SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE CULTIVATION OF

AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS ARABS

AND MUSLIMS

By

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Abstract: The west has perceived Arabs and Muslims through the stereotypes they are associated with in the media, such as news broadcasts, print media, films, or TV shows. With the emergence of social media, these stereotypes followed Arabs and Muslims to the Internet. Most of the existing literature focused on studying the cultivation of Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims based on traditional media rather than social media. So, this research incorporated social media upon studying the cultivation effect of media by studying the perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and Muslims on social media, using the Perceived Realism Scale, and their effect on how participants perceive Arabs and Muslims. Unlike most existing literature, the results of the research generally showed a favorable perception towards Arabs and Muslims, lacking a strong correlation between the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims and Americans' perceptions towards them. The results also showed that interpersonal communication plays a role in the formation of perceptions towards Muslims. The results also emphasized that upon studying the cultivation effect of different media platforms, other factors, like interpersonal communication, affect perceptions. Future research can study why social media may or may not affect perceptions by researching trust level, the use of various social media platforms, and social media content related to Arabs and Muslims.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For decades now, Arabs and Muslims are being misrepresented in Western media. This misrepresentation includes portraying Arabs and Muslims as terrorists (El-Farra, 1996, Martin, 1985, Said, 1978, & Shaheen, 2003). As a result of these misrepresentations and portrayals, the perceptions of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims were affected (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Consequently, these perceptions lead to the highlight of cultural awareness in social media. Nalloor and Scott (2016) investigated in their research the role of social media and whether it enforces or limits the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims.

There are three main areas that Americans may have observed upon constructing their perceptions of Arabs: media representations, interpersonal communication, and media content (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Said (1978) argued that the media, as in television, newspapers, magazines, and radio, is not ultimately free and unplanned since there are rules that shape how reality and the message are transferred. Said (1997) also argued that his defense of Islam in the West doesn't mean that he agrees with the malpractice of Islam in some societies, which is reflected in oppression and the violation

of personal freedom. For instance, the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, along with following planned terrorist attacks that were stopped before happening, supported the claims made against Arabs and Islam (Powell, 2011). According to Shmid (1983), terrorism is an anxiety that causes violent action done on an individual or a group for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons targeting random or selected populations to communicate a message of terror, intimidation, coercion, propaganda, or request demands.

In his book, Said (1997) differentiated between real Islam and Islam as known by the West. He elaborated that the world of Islam is not as simple as it sounds; it spreads in Africa and Asia and includes over 800 million people from different histories, geographies, cultures, and societies. An Arab or Muslim individual doesn't represent the whole community. Yet, when referring to Arabs, the media portrays them as one group of people from the Middle East rather than recognizing them as individuals from different countries with different cultures, religions, and beliefs (El-Farra, 1995). As a result, Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) argued that the negative perception of Arabs resulted in the clash of civilizations between Arabs and Americans.

A lot of research has been done regarding the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. media. Researchers studied how Arabs and Muslims were portrayed in the news, films, TV series, and other media (El-Farra, 1996, Martin, 1985, Said, 1978, Shaheen, 2003, and Merskin 2004). Researchers also studied how certain events, like the terrorist attack on September 11, impacted the media which in turn impacted the Americans' perception of Arabs and Muslims (Powell, 2011 & Merskin, 2004). Other researchers studied how Americans form their perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims (Nalloor & Scott, 2016,

Chamieh, 2015, and Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). With the emergence of new media and social media platforms, traditional news resources have changed. Statistics prove that millennials now use social media to get their news, unlike older people who still watch TV to get their news. Only 15% of American adults between the age of 18 and 29 watch news on TV (Barthel, Grieco, & Shearer, 2019). People with some college education or a college degree watch less TV than people who have a high school degree (Barthel, Grieco, & Shearer, 2019). However, when it comes to reading the news, people now prefer reading online rather than reading newspapers (Mitchell, 2018). Despite the increase in internet penetration rate in the Arab world, social media's power to promote the Arab culture in traditional media platforms in the West is inadequate (Nalloor & Scott, 2016). But, many studies address the issue of misrepresented Arabs and Muslims in U.S. media and its effect on the Americans' perception without providing tangible elements to overcome this stereotype. A study done by Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) argued the absence of personal experience proves that the media has a powerful impact on shaping Americans' perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims. Nalloor and Scott (2016) argued that social media plays a role in enforcing preconceptions. However, there is little information regarding the role of social media in shaping or altering the perception of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims.

The importance of this research lies in studying whether there is a relationship between social media and the formation of Americans' perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims. The proposed research would enable researchers to identify and understand Americans' perceptions of social media representations of Arabs and Muslims in relation to their perceptions of the characteristics of Arabs and Muslims. By understanding the reasons

behind their perception, researchers will be able to identify and list the factors and sources that Americans are subjected to upon forming their perceptions. Researchers and people in the communication field can then utilize and plan social media strategies to help establish a rational perception of Arabs and Muslims if the traditional media platforms continue with the stereotyped representation. The use of social media platforms to objectively address the side effects of stereotyping is essential not only in the mass media and communication field but also in other fields like politics and public diplomacy.

In the following study, the researcher will review relevant literature on the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. media and how this portrayal through cultivation theory shaped the Americans' perceptions towards them. In addition, the researcher will review factors that played a role in stereotyping Arabs and Muslims in U.S. media and the involvement of social media in changing this perception.

The purpose of this survey research study is to test the cultivation effects of U.S. media on the relationship between social media and Americans' perceptions about Arabs and Muslims, controlling for media representation, content, and personal communication for the American community at Oklahoma State University.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many Americans have a distorted perception of Arabs or Muslims based on

misrepresented and stereotyped media portrayals. Stereotyping is the formation of a

biased opinion or perspective of an individual or a group based on the behavior of

another individual or group who may share the same ethnicity, religion, race, or social

group (El-Farra, 1996). There's a positive relationship between the negative media

content and the negative relationship between Americans and Arabs in reality (Melhem &

Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). However, other factors may be studied in order to have a better

understanding of the Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. Melhem and

Punyanunt-Carter (2019) argued that interpersonal communication affects the formation

of perception. In this age, satellite TV, as well as the Internet, provide people with

content produced all over the world (Ahmed, 2017). Stereotyping is a result of the role

that the internet plays in echoing personal views (Manjoo, 2015). Thus, Nalloor and Scott

(2016) investigated in their research whether social media has a role in promoting a more

realistic image of Arab cultures.

Americans construct their perceptions of Arabs and Muslims from media representations

and content as well as interpersonal communication (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). In this study, the researcher looked at current literature discussing factors that led to and influenced the perceptions formed by Americans towards Arabs and Muslims. The researcher studied whether there's a relationship between social media and perceptions. According to Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019), cultivation theory may explain the relationship between exposure to negative portrayals of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of them just as it explained the relationship between exposure to violence in television and perception of the world.

Media representations of Arabs and Muslims

The media, when referring to Arabs, usually refers to individuals who are from the Middle East and mistakenly consider them one group of people, despite that Arabs are individuals from different countries with different cultures, religions, and beliefs (El-Farra, 1996). In his book, Said (1997) differentiated between real Islam and Islam as known by the West. Said (1997) elaborated that the world of Islam is not as simple as it sounds. He added that it spreads in Africa and Asia and includes over 800 million people from different histories, geographies, cultures, and societies (Said, 1997). Although researchers differentiated between Arabs and Muslims (Said, 1997; Shaheen; 2003), other researchers addressed Arabs and Muslims altogether when discussing stereotyping and negative portrayal (El-Aswad, 2013; ElSeewi, 2015; Nurullah, 2010).

Abukahlil (2002) argued that journalists and politicians frame the West and Islam as 2 separate uniform and cohesive groups, disregarding the diversity within these groups. For example, Huntington generalized Arabs and Muslims by referring to them as one group

(Gerges, 1999). Researchers argued that Muslim individuals and Islam as a religion were standardized by Western media (Saeed, 2007). Muslims in the world are not only Arabs; they may be Indonesian, Malaysian, and Indian (Shaheen, 2003). Arabs are not only referred to as one entity and described as being all Muslims, but they are also affiliated with other non-Arab groups since they both belong to the "them" or "other" concept (Merskin, 2004 & El-Farra, 1996). The West and media in the United States mistakenly consider Iranians and Persians as Arabs, thinking that they belong to one Middle Eastern group (El-Farra, 1996).

On another note, Telhami (2015) argued that Americans also have distinct views of Muslim individuals and Islam as a religion. Americans, who have anti-discrimination values, differentiate between Muslim individuals and Islam as a religion since they're more likely to express their dislike towards an idea rather than a person (Telhami, 2015). However, Huntignton (1993) believed that the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations and that the military interactions between both groups will not decline in the future. On the contrary, Telhami (2015) believed that the majority of Americans don't believe there's a clash of civilizations between the West and Islam.

The media presents misleading or falsified information about Arabs the same as it exaggerates the level of violence in the real world (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Said (1978) argued that the media is not ultimately free and unplanned since rules and messages shape how reality is formed. Similarly, 4 decades later, Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) also argued that misrepresentations occur due to the power that media institutions have in serving political agendas. The general American public follows Islamic-related issues, yet there's a lack of American experts on that matter (Said, 1997).

Thus, Nurullah (2010) urged to distinguish between Arabs and Muslims by stating that not all Arabs and/or Muslims are terrorists. Shaheen (2003) argued that the United States is the world's leading media exporter with a high reach of American culture, nationally and internationally, causing the stereotypical image of Arabs to spread. Consequently, almost half of Muslim-Americans said that it's hard for them to live in the United States as Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Role of Media Content in the Formation of Perception

Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) stated that specific media content about Arabs affects the way they are perceived by people. Although there was an increased sympathy by U.S. media towards the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims right after September 11, there was also an increase in hate crimes and bias incidents towards Arabs and Muslims (Alsultany, 2013).

Arabs and Muslims in U.S. News

Terrorism. Martin (1985) stated that when reporting the same acts of violence, Arabs would be described as terrorists while non-Arabs would be described using more neutral and bias-free words. Similarly, in a study conducted by Powell (2011), he concluded that non-Muslim American individuals who committed terrorist acts were labeled as mentally unstable instead of terrorists. The bombing of the Federal Government Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was mentioned in many studies to emphasize how media is prejudice and stereotypical when referring to Arabs and Muslims (El-Farra, 1996, Nurallah, 2010, Shaheen, 2003). Alter (1995) stated that CNN released the names of Arab suspects who turned out to be innocent since the real

attackers were 2 non-Muslim Americans. The act of a non-Muslim American terrorist is often referred to as a lone act while the act of a Muslim terrorist would be referred to as part of a bigger plan targeting the United States (Powell, 2011).

Before and after September 11. Although the negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims have existed since the 1920s as mentioned by Shaheen (2003), Nurullah (2010) and ElSeewi (2015) significantly related the continuing negative portrayal to the post-September 11 era when the twin towers in New York were attacked. Nurallah (2010) believed that this terrorist attack magnified the concept of "us" versus "them" or "U.S." versus "Muslims and Arabs" that Huntignton (1993) emphasized. El-Aswad (2013) similarly argued that September 11 motivated Western media to create negative portrayals of Muslims, yet, it wasn't the cause (Alsultany, 2013; AlSeewi, 2015). In a study done by Powell (2011) analyzing the news coverage of 11 terrorist events in the United States after the 9/11 attacks, the researcher realized that media coverage of terrorism empowers the fear of the Islamic culture. The United States used this incident to justify the war on Iraq to destroy weapons of mass destruction that were not to be found in Iraq (Nurullah, 2010). Norris, Kern, and Just (2003) highlighted how news coverage of terrorism goes hand in hand and reinforces statements of political leaders and government officials to convey the same theme and perception. Telhami (2015) argued that even if September 11 hadn't occurred, the perception of Islam and Muslims wouldn't have been different.

Arabs and Muslims in U.S. Films/Series

Jack Shaheen published a book called Reel Bad Arabs to discuss how Arabs were portrayed in 900 films. According to Shaheen (2003), the reasons behind the stereotyping of Arabs in films include personal political agenda, profit, absence of criticism, and silence on behalf of the Arab community. Shaheen (2003) supported his argument by referring to Adolph Zukor, who was the head of Paramount Pictures after WW1, saying that films act as means of propaganda and are not solely for entertainment purposes. Similarly, McQueeney (2014) argued that the misrepresentations in media messages serve as an instrument to advance political agendas. Shaheen (2003) created a new definition of Arabs based on what was portrayed in films since they were portrayed as "brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women." Besides, in its perception of Arab women, Hollywood portrays them as humiliated, dehumanized, weak, oppressed, and untalented in Western scenarios (Shaheen, 2003; Melhem & Punyanyn-Carter, 2019).

Nurullah (2010) chose another medium to study the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims. In his study, Nurullah (2010), analyzed the series "24," which started airing on Fox Networks two months after the 9/11 attack. Season 4 of the series focused on a character called Habib Marwan, who was a Middle-Eastern Muslim terrorist controlling terrorist cells in the Middle East (Nurullah, 2010). James Woolsey, a former CIA director, believed that the series "24" was "realistic" and that the threats in the scenario depicted reality (Woolsey, 2007). Similarly, when questioned about their intentions behind stereotyping Arabs or Muslims, filmmakers argue that they are inspired by what they watch in the news (Shaheen, 2003). Shaheen (2003) indicated that although the Arab-

American and Muslim-American population are growing in the United States, very few of them discuss breaking the stereotypical image they are linked to.

Role of Interpersonal Communication in the formation of Perception

In a study conducted by the Arab American Institute (2017), statistics showed that 42% of Americans have favorable attitudes towards Arabs, 32% have unfavorable attitudes, 11% are not familiar enough to make a judgment about Arabs and 15% are not sure about their opinion.

Researchers emphasized that personal experience, which is a form of interpersonal communication, can act as a mediator between the messages communicated in the media and the perception in real life (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). In a study conducted by Pew Research Center (2014), the researchers concluded that American individuals who had a link to someone from a religious group viewed that group more positively. Americans who knew Muslims provided a neutral rating towards Muslims while those who didn't know Muslims provided a cooler rating (Pew Research Center, 2014). Similarly, Telhami (2015) argued that Americans who knew Muslims viewed Muslims more favorably, but that didn't affect their favorability of Islam as a religion. El-Aswad (2013) argued that images portrayed about Muslims and Islam from personal contact are different from images portrayed through the media, especially that knowing a Muslim generates favorability towards Muslim individuals and Islam in general.

Role of Social Media in the formation of the perception of Arabs and Muslims

It is a widely held belief that social media at this age is the most common media out of the other media sources (Shami & Ashfaq, 2018). Also, television is the most discussed

topic on social media (Hirshberg, 2014). Bauder (2012) stated that one-third of Americans tweet about television content. The use of social media platforms, however, is not restricted to corporate media since content by individuals can also be shared globally (Nalloor & Scott, 2016). Despite the increased number of social media users in the Arab World and the attempt to objectively present themselves, there are still stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims (Nalloor & Scott, 2016). For example, El-Aswad (2013) stated that Muslim societies in the United States founded institutions, with cyber services, to combat misconceptions and to provide more insights about Muslims and Islam.

As a result of globalization, Abduljaber (2018) stated that Arabs living in the Arab world are becoming more open-minded to and accepting of non-Muslims, Americans, and Westerners. However, Nalloor and Scott (2016) argued that tolerance of other cultures and religions is not guaranteed through communication on social media. In fact, according to the study conducted by Nalloor and Scott (2016), they concluded that social media confirms and reinforces pre-existing prejudices. This may be explained due to the lack of non-Arabic social media content produced by Arabs to the public (Nalloor & Scott, 2016). Statistics showed that Arab internet users prefer using the Arabic language on social media, which consequently inhibits non-Arab internet users from understanding the message and limits the self-representation of Arabs (Nalloor & Scott, 2016).

Cultivation Theory

Jeffres, Atkin, Lee, and Neuendorf (2011) argued that the cultivation theory, which studies the images of people created by other people, is the communication theory used

most to study the impact of persistent media messages on the perception of people. Gerbner and Gross (1976) explained in their formation of the cultivation theory that there's a relationship between people's perceptions of reality and exposure to television. Cultivation theory inferred that a negative perception of the world was formed due to the unbalanced portrayal of violence in the world on TV in comparison to the actual reality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2015) argued the significance of the cultivation theory in studying the social and cultural impacts of media, especially television, in the perception of social reality. As a result, Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) decided to use cultivation theory to study perceptions of Arabs since Arabs may be misrepresented the same as violence was exaggerated. American media plays a role in supporting the cultural conflict between Americans and Muslims or Arabs due to the negative influence of media on the Americans' perceptions (Melhem & Punyanunt-Carter, 2019). Thus, heavy television viewers in the West would portray a negative attitude towards Muslims due to the media's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists or bad people (Severin & Tankrad, 2000).

Gerbner (1998) elaborated in a later study that his model of cultivation theory takes the content itself into consideration upon linking it to violence. "Cultivation theory is concerned with aggregate effects of massive, long-term and common exposure of large and heterogeneous publics to centrally produced, mass-distributed, and repetitive systems of stories" (Williams, 2006, p.74). In this age, satellite TV, as well as the Internet, provide people with content produced all over the world (Ahmed, 2017). Statistics prove that millennials now use social media to get their news, unlike older people who still watch TV to get their news. Only 15% of American adults between the age of 18 and 29

watch news on TV (Barthel, Grieco, & Shearer, 2019). In a study conducted by Ericsson (2012), researchers stated that 60% of TV viewers use social media while they are watching, where 40% of these users discuss the televised content they're watching on social media platforms. Similarly, Hirshberg (2014) believed that TV programs generate social media interaction. Another study conducted by Achieve research agency concluded that social media played a role in the 2016 election, especially that most of the millennials shared their views on social media platforms (Fromm, 2016). Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2015) argued that watching programs on the Internet is still considered watching TV in the sense that the content is the same regardless of how the viewer is receiving it. So, social network sites, similarly to Television, may act as socializing agents for cultivating perceptions (Morgan et al., 2015).

Researchers have also applied the cultivation theory to study the role of social media on cultivating perceptions of privacy (Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2018) and the impact of social media consumption on fear of crime (Intravia, Wolff, Paez, & Gibbs, 2017). Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2018) argued that using cultivation theory as a reference to study potential long-term effects of social network sites on users' attitudes towards privacy and self-disclosure behaviors privacy, delivers valuable findings. Researchers concluded that social network sites affect their users' attitudes towards privacy and self-disclosure behaviors privacy (Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2018). Similarly, the study done by Intravia et al. (2017) concluded that the consumption of social media plays a role in increasing fear in young adults, yet it unexpectedly did not show a relationship between the consumption of crime or violence on social media and fear of crime.

In a meta-analysis done by Mingoia, Hutchinson, Wilson, and Gleaves (2017), the researchers stated that the results of studies associating the use of Social Network Sites and body image were consistent with cultivation theory; the higher the exposure to SNSs, the higher the "internalization of a thin ideal." Repeated exposure to pictures and messages on SNSs led to the belief that the displayed pictures are attractive which is consistent with cultivation theory indicating that exposure to repeated media content results in perceiving that message as real (Mingoia et al., 2017).

Although cultivation theory has been used to study perception (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2018), researchers criticized it for solely focusing on Television and disregarding personal experience (Boyd-Barret & Braham, 1987). Boyd-Barret and Braham (1987) criticized Gerber and Gross (1976) for disregarding the effect of personal experience upon studying the effect of television viewing hours on real-life violence. Consequently, Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) expanded cultivation theory by studying if interpersonal interaction directly affects the perception of the world, which might have been formed due to media exposure.

This research contributes to the communication field and the media research area by understanding the Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, using the cultivation effect of social media and personal communication. The study provides further information on the factors that shape the Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. Besides, researchers and scholars may create a social media plan to combat the negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims by promoting and reflecting a more objective representation. The researcher conducted a quantitative study based on the participants' self-reports to avoid subjective qualitative approaches. Financial constraints, such as

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insufficient funds, prevented the researcher from conducting a nationwide study. Future research may include longitudinal studies on Americans' perceptions and social media to monitor whether perception changes over the years, given the same factors. Further research can be done to test whether perceptions may develop into violent behaviors against Arabs and Muslims.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: Is there a relationship between the Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and Muslims on social media and their opinions or perceptions towards them?

H_1: There is a relationship between the Americans' perception of the portrayal of Arabs on social media and their opinions about Arabs.

H_2: There is a relationship between the Americans' perception of the portrayal of Muslims on social media and their opinions about Muslims.

RQ2: Is there a relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of Muslims?

H_3: There's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perception of Muslims

H_4: There's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of portrayals of Arabs on social media and Americans' perceptions of portrayal of Muslims on social media

RQ3: Is there a relationship between interpersonal communication with Arabs or Muslims and Americans' perceptions towards them?

H_5: There is a relationship between knowing Arabs and the perceptions of Americans towards them.

H_6: There is a relationship between knowing Muslims and the perceptions of Americans towards them.

RQ4: Do different social media platforms affect the perceptions of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims differently?

H_7: There's a relationship between the number of hours spent on social media per day and Americans' perceptions towards Arabs.

H_8: There's a relationship between the number of hours spent on social media per day and Americans' perceptions towards Muslims.

H_9: There's a relationship between the number of hours spent on the Internet per day and Americans' perceptions towards Arabs.

H_{10}: There's a relationship between the number of hours spent on the Internet per day and Americans' perceptions towards Muslims.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted quantitative research based on a cross-sectional survey design using a self-report internet-based questionnaire for participants to fill out. The researcher used Survey Monkey to collect the research data. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions. The primary purpose of this study was to empirically evaluate whether social media is related to Americans' perceptions of Arabs or Muslims, which may have been formed due to media content and interpersonal communication.

The researcher preferred the survey method in conducting the study in order to be able to reach out to more participants in this research. An experimental design was not adopted to look at the relationship between social media and Americans' perceptions of Arabs because it would be difficult and potentially unethical to randomly assign participants to the control and experimental groups. It would also be very difficult and delicate to decide on specific social media content to compare the difference in perceptions between the participants in each group.

Participants

The population of this study is American citizens at Oklahoma State University. The

researcher requested a list of emails from the IRB office at OSU to recruit participants to participate in the survey. The university randomly selected 5000 potential participants for the survey. The researcher calculated the sample size from the given population, with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin error, which is equal to around 360 participants.

Procedure

Before the researcher sent out the final survey questions for data collection, the researcher did a pilot survey using the first 5000 email list provided by the IRB office. Upon conducting the pilot, changes were done to the survey questions and the formatting on SurveyMonkey. The researcher then sent out another recruitment email for a new sample consisting of 5000 potential participants, including OSU students, staff, and faculty. Participants were provided with the consent form on the first page of the internet-based questionnaire. At the end of the survey, participants wishing to enter the draw to win a $25 gift card were asked to send a screenshot of the final page of the survey to the researcher's email in order to keep their answers anonymous and unlinked to their emails.

Measures and Instruments

In order to measure the perception of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims through social media, the researcher adapted the Perceived Realism Scale used in Melhem and Punyanunt-Carter (2019) to understand the cultivation effect. The scale was originally developed by Rubin (1979) as a reality index to measure how true the perception of television was. The Perceived Realism Scale consists of five Likert-type items that range from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). Melhem and Punyanunt (2019) cited

Perse (1994) to explain how PRS scores are added and averaged to find the combined score.

Perception of Americans towards Arabs was measured as a five-item index with the following six statements: "Social media presents Arabs personality characteristics as they really are in life," "social media lets me really see the personality characteristics of Arabs," "If I see something about Arabs personality characteristics on social media, I can't be sure it really is that way," "social media lets me see positive stereotypes of Arabs," "social media presents Arabs with positive stereotypes as they really are in life," and "If I see Arabs with positive stereotypes on social media, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way."

Similarly, perception of Americans towards Muslims was measured using a five-item index with the following six statements: "social media presents Muslims personality characteristics as they really are in life," "social media lets me really see the personality characteristics of Muslims," "If I see something about personality characteristics of Muslims on social media, I can't be sure it really is that way," "social media lets me see positive stereotypes of Muslims," "social media presents Muslims with positive stereotypes as they really are in life," and "If I see Muslims with positive stereotypes on social media, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way."

In order to measure the perception of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims with respect to interpersonal communication, the researcher adapted survey questions used by Zogby Analytics (Arab American Institute, 2017). To measure the perception of Americans towards Arabs, participants were asked to give their opinions towards Arabs

by choosing one of the following options: "Very favorable," "somewhat favorable," "somewhat unfavorable," "very unfavorable," and "not familiar enough to make a judgment."

Similarly, to measure the perception of Americans towards Muslims, participants were asked to give their opinions towards Muslims by choosing one of the following options: "Very favorable," "somewhat favorable," "somewhat unfavorable," "very unfavorable," and "not familiar enough to make a judgment" (Arab American Institute, 2015). The researcher also used the question used in the study published by the Arab American Institute (2015) when asking whether the participants knew Arabs or Muslims by asking the following questions: "Do you personally know anyone who is a Muslim" and "Do you personally know anyone who is an Arab". The answers fall under three categories: "Yes, I know," "No, I don't know," and "Not sure."

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Among the 454 participants, 21 said they do not study or work at Oklahoma State University, 3 reported that they are non-Americans, and 2 did not report whether they work/study at OSU or whether they are Americans or not. For external validity reasons, the 26 respondents, who are not considered from the OSU community, were removed and excluded from the analysis of the results for this research study. So, the researcher analyzed the answers of 428 participants.

To test for the proposed research questions and hypotheses, the researcher analyzed the survey questions using an SPSS software package. To calculate the perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs on social media, the researcher averaged the answers provided on Arab Personality Characteristics, Arab Stereotypes, and then computed a third average that reflects the overall perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs on social media. Similarly, to calculate perceptions of the portrayals of Muslims on social media, the researcher averaged the answers provided on Muslim Personality Characteristics, Muslim Stereotypes, and then computed a third average that reflects the overall perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims on social media.

Regarding the general perceptions of the participants who shared their perceptions

towards Arabs, 37.8% voted 5 (very favorable), 36.5% voted 4 (favorable), 22.2% voted

3 (neutral), 2.4% voted 2 (unfavorable), and 1.1% voted 1 (very unfavorable).

Regarding the general perceptions of the participants who shared their perceptions

towards Muslims, 35.2% voted 5 (very favorable), 35.8% voted 4 (favorable), 22.7%

voted 3 (neutral), 3.7% voted 2 (unfavorable), and 2.6% voted 1 (very unfavorable).

Upon calculating participants' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs on social media,

4.18% of the participants said that they strongly disagree with how social media portrays

Arabs, 29.55% disagree, 34.58% were neutral, 26.78% agree, and 4.93% strongly agree.

Upon calculating participants' perceptions of the portrayals of Muslims on social media,

3.98% of the participants said that they strongly disagree with how social media portrays

Muslims, 29.28% disagree, 35.01% were neutral, 28.31% agree, and 3.43% strongly

agree.

Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayals of Arabs and Portrayals of Muslims

To test for RQ1, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of the

portrayals of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Muslims on social

media and their opinions/perceptions towards them, the researcher conducted a series of

correlations and regressions tests.

To test for H_1, whether there is a relationship between Americans' perceptions of the

portrayal of Arabs on social media and their opinions about Arabs, the researcher did a

bivariate correlation between all the Arab-related averages computed and the

participants' opinions towards Arabs. Table 1 shows the results for the Pearson

correlation coefficient, a correlation that was not significant was found (r= 0.01, p=0.055)

when calculating a Pearson correlation coefficient between Americans' perceptions of the

overall portrayal of Arabs on social media and their opinions about Arabs, indicating

Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs on social media is not related to their

opinions about Arabs. However, a correlation was found (r= 0.103, p<0.05), indicating a

significant relationship between Arab personality characteristics on social media and

Americans' opinions about Arabs. Regarding the portrayal of Arab stereotypes, no

significant correlation was found (r= 0.071, p>0.05), indicating that Americans'

perceptions of the portrayal of Arab stereotypes on social media are not related to their

opinions about Arabs.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs on social media and their opinions about Arabs.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	425	2.98	0.46	—			0.10
2. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arab Personality Characteristics	427	2.97	0.48		—		0.103*
3. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arab Stereotypes	426	2.99	0.58			—	0.071
4.Opinions/Perceptions towards Arabs	370	4.07	0.88	0.1	0.103*	0.071	—

To better understand the data collected, the researcher tested whether the above

correlations differ among males and females. After using the split file option on SPSS to

separate male and female respondents, the researcher calculated a Pearson correlation

coefficient to test for differences among them. Regarding males, a Pearson correlation

coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the perceptions of male

Americans of the portrayal of Arabs on social media and their opinions about Arabs.

Table 2 indicates that no significant correlation was found (r= 0.012, p>0.05), indicating

that the perception of the portrayal of Arabs on social media among male Americans is

not related to their opinions about Arabs.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Male Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Arabs and their Opinions about Arabs.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	149	2.981	0.47	—	0.01
2. Males Opinions/Perceptions towards Arabs	143	4.062	0.87	0.01	—

$^*p < .05. \ ^{**}p < .01.$

Regarding females, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship

between the perception of female Americans of the portrayal of Arabs on social media

and their opinions about Arabs. Table 3 shows a correlation was found (r= 0.157,

p<0.05), indicating a significant relationship between the perception of the portrayal of Arabs on social media among female Americans and their opinion towards Arabs.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Female Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Arabs and their Opinions about Arabs.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	274	2.987	0.464	—	0.157*
2. Females Opinions/Perceptions towards Arabs	225	4.084	0.899	00.157*	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

To test for H_2, whether there is a relationship between the Americans' perception of the portrayal of Muslims on social media and their opinions about Muslims, the researcher calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient for the 2 variables. Table 4 shows no significant correlation was found (r= 0.044, p>0.05), indicating that Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims on social media are not related to their opinions about Muslims.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Americans' perception of the portrayal of Muslims on social media and their opinions about Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4

Variable	n	M	SD	1			
1. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	415	2.982	0.470	—			0.044
2. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslim Personality Characteristics	423	2.958	0.483		—		0.046
3. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslim Stereotypes	420	3.005	0.575			—	0.022
4.Opinions/Perceptions towards Muslims	383	3.973	0.981	0.044	0.046	0.022	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

The researcher also ran a correlation test for male and female participants to calculate a

Pearson correlation coefficient to test for differences among them in their perceptions of

the portrayal of Muslims on social media and their opinions about Muslims. Regarding

males, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the

perceptions of male Americans of the portrayal of Muslims on social media and their

opinions about Muslims. Table 5 shows no significant correlation was found (r= -0.07,

p>0.05), indicating that the perception of the portrayal of Muslims on social media

among male Americans is not related to their opinions about Muslims.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Male Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Muslims and their Opinions about Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	145	2.998	0.461	—	-0.07
2. Males Opinions/Perceptions towards Muslims	143	3.916	1.017	-0.07	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

Regarding females, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the perception of female Americans of the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics on social media and their opinions about Muslims. Table 6 shows a correlation was found (r= 0.179, p<0.05), indicating a significant relationship between the perception of the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics on social media among female Americans and their opinion towards Muslims. However, no significant relationship was correlated (r=0.112, p>0.05) between American females' perception of the portrayal of Muslims in general on social media and their opinion about Muslims.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Female Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Muslims and their Opinions about Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	268	2.975	0.477	—	0.11
2. Female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslim Personality Characteristics	274	2.972	0.470	—	0.179**

| 3. Females Opinions/Perceptions towards Muslims | 238 | 4.008 | 0.963 | 0.11 | 0.179** | — |

To test for relationships of perceptions among participants of different educational levels and their perceptions of Arabs and/or Muslims, the researcher calculated a Pearson correlation coefficient. The only significant relationships between the different educational groups in regards to their perceptions of Arabs or Muslims and the portrayal of Arabs or Muslims are the following: A correlation was found (r=-0.424, p<0.05), indicating a reverse significant relationship between the perceptions of junior college participants towards Arabs and their perceptions of the portrayal of Muslim stereotypes on social media (see Table 7). A correlation was found (r=0.255, p<0.05), indicating a significant relationship between the perception of senior participants towards Muslims and their perception of the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics on social media (see Table 8).

Table 7

Correlation Between Perceptions of Junior College Students and their Perceptions of the Portrayal of Muslims Stereotypes on Social Media.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2
1. Perception of Junior College Students Towards Arabs	22	4.045	0.722	—	-0.424*
2.Junior College Students' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslim Stereotypes	25	3.080	0.603	-0.424	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 8

Correlation Between Perceptions of Senior College Students and their Perceptions of the Portrayal of Arab Personality Characteristics on Social Media.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2
1. Perception of Senior College Students Towards Muslims	73	3.904	0.930	—	0.255*
2.Senior College Students' perceptions of the portrayal of Arab Personality Characteristics	82	2.967	0.487	0.255*	—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

A series of regression tests were also calculated to test the impact of the portrayal of Arabs on social media and Americans' perceptions towards them. Similarly, a series of regression tests were also calculated to test the impact of the portrayal of Muslims on social media and Americans' perceptions of them. The regression equations were not significant.

Americans' Perceptions of Arabs and Americans' Perceptions of Muslims

To test for RQ2, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of Muslims, the researcher conducted a series of correlations and regressions tests.

To test for H$_3$, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perception of Muslims, a Pearson correlation coefficient. Table 9 shows a correlation was found (r = 0.823, p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims. To test for H$_4$, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of portrayals of Arabs on social media and Americans' perceptions of portrayal of Muslims on social media, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the variables. Table 9 shows a correlation was found (r= 0.764 p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and the portrayal of Muslims.

Table 9

Correlation between Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and the portrayal of Muslims and correlation between perceptions towards Arabs and perceptions towards Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	425	2.985	0.467	—	0.764**	0.100	0.034
2. Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	415	2.982	0.470	0.764**	—	0.029	0.044
3.Opinions/Perceptions towards Arabs	370	4.075	0.889	0.100	0.029	—	0.823**
4.Opinions/Perceptions towards Muslims	383	3.973	0.981	0.034	0.044	0.823**	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

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To test for H₃ at the gender level, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between male Americans' perceptions of Arabs and male Americans' perceptions of Muslims. Table 10 shows a correlation was found ($r = 0.794$, p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between male Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Male Americans' Perceptions of Arabs and Male Americans' Perceptions of Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Male Americans' perceptions of Arab	143	4.062	0.873	—	0.794**
2. Male Americans' perceptions of Musli	143	3.916	1.017	0.794**	—

*p < .05. **p < .01.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between female Americans' perceptions of Arabs and female Americans' perceptions of Muslims. Table 11 shows a correlation was found ($r = 0.850$, p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between female Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Female Americans' Perceptions of Arabs and Female Americans' Perceptions of Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Female Americans' perceptions of Arabs	225	4.084	0.899	—	0.850**
2. Female Americans' perceptions of Muslims	238	4.008	0.963	0.850**	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

To test for H$_4$ at the gender level, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs and male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims. Table 12 shows a correlation was found (r= 0.764 p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between male Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and their portrayal of Muslims.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Male Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Arabs and Male Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	149	2.981	0.479	—	0.764**
2. Male Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	145	2.998	0.461	0.764**	—

$^*p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs and female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims. Table 13 shows a correlation was found (r= 0.766 p=.00), indicating a significant relationship between female Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and their portrayal of Muslims.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Female Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Arabs and Female Americans' Perceptions of the Portrayal of Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2
1. Female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs	274	2.987	0.479	—	0.766*
2. Female Americans' perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims	268	2.975	0.477	0.766*	—

*p < .05. **p < .01.

To test for H$_3$, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of Muslims among different educational levels, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. A correlation was found among all groups, indicating a significant relationship between the participants' perceptions of Arabs and their perceptions of Muslims; A correlation was found among junior college participants (r=0.859, p=0.00), a correlation was found among sophomore participants (r=0.864, p=0.00), a correlation, and the highest one, was found among senior participants

(r=0.944, p=0.00), a correlation, the least among the other groups, was found among the graduate participants (r=0.728, p=0.00), and a correlation was found among post-graduate participants (r=0.867, p=0.00).

Similarly, to test for H$_4$, whether there's a relationship between Americans' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of portrayals of Muslims among different educational levels, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated. A correlation was found among all groups indicating a significant relationship between the participants' perceptions of the portrayals of Arabs and their perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims; A correlation was found among junior college participants (r=0.611, p=0.02), a correlation, the highest among other correlations, was found among sophomore participants (r=0.878, p=0.00), a strong correlation was found among senior participants (r=0.806, p=0.00), a correlation, the least among the other groups, was found among the graduate participants (r=0.744, p=0.00), and a correlation was found among post-graduate participants (r=0.763, p=0.00).

Interpersonal Communication and Americans' Perceptions of Arabs and Muslims

To test for RQ3, whether interpersonal communication with Arabs or Muslims affects Americans' perception towards them, the researcher conducted a series of tests. To test for H$_5$, whether there is a relationship between knowing Arabs and the perceptions of Americans towards them, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the Americans' perceptions towards Arabs and their encountering of Arabs. Table 14 shows no significant correlation was found (r = 0.071, p>0.05), indicating that Americans' perceptions of Arabs are not related to knowing or having met an Arab.

To test for H_6, whether there is a relationship between knowing Muslims and the perceptions of Americans towards them, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the Americans' perceptions towards Muslims and their encountering of Muslims. Table 14 shows the following results. A correlation was found ($r = 0.129$, $p<0.05$), indicating a significant relationship between Americans' perceptions towards Muslims and having met or known a Muslim. Also, a Pearson correlation coefficient that was calculated for Americans' perceptions towards Muslims and their encountering of Arabs, a correlation was found ($r = 0.109$, $p<0.05$), indicating a significant relationship between Americans' perceptions towards Muslims and having met or known an Arab. Another correlation was found between encountering Muslims and encountering Arabs ($r=0.807$, $p=0.00$), indicating a significant correlation between the 2 variables.

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Frequencies and Encountering Arabs/Muslims and Americans' Perceptions Towards Arabs/Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Encounter Arab	424	3.806	1.113	—	0.807**			0.071	0.109*
2. Encounter Muslims	424	3.889	1.108	0.807**					0.129*
3. Frequency of Meeting Arabs	401	2.967	0.911			—	0.792**		

	N	M	SD				
4. Frequency of Meeting Muslims	406	3.017	0.946			0.792**	
5. Americans' Perceptions Towards Arabs	370	4.075	0.889	0.071			—
6. Americans' Perceptions Towards Muslims	383	3.973	0.981	0.109*	0.129*		—

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Also, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to test for H5, to compare the means of opinions towards Arabs among those who know Arabs and those who don't know Arabs. No significant difference was found ($F(4,361) = 1.248$, $p>0.05$). Thus, participants from the 5 different groups and the frequency of encounters did not significantly differ in regards to the participants' opinions towards Arabs.

To test for H6, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted to compare the means of those who know Muslims and those who don't know Muslims regarding their opinions towards Muslims. No significant difference was found ($F(4,374) = 1.826$, $p>0.05$). Thus, participants from the 5 different groups and the frequency of encounters did not significantly differ in regards to the participants' opinions towards Muslims.

The researcher used the split file option for gender and conducted a one-way ANOVA test to compare differences between perceptions of males and females who encountered

Arabs and Muslims and their frequency of encounter, no significant difference in perception existed between males who encountered Arabs and Muslims. Also, no significant difference in perception existed between females who encountered Arabs and Muslims.

The researcher also applied the split file option for educational levels and conducted a one-way ANOVA test to compare differences between the perceptions of participants towards Arabs based on their level of education. There was no significant difference detected between the participants of different educational levels. However, a one-way ANOVA test to compare differences between the perceptions of Muslims based on the participants' educational levels indicated a significant difference in the graduate level between those who had never met a Muslim and those who had encountered Muslims once a week and once a month; a significant difference was found among the participants $(F(4,140)=4.742, p=0.001)$. Turkey's HSD was used to determine the nature of the difference between participants. The analysis revealed that graduate participants who never encountered a Muslim scored lower (M=2.00, sd=0) than graduate participants who encountered Muslims once a week (M=4.29, sd=1.01) or once a month (M=4.10, sd=0.83).

Americans' Perceptions of Arabs and Muslims vs. Internet and Social Media

To test for RQ4, whether different social media platforms affect the perceptions of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims differently, a series of Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. To test for H_7, whether there's a relationship between the number of hours spent on social media per day and Americans' perceptions towards

Arabs, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, Table 15 shows that no significant correlation was found (r= 0.034, p>0.05), indicating no significant relationship between the two variables. To test for H_8, whether there's a relationship between the number of hours spent on social media per day and Americans' perceptions towards Muslims, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated, Table 15 shows no significant correlation was found (r = 0.092, p>0.05), indicating no significant relationship between the two variables.

To test for H_9, whether there's a relationship between the number of hours spent on the Internet per day and Americans' perceptions towards Arabs, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the variables. Table 15 shows a correlation was found (r = 0.118, p<0.05), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. To test for H_{10} regarding Americans' perceptions towards Muslims, a Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between Americans' perceptions of Muslims and the number of hours spent on the Internet per day. A correlation was found (r = 0.102, p<0.05), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables (see Table 15).

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Number of Hours Spent on Social Media and Internet Per Day and Americans' Perceptions Towards Arabs and Muslims.

Variable	n	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Hours spent on the Internet/day	428	7.28	3.626	—		0.118*	0.102*
2. Hours spent on social media/day	423	3.00	2.455		—	0.034	0.092

| 3. Americans' Perceptions Towards Arabs | 370 | 4.075 | 0.889 | 0.118* | 0.034 | — | |
| 4. Americans' Perceptions Towards Muslims | 383 | 3.973 | 0.981 | 0.102* | 0.092 | | — |

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Upon testing whether the usage of any of the social media platforms was correlated to the

perceptions of Arabs or Muslims, or the perceptions of the portrayal of Arabs and

Muslims, only Facebook was correlated to the portrayal of Arab personality

characteristics, the portrayal of Muslims personality characteristics, and the portrayal of

Muslims on social media. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for

Americans' perception of the portrayal of Arab personality characters and Facebook

usage. Table 16 shows a correlation was found ($r = 0.104$, $p<0.05$), indicating a

significant relationship between Facebook usage of participants and their perception of

the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics. A Pearson correlation coefficient was

calculated for Americans' perception of the portrayal of Muslim personality characters

and Facebook usage. A correlation was found ($r = 0.120$, $p<0.05$), indicating a significant

relationship between Facebook usage of participants and their perception of the portrayal

of Muslim personality characteristics (see Table 16). A Pearson correlation coefficient

was calculated for Americans' perception of the portrayal of Muslims on social media

and Facebook usage. A correlation was found ($r = 0.107$, $p<0.05$), indicating a significant

relationship between Facebook usage of participants and their perception of the portrayal

of Muslims (see Table 16).

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Facebook Users and the Perception of the Portrayal Muslims Personality Characteristic, Arab Personality Characteristic, and Muslims on Social Media.

Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Facebook	415	2.72	1.913	—	0.104*	0.120*	0.107ᶜ
2. Americans' Perceptions Towards Portrayal of Arab Personality Characteristics	427	2.972	0.489	0.104*	—		
3. Americans' Perceptions Towards Portrayal of Muslims Personality Characteristics	423	2.958	0.483	0.120*		—	
4. Americans' Perceptions Towards Portrayal of Muslims	415	2.982	0.470	0.107*			—

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Testing for Predictors of Perceptions

In addition to the above association tests done to analyze and answer the researcher's research questions and hypotheses, the researcher conducted regression tests to have a better understanding of the correlations found between Americans' perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims and the other variables. The following results will be elaborated in the discussion section.

Predictors for Americans' Perceptions Towards Muslims by Gender

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict the participants' perceptions of Muslims, separated by gender, relative to the following variables presented in the study:

hours spent on the Internet/day, hours spent on social media/day, social media usage across different platforms (Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tiktok, and Instagram), encountering Arabs, encountering Muslims, age, perceptions towards Muslims, perceptions of portrayals of Muslims (including the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics and the portrayal of Muslim stereotypes), and perceptions of portrayals of Arabs (including the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics and the portrayal of Arab stereotypes). The series of simple linear regression tests for males indicated 6 predictors with R square of 0.832, F=79.496, Sig =0.00, which are perceptions of Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficients B=0.904), age (Unstandardized Coefficients B=-0.08), encountering Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficients B=0.96), encountering Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficients B=-0.210), hours spent on the Internet (Unstandardized Coefficients B=-0.32), and portrayal of Arab stereotypes (Unstandardized Coefficients B=-0.178).

As for females and their perception towards Muslims, their predictors were different from the males'. A series of simple linear regression tests indicated that 5 predictors with R square of 0.850, F=190.400, Sig =0.00, which are perceptions of Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.945), hours spent on social media per day (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.028), perceptions of portrayal of Arabs on social media (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.126), perceptions of portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.171), and encountering Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.055).

Predictors for Americans' Perceptions Towards Arabs by Gender

Regarding the perceptions of male Americans towards Arabs, similar to the previous test, a series of simple regression tests using step-wise option were conducted to study the predictors for the males' perception towards Arabs. The results indicated 7 predictors with R square of 0.842, F=72.416, Sig =0.00, which are perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.854), hours spent on the Internet (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.33), age of participants (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.009), the use of Pinterest (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.069), the portrayal of Arab stereotypes (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.180), encountering Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.92), and encountering Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.051) are predictors to male Americans' perceptions towards Arabs. However, in females, there were 3 predictors with R Square = 0.843, F=304.041, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.879), perceptions towards the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.157), and hours spent on social Media (Unstandardized Coefficient B= -0.24).

Predictors for Americans' Perceptions by Educational Level

Also, a simple linear regression was calculated using the step-wise option to predict participants' perceptions of Muslims and Arabs, separated by educational level, relative to the following variables presented in the study: hours spent on the Internet/day, hours spent on social media/day, social media usage across different platforms (Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, Facebook, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tiktok, and Instagram), encountering Arabs, encountering Muslims, age, perceptions towards Muslims, perceptions of portrayals of Muslims (including the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics and

portrayal of Muslims stereotypes), and perceptions of portrayals of Arabs (including the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics and portrayal of Arab stereotypes).

Among junior college students, 2 predictors of perceptions towards Arabs were indicated with R Square = 0.838, F=38.726, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.922) and use of Tiktok (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.065) predicted the participants' perceptions towards Arabs. Similarly, perceptions towards Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.843) and the use of Tiktok (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.065) predicted their perceptions towards Muslims with R Square = 0.846, F=41.147, Sig=0.00.

Among sophomore participants, 2 predictors for perceptions towards Arabs were indicated with R Square = 0.760, F=30.095, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.731) and Instagram use (Unstandardized Coefficient B= -0.92). However, upon analyzing the predictors of sophomore's perceptions towards Muslims, 3 predictors were indicated with R Square= 0.846, F=32.932, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.950), perception of the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.485), and use of Twitter (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.187).

Among senior participants, only perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.956) predicted their perceptions towards Arabs with R Square = 0.894, F=486.947, Sig=0.00. Similarly, when studying the predictors of their perceptions

towards Muslims, only their perceptions towards Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B= 0.935) was a predictor with R Square = 0.894, F=486.947, Sig=0.00.

Among graduate participants, 4 predictors to Americans' perception towards Arabs were indicated with R Square =0.823, F=118.350, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.857), perception of the portrayal of Arab stereotypes (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.152), encountering Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.111), and encountering Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.163). Similarly, upon analyzing the predictors of graduate participants' perceptions towards Muslims, 4 predictors were indicated with R Square = 0.840, F=133.851, Sig=0.00, which are perceptions towards Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.916), encountering of Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B =0.144), encountering of Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.209), and perception of the Arab stereotypes (Unstandardized Coefficient B=-0.160).

Among post-graduate participants, the predictor of Americans' perception towards Arabs was their perceptions of Muslims (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.869) with R Square =0.817, F=308.068, Sig=0.00. Similarly, the only predictor of the perceptions of Muslims was the participants' perceptions towards Arabs (Unstandardized Coefficient B=0.940) with R Square =0.817, F=308.068, Sig=0.00.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The collected data and the conducted analyses generally indicated a favorable American

perception towards Arabs and Muslims, unlike a lot of the existing research. The overall

favorable perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, regardless of the portrayals of social media,

indicate that education and exposure to international students within the OSU community

and a university campus affected their favorability of Arabs and Muslims.

Upon studying the relationship between portrayal on social media and perception, initial

tests showed that Americans did not relate or base their perceptions of Arabs and

Muslims based on what they see on social media, especially that only the portrayal of

Arab personality characteristics had a weak correlation with their opinions about Arabs.

The absence or lack of correlation between social media portrayals and perceptions of

Arabs and Muslims may be related to the level of trust in social media. Interestingly,

upon analyzing the results based on gender, the results showed a difference in the

perceptions of Americans towards Arabs among males and females; in females, there was

a significant correlation between the portrayal of Arabs on social media and perceptions

towards Arabs, while in males, there was no correlation found. A study by Warner-

Søderholm et al. (2018) showed that females tend to trust newsfeeds on social media more than other social media users or non-users. Similarly, when analyzing the data about the portrayal of Muslims on social media and Americans' perceptions towards them, participants' perceptions towards Muslims were not correlated to their perceptions of the portrayal of Muslims on social media. However, the analysis at the gender level showed a significant difference among males and females; no relationship was found between males' perceptions of Muslims and the portrayal of Muslims on social media while females' perceptions of Muslims were correlated to the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics. So, why is it that females' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims is related to the portrayal of Arabs and Muslims on social media while men's perceptions are not? A regression test showed that hours spent on social media predicted the perceptions of female participants towards Arabs while hours spent on the Internet predicted the perceptions of male participants towards Arabs.

In terms of the role that education plays on Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims, there were only two significant relationships. Among junior students, the relationship was reversed, as their perceptions of the portrayal of Arab stereotypes on social media increased, their perceptions of Arabs decreased and became less favorable. However, among senior participants, their perceptions of Muslims were correlated to their perceptions of the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics. What can be concluded from the preceding findings is that as education increases, the perception becomes more favorable.

Also, there is a relationship between perceptions of Muslims and Arabs and the perceptions of their portrayals. In fact, the results of the hypotheses questioning the

relationship between the portrayals of Arabs and portrayals of Muslims on one side and the perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims on the other side confirmed that. The perceptions of portrayals of Arabs and the perceptions of portrayals of Muslims were strongly correlated among participants of both genders and all educational levels. Also, there's a strong correlation between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and Americans' perceptions of Muslims among participants of all genders and all educational groups. Another reason why participants have these variables correlated is that they predicted the percentage of Muslims in the Arab world to be around 60 percent, which is a relatively high percentage, although the recent percentage of Muslims in the Arab world is 93.1 percent (Pew Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, 2020). The results also indicated that encountering Muslims and encountering Arabs are significantly correlated. This shows that the OSU community is subjected to Arabs who are mostly Muslims.

Based on the provided literature, one would think that social media is directly related to the cultivation of Arabs and Muslims, just like television is related to the cultivation of reality of Arabs and how it cultivates negative stereotypes of Arabs (Punyanunt-Carter and Melhem, 2019). However, the results concluded in the current research study proved that interpersonal communication does play a role in the formation of perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims.

Although there was no correlation found between Americans' perceptions of Arabs and encountering an Arab, there was a correlation between encountering a Muslim and perceptions towards Muslims (Table 14). Also, a correlation was found between Americans' perceptions towards Muslims and having met or known an Arab, which may be explained by having the participants encountered Arabs that are mostly Muslims.

Also, there was a significant difference in the perceptions of Muslims in the participants with a graduate educational level; those who had never met a Muslim scored less than those who encounter Muslims once a week or once a month, indicating that frequency affects the perception among graduate students.

Upon calculating a bivariate correlation coefficient, a regression analysis indicated that encountering Muslims and encountering Arabs were among the predictors for the perception of Americans towards Arabs in males only. Thus, encountering Arabs leads to the formation of a favorable opinion; 94.57 percent of the participants who answered the question about encountering Arabs reported that they did encounter Arabs. Similarly, it can also be concluded that encountering Muslims leads to favorable perceptions towards Muslims since there was a relationship between Americans' perception of Muslims and encountering Muslims. 95.75 percent of the participants who answered the question about encountering Muslims reported that they did encounter Muslims.

Upon analyzing the data related to interpersonal communication, the researcher found that some participants may have not been aware of the difference between Arabs and Muslims since they listed non-Arab countries of a majority Muslim population as Arab countries, like Iran, Turkey, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. On the other hand, a lot of the participants who stated that they knew Muslims listed non-Arab countries, like Mali, China, Canada, Iran, Pakistan, United States, Afghanistan, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Indonesia, Turkey, Malaysia, Nepal, Cameroon, Dagestan, Turkmenistan, and Norway. That also emphasizes the diverse culture within the OSU community that played a role in increasing the interpersonal communication with Arabs and Muslims, consequently making Americans' perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims more favorable.

The descriptive analysis of the data indicated that the average Internet use among respondents was 7.28 hours a day, while the average of social Media use was 3 hours. Regarding Arabs, the results showed that there's no relationship between hours spent on social media and Americans' perceptions towards Arabs, while there is a relationship between how many hours they spend on the Internet and their perceptions towards Arabs. Similarly, regarding Muslims, there was no relationship between hours spent on social media and Americans' perceptions towards Muslims, while there was a relationship between how many hours they spent on the Internet and their perceptions towards Muslims. In a study about political trust in social media versus online media outlets, Ceron (2015) found that the consumption of online news is related to trust regardless of the Internet source of information; there is a relationship between political trust and news consumers who are Internet users on one hand and news consumers who are social media users on the other hand.

It is important to mention that further analysis, a regression analysis, showed that hours spent online were a predictor for participants' perceptions towards Muslims and Arabs in males, while hours spent on social media were a predictor for perceptions towards Muslims and Arabs in females. The more time spent on the Internet in males and social media in females, the more favorable the perceptions of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims were. That can also be justified by the fact that females tend to trust newsfeed on social media more than other social media users or non-users (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018). The general favorability towards Arabs and Muslims also reflects that the content portrayed on social media is at least neutral, if not favorable,

towards Arabs and Muslims, which is why it may be reflected in the participant's perceptions towards them.

Regarding the specific social media platforms, the participants ranked Facebook as the top used social media platform. YouTube was ranked second, third was Instagram, Twitter came fourth, Pinterest was ranked fifth, LinkedIn was sixth, Reddit was seventh, and TikTok was the least used. TikTok, the lowest-ranked platform, predicted the participants' perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims among junior college students. Instagram use predicted perceptions towards Arabs in sophomore students and Twitter predicted their perceptions towards Muslims. Seniors, graduates, and post-graduates did not have any of the social media platforms as predictors to their perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims, confirming that interpersonal communication played a big role in the favorability of perceptions towards Arabs and Muslims in this study, since graduates and post-graduates represent 258 of 430 participants. However, upon calculating a Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the only platform that showed a relationship between a social media platform and the portrayals of Arab and Muslims was Facebook. Facebook was correlated with the portrayal of Arab personality characteristics, the portrayal of Muslim personality characteristics, and the portrayal of Muslims on social media. In fact, a study about news recommendations from social media and opinion leaders using Facebook API showed that social media recommendations are related to trust in media and affect the attitude of the user regarding seeking information in the future (Turcotte, York, Irving, Scholl, & Pingree, 2015). If the user is exposed to content from a trusted opinion leader, they're more likely to seek information from that opinion leader again in the future and trust the content he/she is providing. Thus, exposure to inaccurate or subjective media

content from an opinion leader might affect the perception of the social media user. A survey by Pew Research Center conducted in July 2020 showed that participants who believe that social media has a negative impact observe misinformation, hate, and harassment on social media resulting in being doubtful and unsure about the content they come across (Auxier, 2020).

Conclusion

Cultivation of perceptions cannot be separated, studied at the media level only, or based on content displayed on any medium. The study of the cultivation of perceptions is a mixture of media, culture, society, and communication, including interpersonal communications.

This research study has certain limitations since no specific portrayals were tested to study the perceptions of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims through social media, the research. Also, the perceptions of the participants towards Arabs and Muslims were studied from their overall exposure to social media rather than their perceptions of related content based on different social media platforms. Future research can study the trust level of social media users in the social media content, specifically the one related to Arabs and Muslims. Also, future research can study whether the negative or positive portrayals of Arabs and Muslims develop certain behaviors towards them.

The results of the current study showed that the participants don't believe what the media tells them about the personality characteristics of Arabs and Muslims, yet, they are not quite sure if they see a positive stereotype, they should believe it, although the averages show that these participants have a favorable view of Muslims.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Social Media and the Cultivation of Americans' Perceptions

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study about the role of social media in cultivating the perception of Americans towards Arabs and Muslims. You were selected as a possible participant because the researcher is interested in the OSU community. We ask that you read this form and contact the researcher if you have any questions before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This study is being conducted by: Farah Shami, graduate student at the school of Media and Strategic Communication, Oklahoma State University, under the supervision of Dr. Skye Cooley.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to answer the survey questions on the following page of this questionnaire.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: No more than 5 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study does not subject you to any anticipated risks. You and your responses are anonymous.

The benefits to participation are: There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researcher learn more about the role of social media and whether there is a relationship between social media exposure and the perception of Americans.

Future research and experiments may be conducted to utilize social media in altering perceptions and combating stereotypes.

Compensation

If you wish to register your email at the end of the survey, while keeping your responses anonymous, you will enter a draw to win one of eight $25 Amazon gift cards as compensation for your participation. You will receive the gift card by email if you win.

Confidentiality

Because of the nature of the survey and data collection, you and your responses are confidential. No names will be collected and you cannot be identifiable from your responses.

This data will be stored on the researcher's computer and on a flash drive, both protected by passwords. Your data collected as part of this research project may be used for future research

studies.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately while the you and your responses remain anonymous.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about your rights as participants, please contact the OSU IRB office on irb@okstate.edu or 405-744-3377.

If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at fshami@okstate.edu.

All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I consent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the below questions:

1) How many hours per day do you spend using the Internet?

2) How many hours per day do you spend using Social Media?

3) Based on your usage, rank the following social media platforms in order from most used (1) to least used (8).

Twitter   Facebook   YouTube   Instagram   LinkedIn   Pinterest   Reddit   TikTok

4) Social media presents Arab personality characteristics as they really are in life.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

5) Social media lets me really see the personality characteristics of Arabs.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

6) If I see something about Arab personality characteristics on social media, I can't be sure it really is that way.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

7) Social Media lets me see positive stereotypes of Arabs.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

8) Social media presents Arabs with positive stereotypes as they really are in life.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

9) If I see Arabs with positive stereotypes on social media, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

10) Social media presents Muslim personality characteristics as they really are in life.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

11) Social media lets me really see the personality characteristics of Muslims.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

12) If I see something about personality characteristics of Muslims on social media, I can't be sure it really is that way.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

13) Social Media lets me see positive stereotypes of Muslims.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

14) Social media presents Muslims with positive stereotypes as they really are in life.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

15) If I see Muslims with positive stereotypes on social media, I can't be sure that the stereotypes are really that way.

5-Strongly Agree   4-Agree   3-Neutral   2-Disgaree   1-Strongly Disagree

16) What is your opinion about Arabs?

| Very Favorable | Somewhat Favorable | Neutral | Somewhat Unfavorable | Very Unfavorable | Not Familiar Enough to Make a Judgment |

17) What is your opinion about Muslims?

| Very Favorable | Somewhat Favorable | Neutral | Somewhat Unfavorable | Very Unfavorable | Not Familiar Enough to Make a Judgment |

18) How often do you encounter an Arab?

Once a week   Once a month   Few times a year   Once a year   Never

From which country? --------------------

19) How often do you encounter a Muslim?

Once a week   Once a month   Few times a year   Once a year   Never

From which country? --------------------

20) In your opinion, what percentage of Arabs are Muslims?

----- %

21) Educational Level:

Junior College   Freshman   Sophomore   Senior   Graduate   Post-
Graduate

22) Gender: Male   Female

23) Age:

24) Nationality: American   Non-American

25) Do you study/work at Oklahoma State University?

Yes   No

VITA

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Experience:

Experienced in the media and TV industry with roles ranging from production to management; producer, project manager, line producer, and field producer. Worked and acquired skills in branding, digital marketing, social media, research, and communication strategies.