

Media Framing on Hijab in the Western Media and Societal Challenges for Muslim Women: A Public Policy Discourse

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Abstract: This study looks into the media framing of the Hijab (Muslim headscarf) in Western media and its significant effects on Muslim women living in Western societies. The hijab has received a lot of discussion and attention in Western media. This study thoroughly analyzes academic literature, media sources, and empirical studies to show how Western media portray the hijab. It also examines the social issues Muslim women confront due to these media framings. The analysis demonstrates the intricate interaction of Western media's frames to discuss the hijab. Negative framing frequently reinforces stereotypes by painting Muslim women who wear the hijab as oppressed, subservient, and with potential security risks. Some media outlets unintentionally encourage Islamophobia by linking the hijab to extremism. A positive frame recognizes the hijab as a sign of empowerment and religious freedom. These media framings present significant and varied socioeconomic challenges. Muslim women who wear the hijab face stigmatization, discrimination, and career difficulties; many also experience verbal and physical harassment due to the hostile environment fostered by inaccurate media portrayals. Additionally, repeated criticism of one's looks and identity can significantly negatively impact one's self-esteem and sense of self, frequently leading to alienation and internal turmoil. These issues are made more difficult by the media's scant exposure of varied voices and viewpoints, reinforcing stereotypes and muting the voices of Muslim women who wear the hijab. This study emphasizes the significance of media accountability and ethical reporting. The media must fairly and objectively cover the hijab without sensationalism or unfavorable preconceptions. Supporting varied viewpoints and views in the media can help give a more accurate representation of Muslim women's experiences and promote inclusion and tolerance in Western society. Muslim women must be empowered to share their stories and experiences to challenge and reshape prevalent preconceptions and misconceptions regarding the hijab. The study recommends a deliberate effort to advance openness, tolerance, and understanding in Western society while also recognizing the autonomy and variety of Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab.

Keywords: Media, Hijab, Muslim, Women, West, Societal, Challenges, Public Policy

Introduction

The hijab, a conventional headscarf worn in adherence to Islamic customs, has been a subject of intense controversy and extensive discourse within the Western media sphere. Over time, Western media establishments have assumed a crucial role in influencing the general public's collective understanding, attitudes, and actions about Muslim women who don the hijab. The representation of the hijab in media exhibits considerable variation, spanning a range of storylines that have the potential to either empower or marginalize Muslim women (Dastgeer & Gade, 2016). This research study examines the complex dynamics of media framing of the hijab in Western media. It investigates the significant societal obstacles Muslim women encounter due to this framing.

The hijab is a garment of significant cultural, religious, and personal importance for the numerous Muslim women who opt to don it. It is not simply a textile material but a representation of one's personal and cultural identity, religious beliefs, and individual preferences (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). Nevertheless, within Western media, the hijab frequently encounters a tendency towards simplifying and reductionism. It takes on symbolic meaning as it is put through various interpretive frameworks, emphasizing both positive and negative qualities and occasionally oversimplifying it into a single stereotype (Islam, 2019).

The hijab is often negatively portrayed in Western media, perpetuating stereotypes that depict Muslim women as repressed, submissive, and devoid of agency. This framing frequently fails to acknowledge Muslim women's varied experiences and choices, perpetuating Islamophobia (Samie & Toffoletti, 2018). Media outlets have occasionally depicted the hijab as a means of male subjugation, neglecting to recognize that numerous Muslim women do it as a manifestation of their religious piety and individuality (Tan, 2023).

On the contrary, the favorable portrayal of the hijab emphasizes its significance as a representation of empowerment and autonomy for Muslim women. This perspective places significant emphasis on the agency and independence of individuals who wear the hijab, acknowledging their entitlement to express their religious views publicly. Specific media platforms have lauded Muslim women who wear the hijab as pioneers in diverse domains, effectively challenging preconceived notions and dismantling societal obstacles (Pennington, 2018).

Neutral framing recognizes the hijab as a dual representation of fashion and cultural identity, portraying it as a voluntary decision by Muslim women for several purposes, such as religious commitment, artistic legacy, and individual self-expression (Rahman, 2018).

These divergent frameworks influence how the general public perceives Muslim women and have tangible implications in the real world. The primary objective of this research study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the media's portrayal of the hijab in Western media and to investigate the various societal difficulties encountered by Muslim women due to this portrayal. This research aims to enhance the level of discourse in Western countries by providing a comprehensive analysis of the intricate aspects of this multifaceted topic. Its objective is to promote a greater understanding, empathy, and inclusivity while also pushing for media reporting that is both responsible and ethical.

Explication of the subject matter

The present study employs framing theory as a suitable theoretical framework. Gregory Bateson put forth the initial proposition of this concept in the year 1972 (Bateson, 1972). Psychological frames refer to the spatial and temporal boundaries that encompass a collection of interactive messages (Bhavnani, 1991). These frames serve as a means of meta-communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Framing refers to the cognitive process of interpreting news items and narrative material by placing them inside familiar contextual frameworks (De Vreese, 2005). The agenda-setting tradition closely connects to this concept. However, it diverges by emphasizing the fundamental aspects of the matters under consideration rather than specific themes (Borah, 2011). The underlying principle of framing theory posits that the media selectively directs its attention toward particular events and individuals, thus imbuing them with significance (Drake & Donohue, 1996).

Moreover, the idea posits that how issues are presented to the audience, referred to as "the frame," influences their decision-making and subsequent information processing. Frames are conceptual tools that structure or construct the significance of the communication (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The frames most frequently employed are those about the notions featured in daily news presented by the media. The idea elucidates how the media constructs frames by giving news items accompanied by pre-established and limited contextualization.

Additionally, they can be formulated as expedient means to establish connections between individual narratives and the broader context. Framing theory is a significant component of scholarly research in social science. Previous research has contributed significantly to the extensive body of literature on framing, specifically in the context of media framing (Drake & Donohue, 1996). News dissemination greatly influences individuals' daily lives, as exposure to bulletins on television, radio broadcasts, newspaper articles, or online platforms often sparks their curiosity and prompts them to seek further information on specific subjects covered in the news. News makers intensifies their curiosity about the prominence of a particular news article. As they engage in further reading, they deepen their understanding of the subject matter or heighten their interest in seeking additional information (Borah, 2011). Individuals' responses to news articles in the media vary according to the specific agenda a given frame presents to its readers. Hence, it is indisputable that the framing theory is the most suitable theoretical framework to inform the present study, which aims to investigate the depiction and representation of Muslim women in Western media's coverage of their news narratives (Drake & Donohue, 1996).

Exploitation of Muslim Women image by west media

Following 9/11, Muslim women have been subjected to a systematic process of marginalization by the mainstream Western media. The efficacy of this intervention has proven to be contrary to initial expectations, causing surprise and confusion among Western authorities and leading to the marginalization of Muslim women within their respective societies (Piela, 2021).

The portrayal of Muslims in Western media outlets varies based on the chosen framing, which serves diverse purposes. Western perspectives often portray women as housewives, sexual objects, and even terrorists. In contrast, society often depicts men as wealthy billionaires, suicide bombers, abusive husbands, terrorists, fathers, Etc. The coverage of the western media outlets notably rose in the use of derogatory labels, such as "extremists" and "radicalisms," to refer to Muslims in general over 12 years

after 9/11. The news media demonstrated a lack of attention to religious freedom (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018). They began portraying Muslim women who wore veils as terrorists, particularly following the 9/11 incident in the United States between 2001 and 2005. The prevalence of potent visual representations in contemporary media regarding Muslim women's resistance to accepting the Muslim veil dress is not recent. However, it has deep roots in previous media depictions of Muslims as terrorists. This phenomenon leads contemporary media practitioners to perceive that women consistently conceal explosives behind their veils or niqabs, mainly due to their reluctance to remove these garments in public settings (Racman & Hadji, 2022).

One could argue that portraying Muslims as terrorists in the media has influenced the United States' perception of Muslims, leading to military interventions in various Middle Eastern and Arab nations. People believe this intervention attempts to mitigate the radicalization of issues within these Muslim countries. Hence, given the prevailing narrative propagated by the Western media, it is imperative to raise awareness among Muslims, particularly women, about the need to avoid succumbing to feelings of inferiority. It is crucial to recognize that the portrayal of these concerns often perpetuates the victimization of individuals due to Islamophobia (Piela, 2017).

Societal Challenges faced by Hijabi Women in the West.

In the Western media, a distinct period exists during which the phenomenon of "Islamophobia," characterized by apprehension towards all practicing Muslims due to the violent actions of an exceedingly small faction, becomes evident in the media. People can anticipate this phenomenon as it occurred following the events of September 11, 2001 (Kiwauka, Parker, & Ben Shitrit, 2023). When examining news articles published by prominent media outlets such as Time, Newsweek, CNN, ABC, Fox, and CBS, about the September 11 attacks within a one-year timeframe, it becomes evident that a significant proportion of these articles addressed, to varying extents, the issue of gender-based discrimination against women in the Middle East. Several headlines, such as "Free to Choose," "Unveiling Freedom," and "Unveiled Threat," were observed, indicating a common theme in the stories regarding the revelation of the concealed hardships endured by Muslim women (Herbert & Hansen, 2018). The pieces possessed an aura of legitimacy and trustworthiness by their presentation as exposés, purporting to unveil concealed information and serve as a veritable wellspring of veracity for American individuals seeking elucidation during a period of great adversity. Individuals consistently derive satisfaction from receiving reassurance regarding their perceptions and convictions. These pieces effortlessly catered to reinforcing preexisting biases prevalent among a significant portion of the American populace. However, the United States cannot be solely held accountable for the situation (Elhadi, 2023).

The portrayal of Islam in a negative light aligns effectively with the geopolitical objectives of the Western world, particularly about the acquisition of armaments and oil resources. In Western societies, there appears to be a tendency to depict Muslim women in a consistently unfavorable light. The same extremist organization actively committed to undermining values cherished by liberal Western society portrays these women as victims. The Western media actively pursues increased viewership, financial gains, and favorable ratings through various means. Frequently, companies incorporate a specific perspective and strategically present a narrative about Muslims and Islam to captivate consumers and ensure the sustainability of their enterprise (Hasanah, 2021).

When examining the experiences of Muslim women, this particular perspective frequently depicts them as individuals who suffer from acts of violence or sexism, primarily perpetrated by men within their cultural context who exhibit anger and misogyny. The media's preoccupation with depicting Muslim women as a marginalized collective is evident via their recent increased coverage of honor killings and violence. The two honor killings in the Netherlands in 2002 and 2003 garnered media attention. Prominent figures such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali played a crucial role in amplifying the discourse surrounding these incidents. Hirsi Ali, a prominent advocate for women's rights and the reformation of Islam expressed in an interview a familiar understanding of the matter at hand (Rahman, 2020).

Honor killing is an integral aspect of a broader phenomenon. The topic pertains to examining sexual morality within Islam, explicitly focusing on the inclination to regulate and exert authority over women's sexual autonomy. A prevailing culture places a significant emphasis on maintaining one's virginity. A woman who fails to adhere to societal norms may face consequences such as expulsion, physical assault, or even homicide. In the context of comparative analysis, it is noteworthy that approximately one-third of women in European countries experience sexual assault (Hirji, 2021).

Similarly, in the United States, the prevalence of sexual assault among women is approximately one in five. Curiously, the media demonstrates no effort to justify or explain these acts of violence, refraining from attributing religion as a primary source of blame or rationale (Amores, Arcila-Calderón, & González-de-Garay, 2020). The Western media tends to exploit women as a vulnerable demographic, strategically using the sympathetic response from such portrayals to attract a more extensive consumer base. The media can create a significantly more pessimistic image than the actual state of affairs by deliberately constructing narratives and scenarios centered around specific Muslim women (Warren, 2019).

The inherent importance of cultivating awareness and considering future generations – ending remarks

Understanding media prejudice concerning Muslim women is of utmost importance for several reasons. The crux lies in acquiring and utilizing knowledge to alter the discourse. Nevertheless, a spontaneous occurrence of a change in conversation is unlikely. When examining a historical movement, a transformation in mainstream Western culture will likely occur throughout several generations. Commencing this project is of utmost importance due to its long-term nature. To facilitate the feasibility of this endeavor, it is imperative to precisely ascertain the underlying cause of the matter. The fundamental reason for this is a pronounced media bias that capitalizes on the fear ingrained in the American and European populace, resulting in the subsequent proliferation of sensationalism.

The absence of proactive engagement exhibited by consumers of mass media in critically evaluating the information they receive contributes to the perpetuation of the existing system. The persistence of this system in dominating the media will persist until American and European societies engage in critical analysis and interrogation of the information they encounter. In light of the prevailing circumstances, it is imperative for individuals from both American and European societies to actively engage in the implementation of the principles they frequently advocate. The United States prides itself on its commitment to equality.

Nevertheless, it consistently perpetuates a systematic portrayal of a particular minority as inferior or

"other" in the broader community. Europe, a continent including more than fifty nations, takes great satisfaction in its remarkable diversity across all contexts.

Therefore, it is pertinent to question why Muslim women should be considered an exception. Through education, individuals enhance their capacity to discern between factual information and sensationalized content. By acquiring this capability, we can disseminate our knowledge to subsequent cohorts. This chance holds significant value as it initiates genuine societal transformation. This transformation will facilitate a heightened comprehension of our magnificent planet's diversity. Consequently, the forthcoming generation will be allowed to mature within an inclusive and receptive milieu.

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