desires to see as a Canadian citizen. She cleverly uses mixes Singh's name with "uprising" in the hashtag uprisingh as a pun to display her own activism.

On top of that in fig. 4.6 shows a collaboration between Hatecopy and Flare magazine, which she has credited in the visual and in the caption. She calls herself "digital didi", which is a mix of English and Hindi, and thus once again the third space. Didi means big sister and she calls herself that because she has an advice column now through Flare magazine. Hatecopy gives instructions on how through her Instagram people can ask her questions and she will answer the ones she finds the most interesting. Moreover, she also mentions question topics ranging from life to death and black magic even (kala jadu in Hindi translates to black magic in English). As in fig. 4.5 she uses a clever hashtag that is a mixture of different languages again. This time it is #helpmedidi, as if she is the followers' real sister and so she can be asked for advice. Consequently, this refers back again to what Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) mentioned in their study that in an online community non-private conversations can grow a relationship for it be seen as a social relationship. Hatecopy positioning herself as a big sister figure is thus an example.



Fig. 4.5



Fig. 4.6

4.2.2 Using Commercial Enterprises to Increase Influence

The second theme and selective code uncovered on Hatecopy’s account is cooperating with commercial enterprises to enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact. This selective code consists of two axial codes: display of repertoire and how fans can contribute and fight against injustice regardless of social ethnic or financial background. This theme focuses more on the business aspect of Hatecopy. She is an activist and this can be seen in her work, however, she is also an artist who displays her work in galleries, she works on commissions because her art is also displayed in restaurants. Additionally, she also runs a webshop where prints and other merchandise such as clothing and tableware are sold. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that through her Instagram page she makes revenue as well. Fig. 4.7 and fig. 4.8 strengthen this conclusion, because these are both Hatecopy collaborations with famous brands, such as Google and Nike. For an app owned by Google, she created stickers that are once again true to South-Asian hybrid culture, because they display South-Asian men and women in different humorous settings. They are made in a Western pop-art style with South-Asian characters as is the majority of her art. The stickers make references to South-Asian culture, such as “pitaji doesn’t approve” refers to the gender roles of South-Asian women and how they are always under surveillance. This particular

sticker mentions that the woman's father would not approve of whatever action is proposed to happen. Thus she always makes decisions within the back of her mind thinking what her father would think of that too. These stickers fall into the category of commodity activism here too, because these stickers are a smaller scale form of her critical art, but now marketable to a larger audience (Mukherjee, & Banet-Weiser, 2012). Collaborating with a Google app on this entails that these stickers are going to be available to anyone who uses the app, which broadens the reachability of her work beyond her own network.

In fig. 4.8 the collaboration with Nike a different statement is made. First of all, her collaboration is only available in Canada in comparison to her work with Google, which is available globally to anyone with internet access. Second, all the Canadian pages are tagged in her post as well to further emphasize that this is a local collaboration. Third, the product that she developed for Nike is a pin in the shape of their logo, but then as a chili. She calls it the mirchi swoosh pin, which is another third space usage of language because mirchi translates to chili in Hindi. And chilies are commonly used in South-Asian food to make the food spicy. Lastly, in the post, it is also mentioned that this pin is specifically created for Airmax day, which is a day to celebrate a specific model of Nike shoes. Thus she connects her own brand to a commercial holiday of a larger brand, which adds to her status as a micro-celebrity. Because Nike would not collaborate with just any artist.

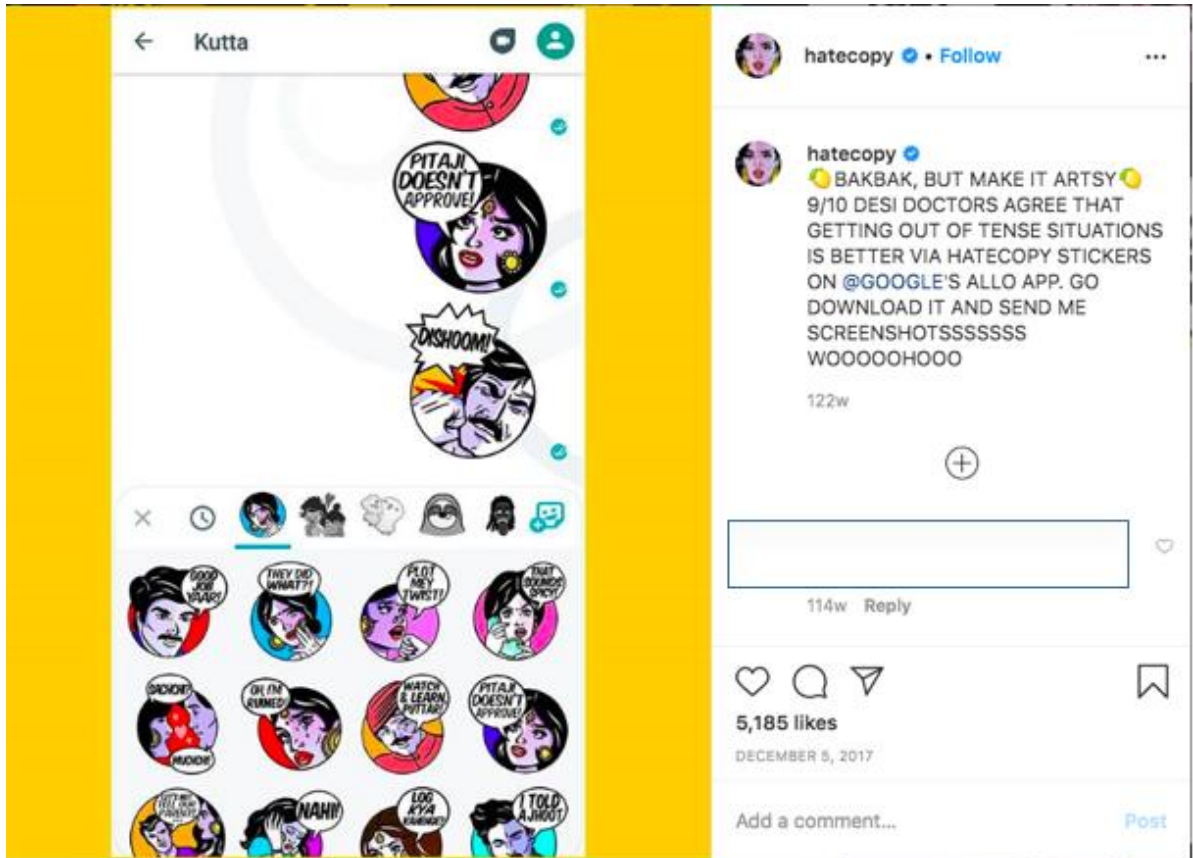


Fig. 4.7



Fig. 4.8

4.3 The Pakistani Martha Stewart

On The Pakistani Martha Stewart's account themes collided more with each other, because there is one selective code and theme which critiques the position of South-Asian diaspora women in their society. The other one however is about how Instagram is used to build a successful platform for activism, which can then be turned into a business. This one again relates to commodity activism and a critical lens on how authentic this type of activism is, which will be further discussed in this section. The open codes that appeared the most in the sample of The Pakistani Martha Stewart are "hybrid culture", "Etsy", "promo", and "product". Hybrid culture is the most frequent open code because just as Hatecopy does, The Pakistani Martha Stewart also uses multiple languages in her comics and in the products she sells. The latter three open codes are all connected to her business ventures as well. She sells her products on the platform Etsy but promotes her products on Instagram. The way that this is done is by reposting pictures of followers who bought her products and posted them on their personal pages. This doubles up as a customer review, which strengthens her authenticity because her consumers are positive about her products, and promotion at the same time.

Furthermore, the axial codes found are: "portrayal of characters in comics", "cultural issues and taboos", "pros and cons regarding globalized culture", "post topic and audience", and "establishment of brand and referrals to services". The first axial code is similar to Brown Girl Gang and Hatecopy, however, for this account, it is different, because The Pakistani Martha Stewart's comics do not only feature South-Asian women for the majority part. She also puts in South-Asian parents, men, and white people, therefore characters have been chosen for the first axial code. The other axial codes refer more to the South-Asian community and culture and the last axial code towards the business side of her account and how she creates her revenue, which will be elaborated upon below.

4.3.1 Critique of South-Asian Diaspora Women on Their Societal Position

The critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society is the first selective code that was discovered on The Pakistani Martha Stewart's account. This selective code consists of three axial codes: portrayal of characters in comics, cultural issues, and taboos, and pros and cons regarding globalized culture. The Pakistani Martha Stewart as Brown Girl Gang and Hatecopy predominantly show South-Asian women in her comics as they are the topic in the majority of the sample, however occasionally, parental figures are shown too. Different characters are

seen to showcase her critique of the position of South-Asian diaspora women in society. In 4.9 an interaction between a South-Asian woman and a white woman is seen, where the white woman mentions that she went backpacking around Europe over the summer. The South-Asian woman responds to it that her parents let her go to the grocery store by herself. What this implicates is that the South-Asian woman's parents would never let her go backpacking around Europe and that she felt lucky that they let her go to the grocery store by herself. The concept of surveillance here is a critique point The Pakistani Martha Stewart makes in this comic (Peterson, 2016). The South-Asian women's parents are too focused on watching what she is doing and not permitting her the same freedom as the white woman's parents do.

Fig. 4.10 raises another point of critique on South-Asian culture that involves gender roles, which is the expectation of having to be married for a certain age. The Pakistani Martha Stewart makes a joke out of this because she herself turned 27 years old and is still not married. The other person from the speech bubble comments that she is an alien, because of her unmarried status. Thus she is portrayed as a South-Asian woman, but instead of having brown skin, her skin is now green and she has horns coming out of head indicating that she belongs to an unearthly species. Through this comic, she critiques that this expectation should not be an expectation and therefore wants a change in it.



Fig. 4.9

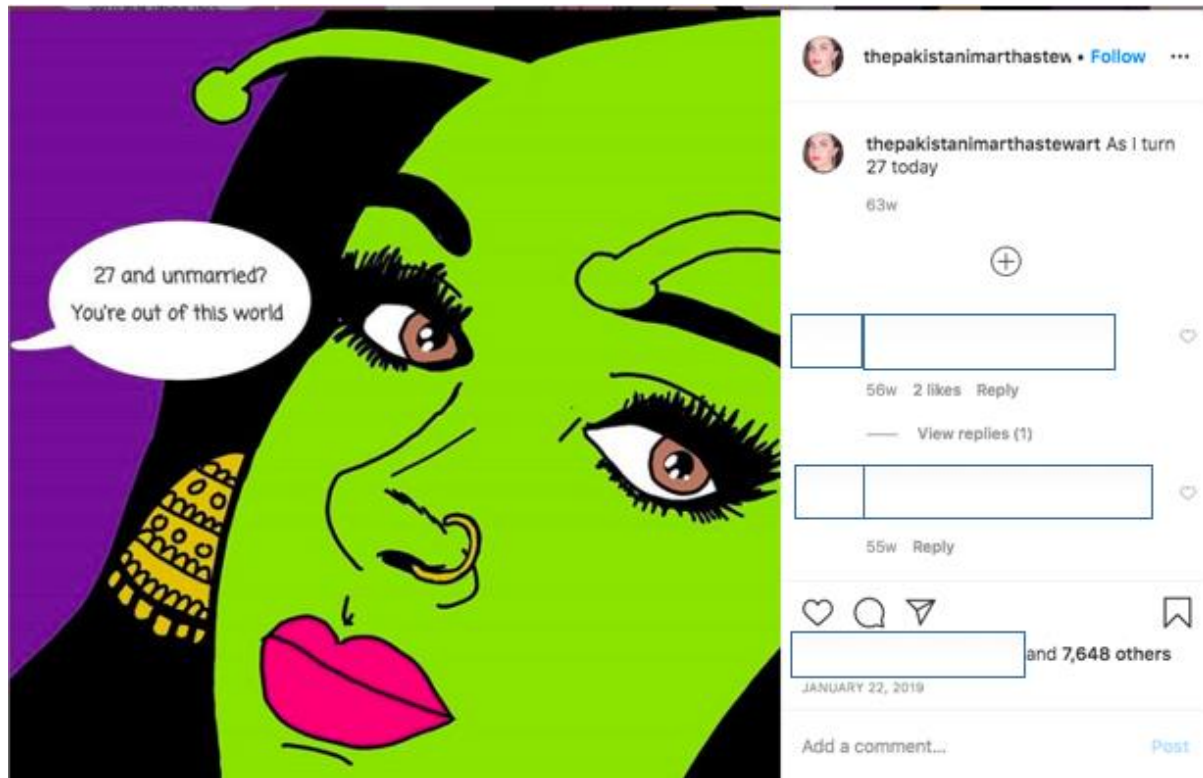


Fig. 4.10

4.3.2 Instagram Fame Gained From Activism Used For Launching Business

The second theme and selective code from The Pakistani Martha Stewart is using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-platform operated business. This theme shows how she promotes her different business ventures from her main account. The axial codes that befitting here are post topic and audience and establishment of brand and referrals to services. She uses her audience and her consumers to promote her products as seen in fig. 4.11. That post is a repost from the account @noorugh, who posted the picture with the hairpins chai wali. These hairpins are another example of third space usage as seen before with Hatecopy. From Punjabi to English this means that the person is a tea lover. In the caption, there is a mention that other hairpins with other texts, such as “be quiet” (translation of chup kar) are also available because there of a restock. She, therefore, uses user-generated content from a consumer of her and merges that visual with an announcement that her products are once again in stock. Additionally, there are more references as to where these can be bought on her Etsy store. The link is provided in the caption and there is also a referral to find it in the biography section of her account and the Insta story function.

In fig. 4.12 a different business venture of The Pakistani Martha Stewart is going to be discussed that is non-product related, but more about creating representation and voices for South-Asian women in STEM fields. STEM fields are science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Smith, Handley, Rushing, Belou, Shanahan, Skewes, Kambich, Honea & Intemann, 2018). This is a male-dominated field and through recent years there have been more movements to have more women study and work in this field. To not move away from it, because it is seen as a male field. The Pakistani Martha Stewart created a separate Instagram account specifically for South-Asian women in STEM, @browngirlsinstem. She said that she started it together with her sister because she sees how impactful these fields are for the improvement of society and social and political change. Hence, why she calls for more South-Asian (diaspora) women to get into STEM because this is not usually promoted for this group. Yet, they are also a part of society, and becoming a part of these fields could also possibly expand their influence and can have their voices heard. @browngirlsinstem, therefore, wants more equality and representation for South-Asian women. This platform is a starting point where other South-Asian women can tell their stories, share their connections and events. Consequently, this account is similar to Brown Girl Gang's @humansofbgg, because that is also a space specifically for South-Asians and for them to have an encouraging online community.

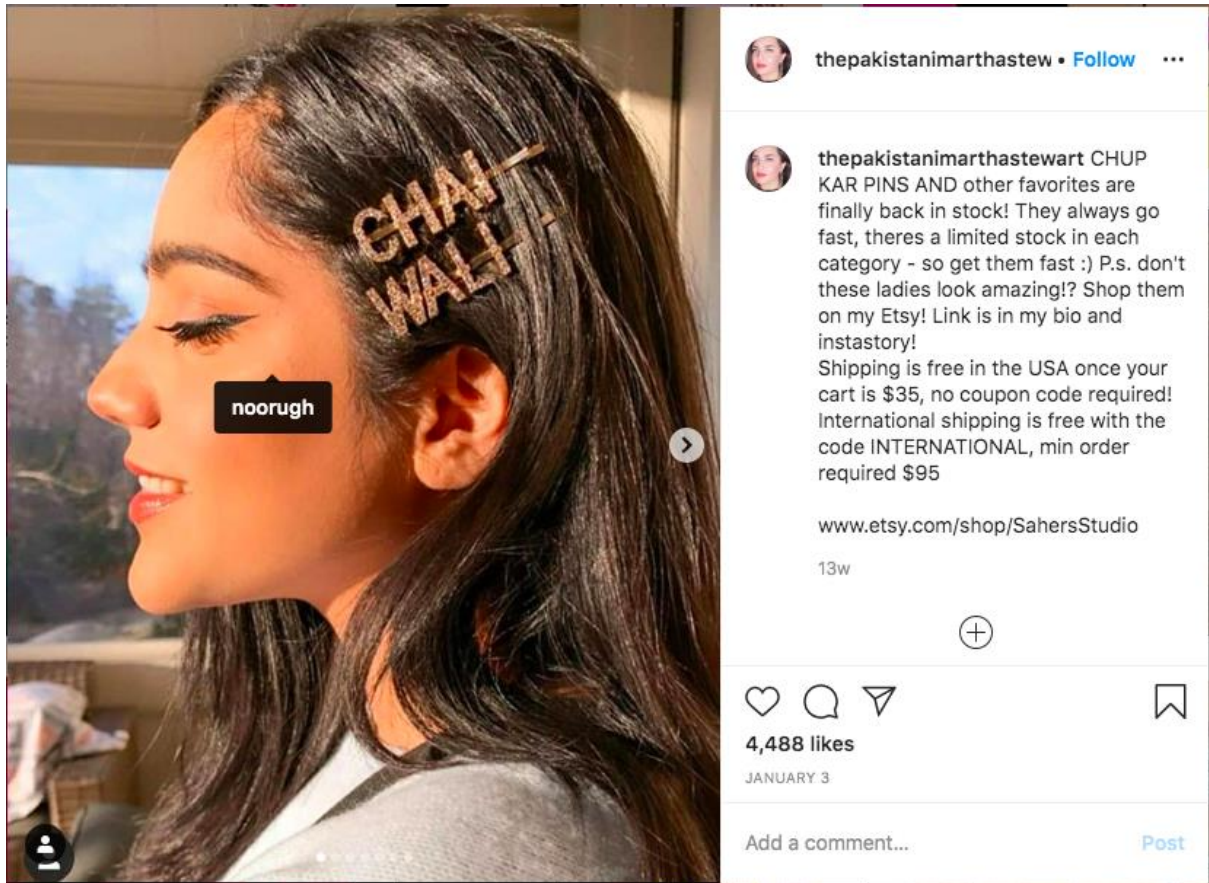


Fig. 4.11

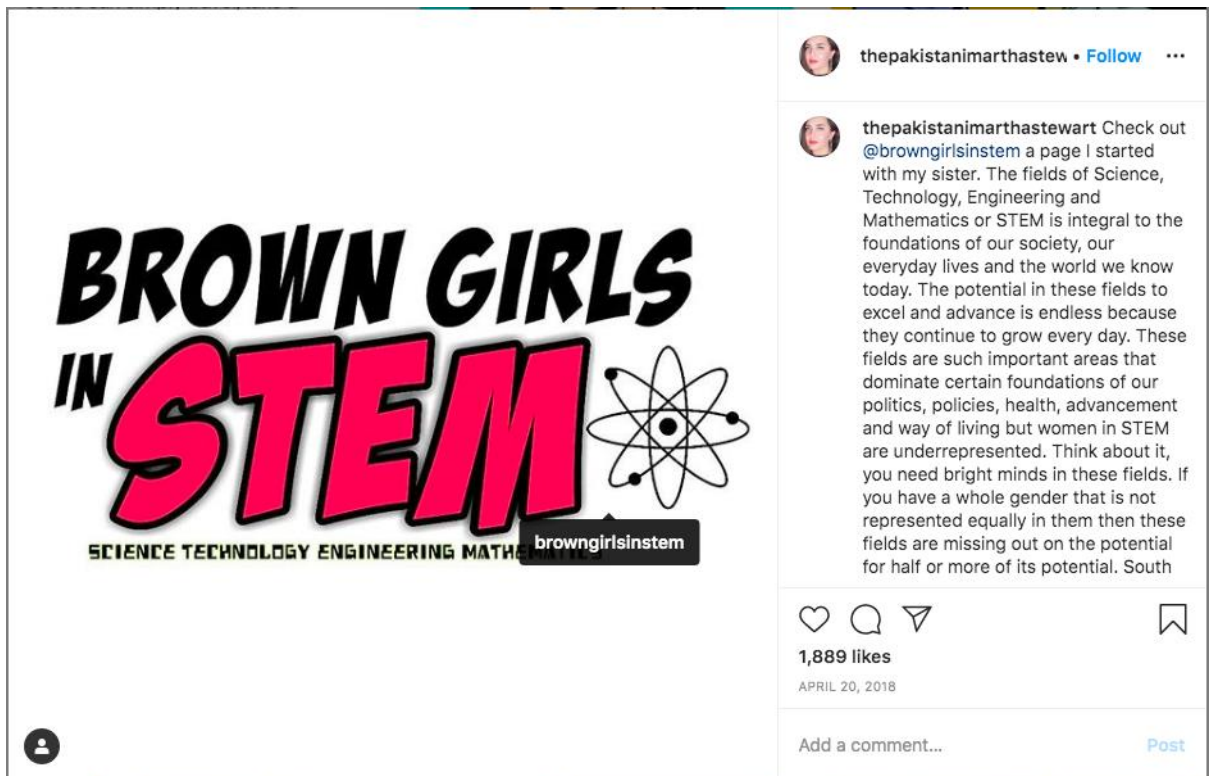


Fig. 4.12

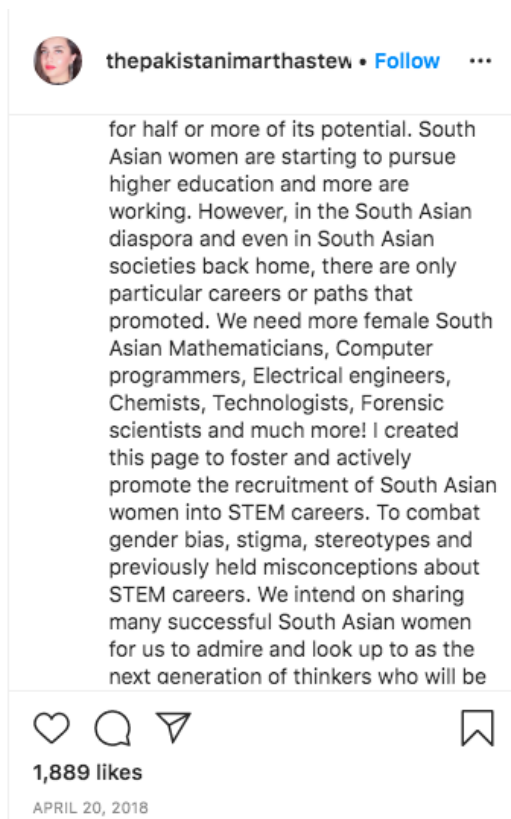


Fig. 4.13

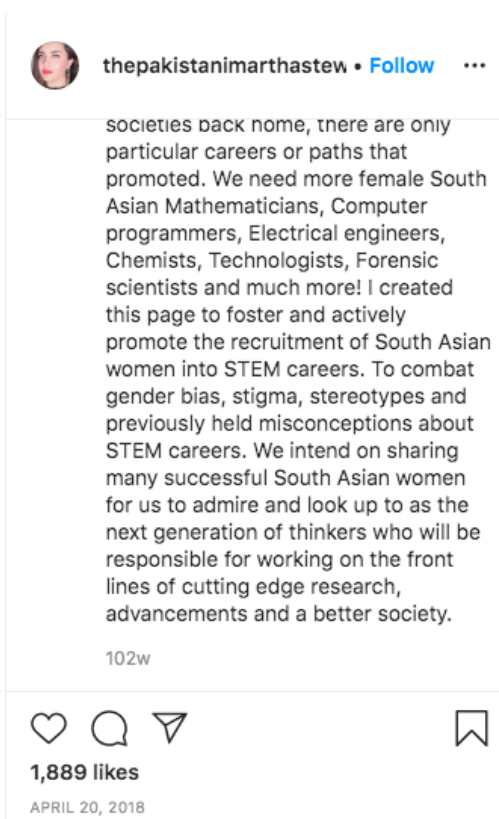


Fig. 4.14

4.4 Similarities and Differences

The overlap of all of the case studies is that they focus on South-Asian women and make them the center of attention on their pages, they create a bilingual atmosphere on their pages by using multiple languages, and they all partake in activist discussion surrounding various cultural topics, such as gender, education, and politics. However, all of the case studies refer to South-Asian women in their own manner. First, they all use different names to call South-Asian women as a group for example. Brown Girl Gang and The Pakistani Martha Stewart more often use the adjective “Brown” and Hatecopy uses “desi”. Brown refers to the brown skin South-Asians have and desi translates to indigenous or native from Hindi. Second, The Pakistani Martha Stewart from the three is the most active and overt about the business side of her page because she heavily promotes her own products on her page, either through reposting others' photos or her own photos. Hatecopy is the most involved with activism because she actively and insistently calls out to her followers to perform actions that will lead to social change. Brown Girl Gang sits in between the two aforementioned. Finally, all of these accounts are activists in the sense that they try to create social change within their own communities, but all have a different and overlapping way of doing it. A discovery I found during the analysis was that Brown Girl Gang and Hatecopy

both also focused on LGBTQIA+ problems, while The Pakistani Martha Stewart did not. Brown Girl Gang and Hatecopy both made posts dedication to Pride month and the celebration of LGBTQIA+ marriage as can be seen in fig. 4.4. Hatecopy openly invites her followers to come to visit her at her galleries and partake in her events, which solidifies a more personal relationship with her and her online community. Brown Girl Gang and The Pakistani Martha Stewart are less inclined to do so. They share their personal stories and the stories of others, but not to the extent where their relationship with their followers could be seen as a personal social relationship (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007).

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the six selective codes overlap and were placed into two groups: one that focuses on business and the relationship with followers and the other that attends to the discussion of the position of South-Asian diaspora women in society. The first group of selective codes: A bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women, Cooperating with commercial enterprises to enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact, Using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-platform operated business, came to be because all of the case studies promoted brands in flattering manners, which is a promotion (Ginsberg, 2015). What overlapped as well was the engagement all of them showed with their followers about them asking them questions and for the followers to answer in the comments, to take a poll through Instagram story, and to participate in hosted events if they were able to. The second group of selective codes: The critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multicultural society, Creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels, and the final theme, Normalizing the voices of South-Asians. All of these selective codes indicate that the case studies agree that the South-Asian diaspora women are marginalized and a group that must be pushed more to the foreground to have representation and their voices heard.

The Pakistani Martha Stewart does this by representing South-Asian women in STEM fields and Hatecopy by encouraging her followers to vote and make a difference. Brown Girl Gang does this as well by supporting South-Asian diaspora women and giving them a virtual voice through their account on Instagram, which is also a uniqueness of the account. Nonetheless, between each of the selective codes, another overlap was found, for example in the way the case studies portrayed women. In Appendix I, II, and III this is reflected in the axial codes more clearly as “portrayal of South-Asian women”, “portrayal of characters in artwork and comics”, and “portrayal of characters in comics”. Since Brown Girl Gang,

Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart all center their work primarily surrounding South-Asian women, they are the group that is the most represented in their work. They did that by displaying these women with long dark brown or black hair, brown skin (although this varied from light to dark), and whilst wearing traditional South-Asian clothing and jewelry.

Moreover, previous studies such as Easthope (1998) with the introduction of hybrid culture and third space and Bhatia and Ram (2004) have shown how of how third space operates in South-Asian culture. However, with this study, and my data, I have added a modern extra layer of it with social media. Couldry (2020) also mentioned that certain cultural studies should perhaps be reinvented to adapt to today's socio-cultural and political climate. Hybrid culture, but then on social media and how that manifests differently from the offline. How being on Instagram has grown the reachability with an audience and increased the interactivity within the (online) community from different places across the world.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this chapter, a conclusion is provided to finalize this study and answer the research question. This chapter is divided into four sections, which are the theoretical implications of the analysis, social relevance, limitations, and future research implications. Thus to come back to the research question: How is Instagram used as a tool for digital activism and monetization by women of the South-Asian diaspora? The results have shown that digital activism and monetization go hand in hand in all of the case studies, however, there are separate levels. They are not the same but are similar because Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart all offer products that comprise out of third space elements and are specifically targeted towards South-Asians. It takes cultural and linguistic knowledge to understand and interpret their posts and to see the humor in them because otherwise the meaning might be lost. They have garnered authenticity and followers through creating this type of user-generated content, whether this consisted of their own or using it from others. Thus by letting their voices be heard and giving others within their community to let their voices be heard as well, they partake in digital activism. This was done through additional accounts, such as @humansofbgg or @browngirlsinstem, but also the advice column Hatecopy put out with the hashtag digital didi. They use their platform to aid.

All in all, I have a sense that the activism of these accounts does have an impact. They are paving the way for women like them because they saw the problems within the South-Asian community and decided to vocalize these issues on Instagram, which was the start. When this vocalization started garnering attention and others from the same community or a similar culture started to interact with the case studies based on this. Awareness was already instigated and it opened a discussion and a consensus for change, as is seen amongst all of the accounts. How these accounts have an impact is that they offer events to network and to teach to other South-Asian diaspora women, so that they can develop themselves further because they might not have the resources. Therefore, they as social media influencers position themselves as helpers or educators and promoters. Whether they view as Instagram as third space where they can merge their hybrid culture is inconclusive. That is how the case studies use their Instagram accounts, but how conscious they are of it could not be measured.

Now when it comes to monetization as their posts all of the case studies offered products that reflected their own content. From hairpins in Punjabi to a box with products made by South-Asian women for South-Asian women to art prints. For Brown Girl Gang the stories of others are more at the front rather than making revenue. However, when discussing The Pakistani Martha Stewart and Hatecopy, they are more about the business side of their

activism. For Hatecopy her art is the central point in the monetization of her account. As with The Pakistani Martha Stewart, it is more separate products that she manufactures and sells that are popular. Therefore, Instagram is used as a build-up platform by South-Asian diaspora women to gain an audience through the creation of representation and letting their voices be vocalized. This in return leads to popularity and perhaps demand of followers to create products, because they are all interactive accounts that ask their followers questions and call them to action as well.

Thus to come back to Instagram as a platform since in the research questions it is framed as a tool of activism. There can be concluded that Instagram is used as a platform for activism by Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart. Instagram is offering the possibility of expression because it is a social media platform that is focused on visuals and visual narratives of people. These narratives include personal touches from sharing prosperous moments as well as negative moments. Showing honesty on social media has led to social media influencers to be seen as trustworthy and relatable as if it were a friend. This social media relationship on Instagram is made convenient and easy to keep by engaging with people on the app, which also increases popularity. Engagement can be done in the form of liking, commenting, and sharing posts, but also creating Instagram stories and longer videos as well as sending private messages between users. All of these engagement forms allow different forms of content to take shape on Instagram targeting various audiences, ranging from low attention to high attention and in-depth knowledge to quick facts. There simply is not another exact social media platform such as Instagram that offers all the same.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Each chapter of this thesis was another build-up layer to understand how digital activism and monetization of digital activism work on Instagram. The activism found in the accounts of Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart is focused on small social changes in the daily lives of South-Asian diaspora women. The central theory of this thesis is hybrid culture because without the notion of third space it would have extremely difficult to pinpoint what made these posts different from a regular Instagram post. Nonetheless, this research added an online setting to third space, specifically with social media. Hybrid culture was developed as a post-colonial theory by Homi Bhabha (Easthope, 1998). Since this theory was created before social media this study added the online aspect. As for commodity activism as a theory was shown through hybrid culture because the case

studies made a profit of selling their third space culture and promoting that on their respective Instagram accounts.

The theoretical aspects from previous works that were confirmed by the findings from the analysis were the concept of voices by Couldry (2020) as well as the marginalization of South-Asian women (Ludhra & Chappell, 2011). There was an emphasis on lost or silenced voices of South-Asian diaspora women and through Instagram, there seems to be a platform where they can connect with others who live in similar situations. However, a new finding from the results showcases a turn of events in the portrayal of South-Asian women. Throughout the posts of Brown Girl Gang, Hatecopy, and The Pakistani Martha Stewart, they were not shown as victims but as strong and independent women who speak up or at least try to. Therefore, the results indicated different portrayals and not a permanent victim role, which was amplified by celebrating all of the career accomplishments South-Asian women have managed and encouraging them to do more.

5.2 Social Relevance

Through this research, I wanted to do the same that each of the women does in these case studies, give a voice. A voice towards the gender roles and expectations South-Asian diaspora women are faced. As well as how they cope with those problems on Instagram and create communities online. As mentioned before, these communities are a safe space for South-Asians that they may not have in real life with their own family or community. Therefore, it is socially relevant to study these online spaces to become aware of the problems South-Asian women face that they are not able to vocalize. Studies such as these create representation and more awareness and thus they are socially relevant in an academic field also.

5.3 Limitations

The limitations of this research were that only a content analysis has been conducted. If it were, for example, combined with interviews from the prospective account owners a more well-rounded analysis could be made from different perspectives. A more concrete answer could be given on if the case studies use Instagram purposefully as a third space, for example, through a dialogue. This would allow the data of this study to be more rich and specific, which hopefully would have let to more precise conclusions instead of open interpretations. One of the other limitations of this study is that it takes South-Asian culture and heritage as a whole and creates some generalizations because it is such a large geographical location with

many different ethnicities, cultures, and languages that were not necessarily spoken for in this research. South-Asia is a large geographical region that in most studies is grouped together instead of individual ethnic groups. Therefore, I also adhered to that name, but a specification of the regions exactly would determine a more realistic image regarding South-Asian culture for example. This in itself would also work better if the methodology also consisted out of interviews because then the specific cultural impacts could have been asked about to the interviewees.

5.4 Future Research

For further research more Instagram accounts can be added to have a larger sample to uncover more themes. More research could be done towards why these women navigate towards Instagram and what they prefer about the platform. Another inclination for future implications is that a study could focus on this topic but other media platforms. On Facebook, for example, there are multiple private and public groups dedicated to South-Asians, such as Subtle Curry Traits or Subtle Curry Food. These groups range from traveling, cooking, memes, and many more subjects. They also vary in populations because in some of them anyone can access and in others, it is women's only or South-Asian women's only. Therefore, they would provide interesting insights into the differences between Instagram and Facebook.

Hybrid culture could also be researched more with other cultures, such as East-Asian, Latin-American, Caribbean or African culture. Since migration patterns differ there also does not have to be a comparison with Western culture. For example, South-Asians immigrated not only to the United States of America, Canada, and Australia, but also to the Caribbean and to East-Asia, therefore it would be interesting to research those cultural differences and overlap to see how it differs within media. How much does third space take shape in these settings? Do social media influencers also partake in activism on their accounts there? Consequently, because of the post-colonial take of hybrid culture it would be intriguing to research this concept in different socio-cultural studies as well as researching this with gender theory in mind.

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Appendix Codebook

I. Brown Girl Gang

Selective Code	Axial code	Open Code
<p>A bottom-up interactive relationship with followers to showcase the daily lives of South-Asian women</p> <p>A bottom-up interactive relationship with followers</p>	<p>Portrayal of South-Asian women</p>	Brown girls
		Long hair
		Dark hair
		Bangles
		Bindi
		Ethnic wear
	<p>Creating an inclusive and diverse narrative to posts</p>	Different shade color emoji
		Social change
		Colorism
		Exploring identity
		Every day stories
	<p>The involvement of the target audience into BGG's content</p>	Social media influencers
		Young people
		Representation
		Globalized society
		Credit
	<p>Awareness towards South-Asian diaspora women and Their career achievements (as role models)</p>	Girlboss
		Creating representation
		Voices
		Accomplishments
Inspiration		
Empowering		
Uplifting woc		
South-Asian brands		
Magazine cover		
Organization mention		
<p>Creating a safe space for South-Asian women in all societal levels</p>	<p>Intersectional equality</p>	Breaking stereotypes
		Call to action
		Feminism
		LGBTQIA+ rights
		Equal pay
	<p>The multicultural merge of using humor in art as a manner to display the social issues that South-Asian diaspora women face and combat</p> <p>Portrayal of South-Asian women</p>	Cultural identities
		South-Asian communities
		Gender bias
		Patriarchy
		Sexism
		Cultural boundaries
		Hybrid culture
		Meme reference
		Pop culture reference
		Media reference
Carbi B		
Lizzy McGuire		
Shezan mango juice		
Collaboration		
Tweet		

II. Hatecopy

Selective Code	Axial code	Open Code
Normalizing the voices of South-Asians	Portrayal of characters in artwork and comics	Ethnic wear
		Dark hair
		Earrings
		Nose ring
		Red lips
		Septum piercing
		Tikka
		Bindi
		Bangles
		No bindi
	Tears	
	Globalized culture from an South-Asian female perspective	Hybrid culture
		Bollywood
		Pokémon Go
		Credit
		Magazine
		Celebrity
		Social media influencers
		South-Asian influencers
		Pop culture reference
Meme reference		
Cooperating with commercial enterprises in order to enlarge the art platform influence to be able to have a larger impact Normalizing the voices of South-Asians	Display of repertoire and how fans can contribute	Product
		Promo
		Advertisement
		South-Asian brands
		Bombay Sapphire
		Canada
		Organization mention
		Collaboration
	Fight against injustice regardless of social ethnic or financial background Portrayal of characters in artwork and comics	Social change
		Criticism
		Revolution
		Political figure
		Human rights
		Indigenous rights
		Equal pay
		Xenophobia
		Activist
		Desi girl problems
		South-Asian community
		Patriarchy
Art		
Expectations		
LGBTQIA+ rights		
Female oppression		
Feminism		
Gender roles		
Call to action		
Instructions		

III. The Pakistani Martha Stewart

Selective Code	Axial code	Open Code
The critique of South-Asian diaspora women on their position in society based on living in a multi-cultural society	Portrayal of characters in comics	Brown girls
		Dark hair
		Earrings
		Different skin tones
		Ethnic wear
		Tikka
	Cultural issues and taboos	Brown girl problems
		Abuse
		Female emancipation
		Gender roles
		South-Asian community
		Brown parents
		Family oriented
		Expectations
		Surveillance
		Whatsapp
		South-Asian culture
		Cultural identity
		Gender bias
		Stereotypes
	Divorce	
	Social change	
	Pros and cons regarding globalized culture	Hybrid culture
		Ariana Grande
		Bollywood
		Colorism
		Agency
Call to action		
Globalism		
Cultural appropriation		
Cultural accessory		
Political change		
Using Instagram fame build on activism within the problems of the South-Asian culture to launch a multi-Platform operated business	Post topic and audience	Credit
		Tweet
		Critique
		Diaspora
		Social media influencers
		Equality
	Establishment of brand and referrals to services Portrayal of characters in comics	Product
		Promo
		Link
		Discount
		Redbubble
		Etsy
		Insta story
		Instagram
		Tweet
		Announcements
		Event
Brown girls in STEM		