



Exploring The Construct Of Muslim Women's Identities On Social Media

A two-minute video on YouTube has had a profound effect on a young researcher's career.

In 2014, a video titled Somewhere in America #MIPSTERZ, featured young Muslim women in major American cities like New York, Los Angeles and Boston. Set to music by Jay-Z, the women are dressed in modern clothing, high-heeled shoes and veils.

Seen dancing, skate boarding and socializing, it demonstrates a fusion of North American trends while honouring Muslim culture and customs.

The video sparked so much online discussion and interaction that in early 2015, Sumayya Daghar, a recent graduate of Sheridan's Project Management Program, and Business Professor Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, decided to examine using social media as an alternative way for Muslim women to express themselves.

"Our purpose is to explore how Muslim women construct their identities on social media, and challenge or resist stereotypes," said Golnaz, who has been exploring this topic for several years. "We were both drawn to this phenomena because of our interest in Muslim women and their status in North American society."

Together, the pair collected, reviewed and analyzed over 2,000 YouTube comments, tweets and related media articles that discussed the video as well as community reaction. Once archived, the pair undertook "critical discourse analysis," identifying themes and trends.

Their work was so unique, they were asked to present their preliminary findings at the International Conference in Critical Management Studies in Leicester, UK. "I was so surprised at the interest," said Sumayya. "Not just because of the topic, but also because of the methodology that we took in terms of dissecting social media and looking at critical discourse analysis."

Golnaz was impressed with how Sumayya handled presenting to an international audience of seasoned scholars, stating, “To hold her own within this community is no small feat.”

Their presentation has since led to an invitation to publish their research in a book and they plan to submit their work to a peer-reviewed journal – more feathers in the cap of Sumayya’s research career. Outside of academia, Sumayya and Golnaz also believe the impact of their research could extend to workplaces.



“We could use our research to help institutions and organizations with their diversity training and inclusion programs,” -Sumayya Daghar, Researcher and Pilon School of Business Graduate

Golnaz believes their work could also be applied to human resources practices to help improve recruitment, and retention, as well as enhance anti-discrimination programs and racism training.

This experience has been so enriching, Sumayya is considering graduate school to pursue further studies in policy management and continue similar research projects. Golnaz believes she’s more than ready.

“Sumayya has the depth, sophistication, and innovative thinking that places her at the caliber of a Master’s and even doctorate-level student,” said Golnaz. “This research experience has opened up new channels for her to pursue her passion, further build her ideas, and disseminate her work and network with international scholars.”

“What was really innovative is that Sheridan Undergraduate Research funded our attendance at the conference,” said Sumayya. “It’s genuine, it’s new, it’s exciting and it’s grassroots...that’s why people are interested in it.”

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