

NUR: A PLAYBOOK ON REPRESENTATIVE BRAND  
ENGAGEMENT WITH FIRST-GENERATION  
AMERICAN MUSLIM CONSUMERS

by

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A THESIS

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and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
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## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

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Title: Nur: A Playbook on Representative Brand Engagement with First-Generation  
American Muslim Consumers

Approved:                     *Dave Koranda*                      
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The identity of First-Generation Muslim Americans is complex and deserves to be represented in mass media, and in particular, in advertising. This cultural report will discuss tangible strategies for advertisers to use in order to understand and target the First-Gen Muslims. Many fail to see the complexity to their identity and rather base their commercials off of stereotypes and assumptions. The research I have done for understanding the First-Gen American Muslim consumer unpacks the intricate audience that many have failed to acknowledge. Focusing on 16-25 year-olds within the demographic, this report includes information that spans different aspects of their lives and how they interact with the world. Ultimately, this research is important because representation for First-Gen Muslims acknowledges their existence and helps empower the roles they fill in our society. And, if the ethos of fair representation isn't enough of a reason for advertisers to care, the purchasing power of Muslims in the U.S is around \$170 billion. By neglecting a large audience who are willing to spend money, advertisers have a missed opportunity.

In a study conducted by Pew Research Center, it is estimated that are 3.45 million Muslims in America, making up 1.1% of the total population. Although many

Muslim Americans were born abroad, First-Gen Muslims in America are more likely to be born in the U.S. than abroad (64% to 52%) (Diamant et al). Furthermore, the Pew Research Center has found that First-Gen Muslims come from multiple backgrounds and in particular, “40% of First-Gen Muslims identify as white (including Arabs and people of Middle Eastern ancestry), 29% as Asian (including people of Pakistani or Indian descent), 17% as black and 11% as Hispanic” (Diamant et. al). Spanning various ethnicities and with many First-Gen Muslims being first-generation Americans, they often are balancing their faith, culture and American identity. The different hats they wear leads to a complex sense of self, with each aspect of their identity playing into who they are and what they value. As Islam plays a large role in many of their lives, purchasing decisions are constantly impacted by their Muslim values. Rather than being just a religion, Islam is often a way of life. Many First-Gen American Muslims eat only *halal* (religiously permissible/prepared) meat, avoid alcohol, and adhere to modest fashion. However, it’s also important to recognize that not all First-Gen American Muslims are strict followers of the faith. Rather, Islam can be more of a cultural aspect that was passed down through their parents. Although there is a vast ethnicity difference between First-Gen American Muslims, solely being Muslim and understanding the expectations of the religion is often a unifier. Furthermore, understanding the culture they stem from as well as their experiences as first-generation Americans is a crucial component to being a First-Gen American Muslims. So, in turn, many may drink, eat pork and dress like any other American would. However, Islam is still a crucial part to their identity even if they don’t follow all the rules. Ultimately, Islam for many First-Gen Muslims intertwines culture and faith. Balancing both worlds of culture and faith is

a complex identity transformation that many First-Gen Muslims face that I hope to address in this playbook.

This playbook is split into two categories. First a deep dive into who First-Generation Muslims are and what makes them unique as a demographic. Second, a look at diversity as a whole in the advertising industry and accounts from First-Generation American Muslims who are championing in the industry. It will also discuss tangible strategies for advertisers to use in order to understand and target the First-Gen Muslims. Many fail to see the complexity to their identity and rather base their commercials off of stereotypes and assumptions. For example, MAC Cosmetics came out with a makeup campaign targeted at First-Gen Muslims that was all about getting glam before starting their fast during the holy month of *Ramadan*. However, if they were aware of the realities First-Gen Muslims in America face, they would know that when Muslims get up at sunrise to eat before they fast, they're half-asleep at home eating leftovers. It's simply not the time to get "glammed up." Because of this, many were disappointed in how incredibly off base the message was and it became more of a mockery. Unfortunately, this isn't the first time this happened.

The research I have done for understanding the First-Gen American Muslim consumer unpacks the intricate audience that many have failed to acknowledge. Focusing on 16-25 year-olds within the demographic, this report includes information that spans different aspects of their lives and how they interact with the world. Ultimately, this research is important because representation for First-Gen Muslims acknowledges their existence and helps empower the roles they fill in our society. And,

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professor David Koranda, Professor Nicole Dudukovic and Professor Christopher Chavez for guiding me through the process of creating this piece. As advocates for diversity and inclusion, each professor has provided unique insight to ensure this piece is representative and empathetic. Additionally, a special thanks to my family for always pushing me to advocate for those without a voice and creating a space for Muslims in mass communication.

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## **Chapter 1: The Current Landscape and Contributions**

Whenever I look at photos in a magazine, turn on the TV to see an advertisement, or read an article, a part of me is secretly hoping to see myself reflected back in mainstream media. I think it's safe to say that we all want to relate to the bigger picture and see accurate representations of ourselves in the world around us. For some, we find strength in a commercial encouraging gay marriage. For others, when reading an article about victims of sexual assault being supported against wealthy and powerful perpetrators, we feel inspired. For me? I keep searching for that moment of empowerment.

Now, don't get me wrong. I have been proud of the advancements our nation, and in turn, our media has been taking toward supporting social and ethnic minorities lately. But as a first generation Muslim American, I'm still restless. It seems more so than before, every representation reflected back at me in the media tells me what I'm not. I often come upon the same themes: Muslim-Americans are not patriotic, they are not our friend, they are not beautiful, and they are not one of "us". Growing up as a millennial in a post-9/11 world, I slowly but surely internalized this information as fact because it was present all around me. I led my life with the belief that I was, and always will be, inherently inferior to my white peers. My faith was a flaw - a social construct completely shaped by fear of the majority and legitimized by different media outlets. Additionally, as a child of immigrants, there was an unspoken agreement that we owe this country for providing our family opportunities that the motherland couldn't. The identity of First-Gen Muslims is complex and deserves to be represented in mass media, and in particular, in advertising.



Although there has been research done by the First-Gen Muslim consumer in the United States, very few resources go in-depth about their experiences and understanding their consumer trends as a demographic. Mainly, because they make up such a wide array of ethnicities and backgrounds with the common link of Islam so it's difficult to find a golden thread. A lot of research has been extensively done about diversity in advertising and many case studies have found that diversity in the Advertising industry is clearly not present. This disparity in the industry is detrimental to business. It has been found that "there is a direct correlation between diversity in the leadership of large companies and two measures of financial outperformance — profitability and value creation (measured as economic profit margin)." (Duggan) In a case study looking at Sephora branding that ventured away from using the traditional model and instead included many models of color, their sales skyrocketed. According to a study conducted by NewsCred Insights, 88% agree that "Using more diverse images helps a brand's reputation. (Walker). However, only 33.9% have actually used diverse images for their brands (Walker). Another prime example of a company that was successful with representation was Fenty Beauty. In the first month of it's launch, the brand saw \$72 million in earned media value, and over 132 million views on YouTube. (Walker). Surprisingly to advertisers, Fenty Beauty's darkest and lightest shades sold out instantly.

Specifically looking at First-Gen Muslims and casting Muslims in advertisements, Nafsia Bakar, an acclaimed journalist, has created 4 question guidebooks for advertisers to consider. Her four recommendations are:

1. Do you understand the context?

2. What is your purpose?
3. Does your representation follow through?
4. Is there ownership in any form by those you seek to represent? (Bakkar)

With all the ads that Bakar analyzed, she found that Muslims were often the sidekicks, just placed for the diversity card, or simply just didn't make sense in the roles they were casted in. Ultimately, she claims "Just casting Muslims – whether in ads or on magazine covers – will never lead to real inclusivity. All of the aforementioned issues could in part be solved by ensuring agencies and advertisers are made up of and working with those they seek to engage with and represent" (Bakkar). The need for hiring Muslims in Advertising is crucial to bridge the gap.

In a separate article for AdAge, a popular Advertising trade magazine, Bakkar speaks to the fact that "representation of Muslims ping pongs between fitting a stereotype or breaking one, not the middle ground where most of us are." Bakkar calls this the "Muslim aesthetic" (Bakkar) that attempts to overly express how "normal" Muslims are. She gives the example of how Vogue Arabia placed Gigi Hadid, a famous white American model, in a headscarf and portrayed her as Muslims. This is comparable to placing a thin model in a fat-suit and claiming she is plus-sized. Rather than seeking out Muslim models, brands are using white women to portray different minorities. At the end of the day brands need to understand how to connect with a Muslim audience.

A common trend that's appeared in all of the literature I've read about advertising to Muslims is that it's not being done properly because advertisers are

failing to connect with this particular audience. Some have suggested hiring Muslims in the industry, which is a piece to the puzzle, but by no means does it solve the larger issue. Part of being a superb advertiser and reaching all individuals is empathizing with people of different backgrounds than yours. The problem here is clear when it comes to engaging with Muslim consumers: Brands are struggling to understand the complicated identities that many American Muslims grapple with. They need a breakdown of their life experiences to empathetically tell creative stories relating to them and they need to hire Muslims in their field.

## **Chapter 2: Goals**

To alleviate the lack of Muslim representation, an initial obvious solution would be for agencies to hire Muslims throughout different specialties. However, part of being a great strategist, art director, account manager, copywriter – or any other roles that are in the industry – is being empathetic. Understanding different walks of life and the experiences of various consumers. The goal of this playbook is to create a resource to invoke empathic thinking. When wanting to learn more about a Muslim consumer-base, this playbook will be readily available to receive accurate and representative information. Simply put, the main goal of this portfolio piece is to create an open resource that gives a glimpse into the complex identities many First-Gen American Muslims interact with daily. This thesis will tackle the sheer lack of understanding about the experiences of First-Gen American Muslims and instead give a window into different sectors of their lives. It is imperative to note that there are many components to their complex identity. So, even though this report is comprehensive, the most invaluable resource is working directly with a First-Gen American Muslim and building a personal bridge of understanding.

### **Chapter 3: Playbook Overview**

In this report, readers will find a clear breakdown of the First-Gen American Muslim demographic and how their culture, religion and American identity function together. From their ethnicity breakdowns, their spending power, major geographic locations, and their vulnerable identity patterns that influence their life - this playbook will provide a launching pad for brands interested in engaging with American Muslims. The six main concepts that provided most relevance with brand interactions were: The Ummah, Ramadan, Food, Dating and Marriage, Fashion and Beauty and lastly, Influential Figures.

## **Chapter 4: Narrative and Aesthetics**

This playbook is written to be engaging and light-hearted to tell unique stories of a demographic that is often seen as submissive, harsh and alien. Each touchpoint works to demolish misconceptions and includes unique narratives from an array of First-Gen American Muslims. Many of the researched insights are backed by personal stories and anecdotes that humanize the data and make the information relevant.

Additionally, the visual aesthetics of this report is geared toward creating a more accurate representation of First-Gen American Muslims. A lively, intelligent, and bold group of individuals deserves a platform that reflects those values. They, too, enjoy The Advertising industry, time and time again, and are failing to reach Muslims, and my thesis will help break down the realities that are essential to understand for diverse representation. As a First-Gen American Muslim myself, I have the ability to navigate a sensitive topic like representation and have the experiences to inject my own insight alongside the research.

## **Chapter 5: Research and Methodologies**

To collect and interpret data for this report, I used both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data was collected from survey research of this demographic in different regions by university institutions and credible institutions - such as the Pew Research Center. To explore the narrative the data was representing, I interviewed a handful of First-Gen American Muslims from different backgrounds. To qualify, I interviewed children of immigrants aged 16-30 and who identify as Muslims. One of the key links to ensuring Islam is represented fairly and accurately in advertising and mass media is having First-Gen Muslims in the advertising industry. Ideally a part of the job description of industry professionals is using empathy to create representative campaigns, but it just hasn't happened yet for First-Gen Muslims. Of 582,000 Americans working in Advertising only 6.6% are black or African American, 5.7% are Asian and 10.5% are Hispanic (Grillo). Even fewer are Muslim. Simply put, with this stark disparity, the industry is failing to cater to minority audiences. Because of this, Muslims are needed in advertising to ensure campaigns are effectively targeting First-Gen Muslims. I interviewed individuals who fit the identity requirements but also work in the Advertising Industry. We discussed a wide array of topics including representation in the field of advertising, how their identities come to play in the workplace and the impact their role has at work. Furthermore, they provided unique insights they have about First-Gen Muslims and how to engage with them on an emotional level. Receiving this perspective from Advertising professionals helped shape this report in a way that will best add value to the field.

## **Chapter 6: Main Takeaways and Findings**

From both the primary and secondary research I conducted, I came out with six main insights that can help brands and marketers understand First-Gen Muslim Americans on a personal and relatable level. The six takeaways are:

1. Islam in America is heavily associated with different motherland cultures. The lines between cultural and religious expectations are often blurry for many First-Gen American Muslims.
2. The key to understanding First-Gen American Muslims in the United States is breaking down the nuances and limits they test within their faith.
3. A fundamental truth of First-Gen American Muslims is they see themselves as American first - interested in the same things as their peers - but, with added layers to their identity.
4. Brands that seek to engage with First-Gen Muslims in America need to tap into the community value. This is a very different approach than the known individualistic spirit of American consumerism.
5. Many First-Gen Muslims see themselves as masters of finesse. They hop between identities, understand different expectations and still survive - and even thrive in America.
6. Albeit obvious, engaging with First-Gen Muslims means understanding their story on a concrete level. The most impactful, accurate and somewhat easy way to do this is to create spaces for Muslims in advertising agencies and marketing teams.



These main findings are unique to this culture report because it provides creative solutions to engage with a demographic that brands have continually struggled to do effectively in the United States. Although previous reports have looked into the different parts of what makes up a First-Gen Muslim American, this is the first report to explore the intersections of identities and its impact on the sense of self. Islam's association with the motherland culture is a crucial component to the identity of the target demographic, yet, no research has taken the time to articulate the balancing act and significance of these different parts of the Muslim consumer.

## **Accompanying Documents**

1. Playbook Report

نور

**NUR:**

A Playbook on Representative  
Brand Engagement with  
First-Generation American  
Muslim Consumers



# نور

“NUR”

## Author’s Note

In Arabic, Nur means “the light.” One of the many names of Allah (God) for Muslims, it holds great power and significance. Just as a lighthouse guides a ship to the shore, I hope this report guides you to think creatively and inclusively about a powerful, yet, underrepresented demographic in the United States. You will find words of wisdom, interesting data, and a new narrative to understand about First-Generation American Muslims. The Muslim diaspora of the 20th and 21st century in America is complicated. Many immigrate for a better life while some even come to avoid persecution. Muslim immigration has steadily increased since the 1960’s, however, the first Muslim immigrants came to America as slaves with colonist Christopher Columbus. American Muslims have been part of our country’s history for centuries and they deserve representation in mass media. The advertising industry has the power to create representation through profound storytelling. Some of the information in this playbook stems from my own story about navigating an identity as a First-Gen American Muslim myself, but it’s important to remember everyone’s story is unique. May this knowledge help create a world of Advertising that cares about the people who make up our diverse world.

Best Wishes,

**Zaria Parvez**

*Clark Honors College, University of Oregon  
Spring 2020 Thesis*



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THE BREAKDOWN:

# MUSLIMS IN THE U.S.

THERE ARE **3.45 MILLION**  
MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED STATES.  
THEY HAVE **\$170 BILLION** IN U.S.  
PURCHASING POWER.

## MUSLIMS IN THE U.S. (MA) ARE YOUNG<sup>1</sup>

**38%** of U.S. population

**60%** of MA population

 = adults aged 18 - 39     = total population



**2,001,000**  
BORN ABROAD<sup>1</sup>



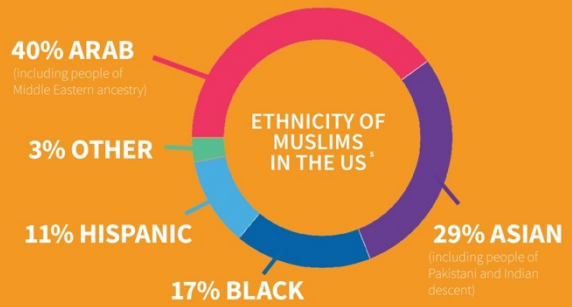
**828,000**  
U.S. NATIVES<sup>1</sup>



**621,000**  
BORN IN THE U.S.  
W/ IMMIGRANT  
PARENTS  
(FIRST-GENERATION)<sup>1</sup>

1

No single country accounts for more than 15% of adult Muslim immigrants to the United States (15% are from Pakistan), meaning **Muslims in America are incredibly racially and ethnically diverse** - more than any other demographic in the United States.

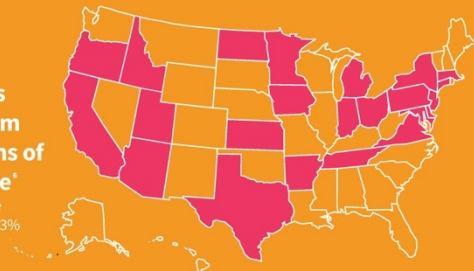


**92%** of U.S. based Muslims say that religion is very important to them\*  
**82%** are U.S. citizens\*



**9 in 10** Muslims in America either completely or mostly agree with the statement "I am American."\*

**U.S. States with Muslim populations of 1% or more\***  
 New Jersey is the most dense with 3%



WHO ARE THEY?

## THE FIRST GENERATION MUSLIM

### **FIRST-GENERATION MUSLIM (def):**

A Muslim born in the United States whose parents immigrated from another country. This playbook will focus on ages 16-25 who are in the millennial or gen-Z demographic.

### **A GLIMPSE**

Spanning various ethnicities and with First-Gen Muslims being first-generation Americans, they often are balancing their faith, culture and American identity. The different hats they wear leads to a complex sense of self, with each aspect of their identity playing into who they are and what they value.

As Islam plays a large role in many of their lives, purchasing decisions are constantly impacted by their Islamic values. Rather than being just a religion, Islam is often a way of life. For example, many First-Generation Muslims eat only halal meat, avoid alcohol, and adhere to modest fashion.

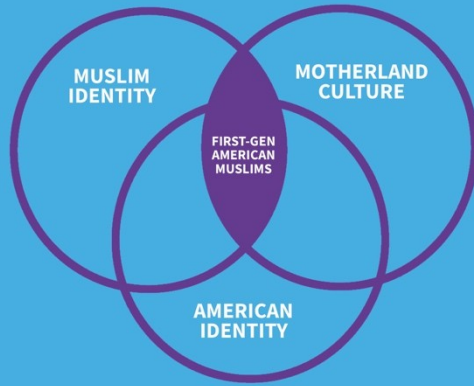
However, it's also important to recognize that not all First-Generation Muslims are strict followers of the faith. Rather, Islam can be more of a cultural aspect that was passed down through their parents. So, in turn, many may drink, eat pork and dress like any other American would. However, Islam is still a crucial part to their identity even if they don't follow all the so-called "rules." This tension brings multiple layers to who they are that moves beyond common assumptions and stereotypes. This space that First-Generation American Muslims tread through is very unique and difficult to understand at the surface with the Western gaze. Many brands have failed to engage in a way that resonates with this demographic because of the complexity surrounding their identities.

Although there may be a vast ethnicity difference between First-Gen Muslims, solely being Muslim and understanding the expectations of the religion is often a unifier.

3



Even though there are varying degrees of religiosity in First-Generation American Muslims, their identity is actually pulled between three main categories that don't always necessarily agree with each other.



## MOTHERLAND CULTURE

Because their parents are immigrants, First-Gen Muslims are raised in multicultural households. Each culture has a unique set of customs, standards and expectations. It's common for their parents to hold on tight to their motherland and enforce it on their children out of fear of losing their identity with immigration. Many parents have conflicting feelings of rejection of their own culture, so when pushing it strongly on their children, it's often a psychological compensation for guilt of leaving their family and life behind.

## MUSLIM IDENTITY

First-Gen Muslims are raised in the disciplined faith of Islam. With prayers 5 times a day, strong restrictions on drinking and drugs, prohibition of dating and required modest clothing for women - Islam isn't always the easiest religion to follow in America. Many try to maneuver or play a game of give and take to see how their Muslim identity manifests in day to day life.

## AMERICAN IDENTITY

If handling a foreign culture and a minority religion wasn't enough, many First-Gen Muslims get stuck with their American identities. Being born and raised in America, they see themselves as American. However, other American peers don't necessarily process them as "full" Americans. Additionally, mainstream American culture has many contradictory components that don't mesh well with First-Gen Muslim's motherland culture and Muslim identity. These conflict points pose identity issues where First-Gen Muslims are being pulled in opposing directions. To make one part of you happy, you have to let another down.



## THE STAGES OF ACCEPTANCE

First-Gen Muslims in America, similar to any First-Generation American face conflicting identities. However, an added layer of religious expectations from a faith that fundamentally conflicts with mainstream culture leads to these stages. Of course, everyone has their own unique journey with Islam and culture and each stage may have less or more of an extent, but these stages are common amongst many.

### 1. Blind Acceptance of Faith and Culture.

First-Gen Muslims are born and raised with Islam as a north star. Each family has varying degrees of religiosity, but the fundamental values of Islam ring true throughout their childhood. They follow their parents and do as told - that's all they know.

### 2. Questioning of Faith and Culture.

As they get older, say 13 or 14, many First-Gen Muslims start to realize they aren't similar to their peers. They have different cultural practices, there's some activities they can't participate in, specific food they can't eat (pork) or because they eat halal, and clothes they can't wear. Many start to think, "Why me?", "Why does Islam require this of me?", "Why can't I just do what the other kids do?" This process of asking "Why" isn't always well-received in the community, but is starting to be seen as less taboo. When they're stopped from questioning and met with "Because I said so", they become turned off to the faith. However, if given the right to question, many refrain from rebelling.

### 3. Testing the Waters of Faith and Culture.

Once in high school, many First-Gen Muslims start to experience a sense of freedom and individualism. Very few relate to their motherland culture, Islam or the values of their parents. They start to engage in forbidden activities that are seen as normal to other American teenagers. Many date, girls may wear clothes that don't follow Islamic guidelines, many have their first sip of alcohol. Because they still live under their parents's roof, they resort to hiding parts of their lives. A strong interdependency on other First-Gen Muslim peers arises.



### 4. Rejection of Faith.

Often, once in college, with complete independence - few stick to the traditional way they were raised. For some this means completely turning against all religious values and cultural standards. They push the boundaries because they're surrounded by peers who often normalize the forbidden. No longer is there a looming watch over where you go, who you hang out with or what you do.

### 5. Re-acceptance of Faith with adaptations.

After years of questioning and rejecting, many start to re-discover Islam and their culture. They find parts they want to hold on to and others they want to let go of. In a way, Islam has been transformed in a new light by First-Gen Americans that is different from the common archaic ways of faith found in their parents.



Man, what it comes down to with a lot of our 'rebellious' phases is that we **just want to explore and see what it's all about**. A common misconception is that we're trying to anger our parents and hurt them. Yes, sometimes, we do resent them. But, other times, it's **just finding out for ourselves what works and what doesn't** as Muslims in America with all our moving parts.



- First-Gen American Muslim, 19'

## A SENSE OF SOLIDARITY

One of the beautiful things about being a First-Gen Muslim in America is that even though they're a minority, they're deeply bonded to other First-Gen Muslims who've gone through similar life experiences. Often, these are the children of their parents's friends or people they've met at the mosque.

As First-Gen American Muslims navigate the different Stages of Acceptance, they create a bond with each other. When there are topics that they can't discuss with their parents because it may be seen as taboo, they discuss amongst themselves. In a way, they helped raise each other by solving common dilemmas they face because of their identities. This interconnectedness often creates a deep bond that's a staple to the life experiences of most First-Gen Muslims.

# أمة

“ONE NATION”



## THE UMMAH

Ummah is loosely translated in English to mean "nation". However, in Islam, this does not mean people share a common ancestry or geographical location - rather it's defined as an Islamic community. The Muslim Ummah includes people of all backgrounds, ancestry, and race. Any Muslim is part of the Ummah. Simply put, in Islam there is a strong emphasis on the betterment of community - not just the individual. In America, this sense of community between Muslims is amplified because of their minority status. It's the reason why if you're an American Muslim and you see a hijabi at Costco, you'll be sure to smile, nod and may even say "Salam."

## MOSQUES

Mosques hold a special significance in Islam, but a particular importance to First-Gen Muslims in America. Unlike in Muslim majority countries, for American Muslims their local mosque is their main connection to the Ummah and their faith. Beyond just being a place to perform the 5 daily prayers, the mosque is a safe space to not feel like an outsider. Many create long lasting friendships at the mosque. Often times, many first-Gen Muslims grew up with others attending their mosque and share in similar life experiences of being a minority. Mosques are tangible manifestations of being part of the Ummah as many have a wide array of worshippers with various nationalities.



***You are the best community (Ummah) raised up for (the benefit of) humanity; enjoying what is right and forbidding what is wrong and believing in God...***

**Quran 3:110<sup>8</sup>**



## E-UMMAH<sup>9</sup>

Today, with First-Gen American Muslims, the internet has had an extremely large impact on the global Muslim community. Creating avenues of connection never seen before, many First-Gen Muslims interact with other Muslims who have shared experiences. Social media and online platforms have become avenues for First-Gen American Muslims to discuss taboo topics they face in their day to day life that they otherwise couldn't with their parents. They can explore hard topics without the fear of judgement or rejection from their communities.

Imams and scholars with large followings from First-Gen Muslims often tweet bite-sized religious teachings that have made them influencers in their own right. Some include Yasir Qadhi and Omar Suleiman. The E-Ummah extends into other domains including: modest fashion, parenting, cooking and Islamic tips and tricks.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### IDENTIFYING AS A MUSLIM FUNCTIONS AS STRONGLY AS AN ETHNIC IDENTITY.



Although this may ring true to different religions, Islam is still special in this aspect because the “one-ness” is a core part of the faith. In America, with Muslims being a minority, the Muslim Ummah holds a deeper meaning. A Muslim American Somali would likely relate more to a Muslim American Arab than a non-Muslim Somali. This kinship between other Muslims and their experiences creates a tight-knit community that is starting to extend beyond geographics and now over the internet.

### MOSQUES IN AMERICA ARE MORE THAN A PLACE OF WORSHIP.



The main purpose of a mosque is to provide a space for communal prayer, 5 times a day. However, in America it has become a place to build friendships, play soccer in the lawn with other Muslim kids, learn about faith in Sunday School and host community events. The mosque has become the heartbeat of the community for Muslims in America. Understanding the pivotal role the mosque holds can be a great opportunity when referring to the ummah.



# رمضان

“RAMADAN”



## RAMADAN

The most sacred month of the Islamic calendar, Ramadan is a special time for Muslims globally. Muslims believe that during Ramadan the holy **Quran** was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). Based off of the lunar calendar, the start date changes every year. From sunrise to sunset, Muslims abstain from food and drink. Yes, even water. For Muslims, fasting is an opportunity to gain **taqwa**, a deep consciousness of God.

**80%** of First-Gen Muslims say they fast during Ramadan - indicating almost no difference between non-U.S. Muslims."

Many First-Gen Muslims of all religious levels participate in Ramadan to some extent. Even if other times of the year they struggle, Ramadan is a chance to rekindle their faith. During this time, most continue their day to day life in America including going to school/work, studying for tests and hanging out with friends. Ramadan brain - where your head can't think straight because you're hungry - is very real.

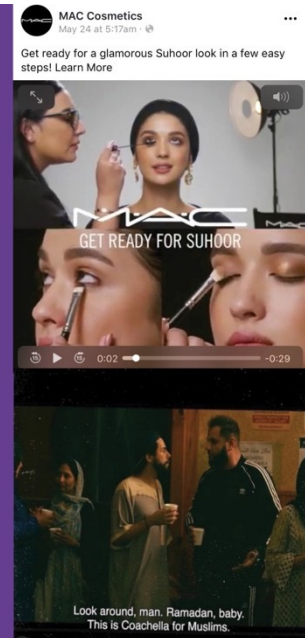
11

## SUHOOR

**Suhoor** is the morning meal before sunrise to start the fast. Most people roll out of bed and are half asleep trying to get their last bite of food. So, when MAC released an advertisement for a full Suhoor glam look," you can only imagine the outrage it recieved for how tone deaf it was.

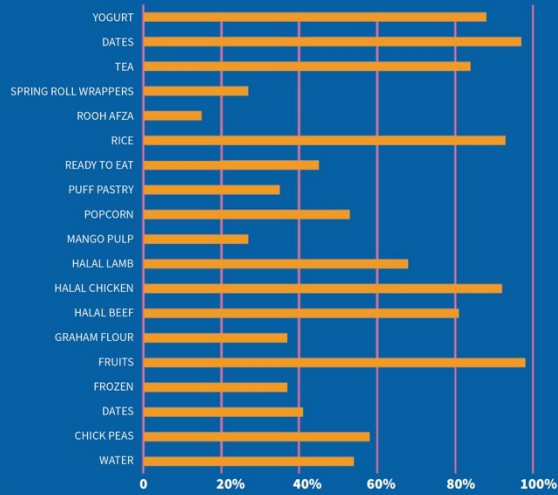
## IFTAAR

**Iftaar** is the meal after sunset - when it is finally time to eat. Growing up in multicultural households, many First-Gen Muslims enjoy large ethnic feasts that their parents save only for Ramadan. Many also break fasts with their communities at their local mosque. Breaking bread together is a central aspect of Ramadan. In the Hulu TV show, **Ramy**, Ramy and his friend break their fast at their mosque in New Jersey.





## MOST PURCHASED FOOD DURING RAMADAN



In a 9 question survey about food spending habits, respondents made up a variety of ethnicities. 60% were South Asian, 12% were Middle Eastern/North African, 12% were East Asian, 6% were Caucasian, and 3% were European. All respondents were from Chicago, a large hub for American Muslims. Even though this sample may not be representative of all American Muslims, it gives a good snapshot of common foods purchased.<sup>16</sup>

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## OPPORTUNITIES

### UNDERSTAND THE SPIRIT OF RAMADAN.



Because Ramadan is about God consciousness and spending energy toward building faith, promoting mass consumption isn't the way to go. Instead, creating thoughtful "Ramadan Mubarak" or "Ramadan Kareem" advertisements demonstrate an acknowledgement for this high holy month and keeps brands top of mind in a non-intrusive way. Hallmark created "Ramadan Mubarak" cards and Burger King released a simple announcement - all which were greatly appreciated. In 2019, H&M released a Ramadan clothing line that was a massive success.

### OPTIMIZE ON ACTIVE DIGITAL HOURS OF 3 AM - 6 AM.



Data collected by Webspals Inc. found that during Ramadan, e-commerce traffic in the Middle East was up by 230%<sup>27</sup> with the highest increase in website traffic of 200% at 3 AM<sup>28</sup>. This can be extremely indicative of similar patterns for American First-Gen Muslims who also actively fast during Ramadan. Late afternoon or evenings are no longer prime time.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT THE COMMUNITY.



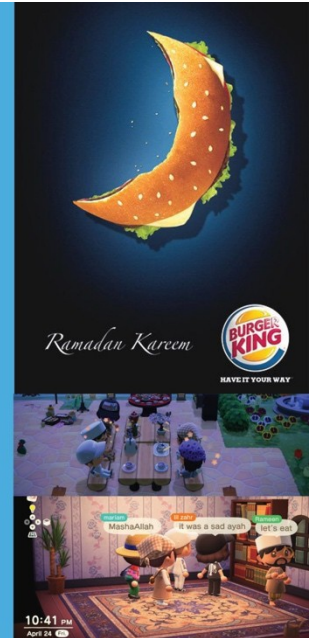
Ramadan just hits different because it's done together. From iftaar with friends and family to the nightly taraweeh prayers - Ramadan encapsulates the earlier explored concept of the Ummah. In America, there's comfort in knowing other Muslims are enduring fasts and finding a closeness to God together. During the era of COVID-19, with social distancing creating severe isolation, Muslims have taken it into their own hands to still break fasts together remotely. Many have turned to Animal Crossing to mimic a sense of community that's integral to Ramadan.

### AVOID STEREOTYPES.



A no-brainer, but needs to be said. First-Gen American Muslims come from pretty diverse backgrounds, but they are more likely than their immigrants parents to say they have a lot in common with most Americans (68% to 54%, respectively)<sup>29</sup>. That being said, lanterns and camels are a no-go. One First-Gen American Muslim said: "I'm from Los Angeles. I've never celebrated Ramadan in the desert with camels."<sup>30</sup>

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# طعام

“FOOD”



Muslims living in the United States are estimated to **spend up to \$20 billion on food and beverage products annually.**<sup>12</sup> They also spend an average of **\$200 a week on groceries** for a family of 4. That's just **over 3% of total U.S. grocery stores sales.**<sup>13</sup>

## HALAL FOOD

Many Muslims in the U.S. only eat Halal meat which is slaughtered and prepared according to Islamic law. Typically, it is organic and provides minimal pain to the animal being butchered. More of a gray area, there are certified Islamic scholars on both ends of the debate on whether it is required or not. Unanimously, Muslims are allowed to eat any seafood. It's also important to note that some Muslims in the U.S. only use Halal meat for cooking, but eat non-Halal at restaurants as access to halal meat can be very scarce. Regardless, it is forbidden for Muslims to eat pork, roadkill or the blood of other animals.

Additionally, they can not drink or eat anything containing alcohol. Consequentially, many Muslims flock to soft beverages and juices to satisfy cravings for more flavorful drinks.

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## RESTAURANTS AND GROCERY

With rising popularity, halal meat is more pervasive in grocery stores and restaurants than one might imagine. According to Nielsen, recent sales for halal foods in the U.S. reached \$1.9 billion.<sup>14</sup> Retailers such as Costco and Whole Foods have started to include halal frozen food lines. To accommodate dietary restrictions, there a plethora of halal restaurants in major hubs in the U.S. with high Muslim populations such as Dearborn, Houston, Chicago and New York. Other smaller cities have local halal restaurants, however many are inconsistent and are notorious for not providing quality taste. In more Muslim saturated areas, such as Dearborn, franchises such as McDonalds and Popeyes serve halal chicken in their resaturants. Another Muslim favorite is Creekstone Beef - a gourmet halal steak provider that many quality restaurants use in America. Although, it has gained popularity in America, quality halal food isn't easy to come by. One of the many reasons is the higher cost of vigilance and seperation between halal and non-halal meat. For some retailers, the stigma attached to the known halal symbol is too much to overcome.

## THE SYMBOL NEEDS A REBRAND

Even with such high demand, the halal logo placed on food is well, ugly. And the package design doesn't help much either. An opportunity for frozen food brands that are already providing halal food is to package goods in a way that looks sleek, apetizing and delicious. Nielsen shows that branded package redesigns generate an average 5.5 percent<sup>14</sup> increase in forecasted sales revenues over existing designs. Muslims are like any other consumer - they'll be more enticed to buy halal products with good branding aesthetics.



## OPPORTUNITIES

### IF YOUR RESTAURANT OFFERS HALAL, MARKET IT. ETHICAL PRACTICES OF PREPARING HALAL MEAT CAN ALSO APPEAL TO A BROADER AUDIENCE.



As meat providers, such as Creekstone Beef, are becoming more popular it is to the benefit of restaurants to market their offering of halal meat options. An increased popularity of food alternatives - like the Impossible Burger - have showed increase ROI. Additionally, there are also food chains such as Elevation Burger that markets using 100% organic grassfed beef. It is a known fact within the Muslim community that it is also halal. Elevation Burger found a perfect way to reach a wide demographic while also taking in account Muslims.

### NEVER FORGET THE IMPACT OF PACKAGE DESIGN.



Sleek, elegant and consistent package design has become an industry standard for attracting Millennial buyers. Halal food boxes haven't seen a rebrand since the 90's. By sprucing up the design of different frozen halal food offerings, companies can expect a strong increase in buyership and loyalty from a large base of American Muslims seeking halal options.

### OPTIMIZE FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES.



There are many hotspots of Muslims in America where their communities are pervasive. Many brands have the opportunities to alter their store inventory to meet needs to Muslims. Whether that's offering halal meat options, special spices that are used for many traditional dishes or even halal frozen food - there's a great chance to be in touch with their Muslim community and increase sales.

# المواعدة والزواج

“DATING AND MARRIAGE”





## DATING

According to Islamic guidelines, dating is not permitted nor is sexual intercourse before marriage. One step further than other religions, a respectful segregation between man and woman is further emphasized in Islam. Obviously, this becomes tricky territory to follow for First-Gen Americans. Simply put, segregation rarely occurs in America, nor do First-Gen Muslims care to that extent. However, many of their parents are hesitant about them having opposite-gender friends in fear of it turning into dating. Because of this, something seemingly normal like attending Prom with a date or even just going to the dance in general can be an uphill battle for First-Gen Muslims with their immigrant parents. With many parents coming from Muslim majority countries, they've never had to deal with the dating and sexuality pushed onto their children as it is in America. On one hand, many adhere to the non-dating rule, but many venture and date anyway. If they do, it's often done in secret without their parents' knowledge. Again, this is a time where their other First-Gen Muslim friends cover for them or become a resource in navigating relationships.

## MARRIAGE

The official Islamic marriage ceremony is called the nikkah. This legal contract between man and woman, is acceptance of marriage at free will. The ceremony requires either a verbal or written agreement with the presence of two male witnesses. Additionally, an agreed upon monetary amount, called *mahr*, is paid by the groom to the bride at the time of marriage. This act establishes the bride's financial independence from the groom as no one can touch this money other than the bride.

Marriage is viewed as a blessing in Islam and is even famously quoted as "being half of your deen (faith)." For women, it is required that they marry a Muslim man. For men, it is heavily encouraged that they marry a Muslim woman, but they are allowed to marry a woman from any Abrahamic faith. Living in America's melting pot, many First-Gen Muslims find themselves wanting to marry people outside of the faith - leading to a strong conflict with families. Because of the close-knit family dynamic of immigrant households, this is a heavy burden on First-Gen Muslims. Often, this leads to ending the relationship because of a future life filled with unacceptance and disrespect. However, some do persevere and navigate the situation. This demonstrates the evolving faith by First-Gen American Muslims.

An added cultural component that many First-Gen Muslims face, especially those of South Asian descent, is their suited partner must be of the same culture. This is not an Islamic requirement at all, but is another source of conflict with immigrant parents.

*When I told my Pakistani parents I wanted to marry my now-husband who's a practicing Arab Muslim, they wouldn't support it. I didn't want to get married without them, so it took 2 years for them to agree.*

- First-Gen American Muslim, 23<sup>18</sup>

The main reason why many immigrant parents struggle with biracial Islamic marriages is because of how ingrained their motherland culture was when raising their children. Because in many Muslim ethnic communities face different cultural standards, parents believe that marrying within the culture will make family adaptability and life easier.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY IN FIRST-GEN MUSLIM FAMILIES HOLDS GREAT VALUE - EVEN WITH THOSE WHO AREN'T RELIGIOUS.



Because of the close bond between parents and children since childhood and the importance of the family unit, a strong sense of obedience and obligation to parents is held by Muslim children. Although this may be more indicative of culture, Islam itself has a strong stance on maintaining family ties. This engrained way of thinking makes it difficult for First-Gen Muslims to deviate from their parents's wishes - especially when it comes to marriage. Many parents of First-Gen Muslims have the "tough love" approach that doesn't easily accept their children's happiness as a viable reason to marry their spouse. If they choose to not marry within Islam or for some, within the culture, there is strong emotional burden the child carries. Because of this mental strain, not following their parent's standards is rarely done as they may be deemed an outcast.

### EXPERIENCES WITH THE MODERN CONCEPT OF DATING & MARRIAGE IN AMERICA CLASH WITH ISLAMIC STANDARDS.



Not every marriage for First-Gen Muslims are arranged - rather First-Gen Muslims work with the marriage standards placed upon them to find an equivalent to "dating." While some do date in the same sense of other Americans, some only date other Muslims of their culture with an intention of marriage. Navigating different boundaries can be a space of struggle for modern day Muslims, requiring brands to understand these nuances if deciding to play in this field.

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# موضه

“FASHION AND BEAUTY”



## MODEST FASHION

In Islam, it is mandated for Muslim women to wear non-body conforming clothes, cover their arms and legs and to wear the hijab - a head covering worn by women in public. Although the hijab is required by Islam, many women may never reach this point in their faith or otherwise take a while to get there. However, broadly, it is apparent that Islam's rules on modesty strongly contradict common apparel found in America. But, this doesn't stop First-Gen Muslims from creating their own way of merging identities. Many First-Gen Muslims have become crafty with following Islamic guidelines but still remaining fashionable. Some known fashion bloggers and models are Saufeeya Goodson, Heba Jalloul and Dina Torkia. From YouTube channels to quick Instagram tutorials on styling hijabs, many bloggers have entered the scene.

## HALAL-IFYING

As mentioned in the food and drink section, halal translates to "permissible" in English. A common phrase used by First-Gen Muslims, halal-ifying refers to making different clothes fit Islamic guidelines. For example, since women can't show their arms, halal-ifying a sleeveless dress would be wearing a long sleeve shirt underneath. Although this may seem like a fashion faux pas, many First-Gen Muslims have risen as modest fashion influencers. They show that you don't have to compromise your faith and beliefs to still be fashionable in America. Again, it's important to note that not all identifying Muslims follow these rules and there's a spectrum of religiosity.

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*There is a misconception that there is a religious prohibition on beauty, when in fact Islam encourages good grooming and aesthetics. If anything, beauty is a responsibility as long as it is practiced within the bounds of modesty.*

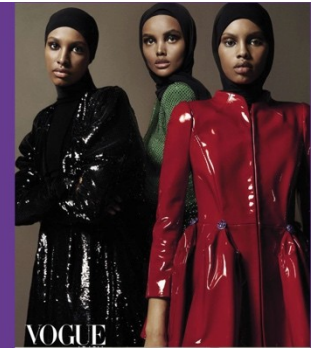
- Generation M, p.161<sup>8</sup>



## MAKEUP

Another market Muslim women are championing is makeup. In Islam, makeup is actually encouraged if a woman chooses to partake. Many Muslim beauty influencers create looks that always intersect with their culture as well. Huda Beauty, started by a First-Gen Muslim American woman named Huda Khatan, is an internationally known staple in the beauty world. Worth \$610 million, Khatan paved ways in the beauty world.<sup>28</sup>

**Global Muslim spend on apparel is predicted to be \$327 billion by the end of 2020.<sup>7</sup>**



## MAJOR BRANDS

Brands such as Zara, Nike, H&M, Gap and Macy's have all seen opportunities to join in the modest fashion movement and attract Muslim consumers. In 2016, Gap included a back-to-school hijab that received positive feedback from the Muslim community, but also a lot of Islamophobic commentary. Other major brands experience similar outcomes, thus raising the question of brand values and the potential of sacrificing customer bases for more inclusive content. An important thing to note is that many added fashion lines from these brands included items that would be suited to Muslim women but also a wider audience with clothes such as long skirts, long dresses or even different scarves.

Additionally, Macy's is a known carrier of Inglot nail polish - a water permeable nail polish. According to Islamic ablution rules before prayer, water needs to touch the nails for the prayer to be valid, which isn't possible with normal nail polish. In America, Macy's was one of the first brands to carry Inglot causing many Muslims to flock to their stores to purchase.

## FAITH AND MODERNITY

First-Gen American Muslims are using fashion and beauty to combat stigma. They aren't compromising for the meek Muslim woman stereotype - they're owning the conversation. No longer are they accepting that being a Muslim woman translates to an uneducated and submissive individual. They're coming in with bold colors, points of view and creating their own narrative. In fact, they are proving that the seemingly contradictory concept of faith and modernity can actually go hand in hand. You can stay true to your faith values, but also bring modern trends into who you are and how you navigate the world.

*Many people think women in Islam don't speak up and we all wear black. But we're women, we like colors, we like makeup, we like wearing bright things, and shoes and heels and everything that women like. This is our religion, but we're just like regular people.*

- Generation M, p.155<sup>9</sup>



## OPPORTUNITIES

### PRACTICING ISLAM ≠ UNFASHIONABLE



A large misconception in the fashion world is that being modest restricts one's ability to be fashionable and take part in the latest trends. Although at times it may be more difficult, it is not impossible. In particular, First-Gen American Muslim men and women both are redefining the fashion industry and bringing their own flare.

### BRING ON THE COLOR



Muslim women aren't confined to wearing only black. The image of Muslim women perpetrated by the media entails a somber woman wearing all black and repressed at home. In fact, maintaining personal care and appearance is a large component of Islam. This means brands should promote modest fashion in all colors, prints and styles - Muslims love to spruce it up a little, too!

### CONSIDER THE MODEST INFLUENCER



Muslim fashion and beauty influencers are no longer niche - they're starting to gain momentum with world recognized brands. Adding a touch of modesty to their look, Muslim fashion influencers have a strong following of First-Gen Muslims who are ready and willing to invest in brands that cater to their needs. With a strong emphasis on makeup as well through culture, First-Gen Muslim Americans are creating an inclusive, creative and talented beauty industry.

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# نفوذ

“INFLUENTIAL FIGURES”



## PAVING A PATH

These changemakers are First-Gen Muslims in America reclaiming the mainstream narrative. From sports, journalism, media and film each are role models that show Muslims deserve to be part of the cultural conversation. Beyond just being a part of the conversation, they can own the conversation.

Each has made a name for themselves in their respective fields. Having Muslim influential figures is often a sign of hope that you can make it in America regardless of race, religion, class or creed. What's special about their work and what they do is it extends beyond just doing tokenized "diversity" work. They have opinions on politics, global issues, economics and mass media.



### IBTIHAJ MOHAMMAD

An Olympic gold medalist, Mohammad paved ways for Muslim women in competitive sports. A fully practicing Muslim, she was the first Muslim American woman to wear a hijab while competing for the United States. Breaking into the world of sport, Mohammad has become an inspiration for aspiring Muslim athletes.



### AHMED ALI AKBAR

Based in New York, Akbar wrote and hosted a podcast for BuzzFeed called "See Something Say Something" centered around the First-Gen Muslim American experience. Covering topics ranging from funny taboos to serious conversations about discrimination - Akbar helps increase positive representation for Muslims in media. Focusing on the South Asian Muslim experience in America, Akbar provides creative insight for non-Muslims and Muslims alike.



### NOOR TAGOURI

A journalist, activist and now social media influencer, Tagouri has gained international praise for her innovative storytelling approach. Host of "Sold in America: Inside Our Nation's Sex Trade" Tagouri unpacks the grim reality of human trafficking in the United States. Tagouri is a First-Gen Muslim navigating uncharted territory for Muslims in America being one of the very few mainstream journalists.



### DALIA MOGAHED

Known for her ability to bring hard data to the conversation about American Muslims, Mogahed is a well-respected Islamic scholar. Raised in the United States, she eloquently bridges the gap for many Muslims navigating Islam in America. Her TED Talk on "What it's like to be a Muslim in America" has been viewed 2.8 million times.<sup>22</sup>



### HASAN MINHAJ

Famously known for his time on "The Daily Show" and now his Netflix original show "Patriot Act", Minhaj uses comedy to connect about pertinent issues in culture. Not one to shy away from his identity as a Pakistani First-Gen Muslim, his comedy often alludes to the tricky dynamics of the identities mentioned earlier.



### G. WILLOW WILSON

A comic-writer, Wilson introduced Ms. Marvel to Marvel Comics. The main character, Kamala Khan is a First-Generation Muslim living in New Jersey. Wilson beautifully depicts different obstacles Kamala Khan faces with her identities on top of being, well, a superhero. This revolutionary comic increased representation for First-Gen Muslims in a way never done before.



# نقطة مرهمة

“KEY TAKEAWAYS”



**1** Islam in America is heavily associated with different motherland cultures. The lines between cultural and religious expectations are often blurry for many First-Gen American Muslims.

**2** The key to understanding First-Gen American Muslims in the United States is breaking down the nuances and limits they test within their faith.

**3** A fundamental truth of First-Gen American Muslims is they see themselves as American first - interested in the same things as their peers - but, with added layers to their identity.

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**4** Brands that seek to engage with First-Gen Muslims in America need to tap into the community value. This is a very different approach than the known individualistic spirit of American consumerism.

**5** Many First-Gen Muslims see themselves as masters of finesse. They hop between identities, understand different expectations and still survive - and even thrive - in America.

**6** Albeit obvious, engaging with First-Gen Muslims means understanding their story on a concrete level. The most impactful, accurate and somewhat easy way to do this is to create spaces for Muslims in advertising agencies and marketing teams.

**PART TWO:**  
A LOOK INTO THE  
ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

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# تغيير

## “CHANGE”

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So far, we've taken a closer look at the various identities of First-Generation Muslim Americans. We've explored how their identities diverge, intersect and become new. If it was all to be defined in one word, I'm sure "confusion" would suffice. But, it's even more true that despite the confusion, their superpower is grit. Facing challenges day in and day out, they are a force because they've learned adaptability and resilience. The empathy they have can't be taught - it's simply part of their ability to understand the details of multiple cultures. In this next portion, we will peek into the Advertising industry and how Muslims are championing change for creative work.

## REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING

**40%**

of the U.S. population are multicultural consumers.<sup>37</sup>

**BUT ONLY**

**5.2%**

of total ad and marketing spend is multicultural media spend.<sup>37</sup>

Combing through 250 ads from 50 of the country's top media spenders, Heat discovered that:

**92%**

of the companies surveyed portrayed an ad with a person of color in a primary role, but less than half were in positions of power.<sup>37</sup>

One study found that 49% of Millennial parents were more likely to talk to friends about products that include more diverse family types in their ads and – perhaps most importantly to brands – 41% are more likely to purchase those products.<sup>37</sup>

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## WHAT AGENCIES SHOULD DO:

In 2016, 72&Sunny created a diversity playbook for members of the Advertising industry to understand tangible ways to create a space for diversity in the workforce. Here are two of the strategies they came up with.<sup>38</sup>

**1 MAKE THE DIVERSITY CONVERSATION ABOUT INNOVATION AND FUTURE-PROOFING THE COMPANY.** ”

**2 RECRUITING DIVERSE TALENT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL - IT'S NOT JUST A LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT.** ”

“ *Instead of leading with diversity in quantity, advertisers should lead with diversity in quality.* ”

- Lindsey Wade, Strategist @ Heat <sup>37</sup>

## THE INDUSTRY BREAKDOWN

	Total	Senior Level	Mid Level/ Upper End	Mid Level/ Lower End	Entry-Level Professional	Admin/Cleri- cal/Support
African- American/ Black	7%	4%	5%	6%	9%	9%
Asian	11%	9%	12%	11%	10%	7%
Hispanic/ Latino	7%	9%	7%	7%	7%	10%
White (Non- Hispanic)	69%	72%	68%	70%	68%	68%
Multi- racial	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	3%
Other/ Not Listed	4%	5%	6%	4%	4%	3%

☞ *It's also not enough to just hire employees from more diverse backgrounds – agencies must empower those employees to have voices.* ☞

- Lindsey Wade, Strategist @ Heat<sup>17</sup>

# MUSLIMS IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

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## HIYAM KHALIFA

Associate Director of Talent Management  
Havas Media™

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Born and raised in New York City, Khalifa grew up in a Sudanese Muslim household and identifies as an Arab Muslim woman. As the youngest of 6 children she developed a more American mentality than any of her other siblings. For example, she was the only one of her siblings to finesse going to prom - even though her parents weren't okay with it. Currently, her side hustles include being a modest fashion influencer. Something she's learned to understand as she's grown older is "separating what Islam actually asks of you and what culture is." Recently married, she explains how in Islam that in order to be married all you need is the nikkah and witnesses to see that you're married. Later, a small dinner is all that's necessary. But, when it comes to culture, and Sudan in particular, it's a 4 day ceremony where you have to invite everybody. This is just one example of where culture and religion intersect and navigating this space with an added American identity has proved to be a challenge for Khalifa.

Regardless, she believes she's developed the skill sets to navigate these situations and has translated it into her work in an advertising agency. Being one of the few Muslims at Havas in the New York office, Khalifa very quickly knew a large objective for her was a focus on diversity. As an HR person it is always top of mind, but there's other things that take priority. But, being in her position, she felt empowered to push initiatives and respected enough to be listened to. There's been people at the company that have come up to her and said "Hey, I have this religious obligation" and instead of assuming the worst that they'll never get their work done, she understands the importance of accommodation.

In the advertising industry, Hiyam Khalifa brings compassion because of her life experiences. She's open and willing to help empower people of color and those of multicultural backgrounds to achieve their best and make them feel heard.



## AMERA LULU

Art Director  
Red Fuse Communications

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Self-identifying as an Arab American Muslim New Yorker native with a creative soul, Lulu is proud of being a practicing Muslim in the Advertising industry. To her, being a Muslim in America means having a backbone of beliefs that guide her life between right and wrong. In her childhood, she always knew Islam was for her, but she struggled more with her culture. Finding herself as a person by doing things that weren't normal to her family was a difficult space for her to navigate. As a hijabi, many can easily identify her as a Muslim, but there are many layers to who she is. Lulu says, "I always push the edge with how I dress. I don't really dress how Muslim girls in my community are told to dress. I believe in pushing the bar and being okay with myself."

For Lulu, her identity always intersects into her work. Heavily cognizant about her faith and Islamic principles she knows, she applies them to her work to make it more human. For example, she worked on Gerber Babyfoods and the concept of motherhood. Knowing the special place Islam holds for mothers, she was able to make her work real and approachable to anyone who highly values their mother.

Lulu recognizes that being a Muslim in New York isn't a big thing, but being a Muslim in the advertising industry is really big. Lulu says, "I'm the only person I've seen wearing a hijab in the advertising industry. I don't know anyone at work who is Muslim or at least identifies as a Muslim."

She finds herself educating people around her about what it means to be Muslim and at times it's exhausting - but more than that, it can be rewarding. At least at her work, her colleagues know when Ramadan is and when she needs to take off to fast. To Lulu, those were people who would never have been exposed to Islam. From initially feeling like a burden for her beliefs and having to always know how to represent Islam, Lulu now feels sharing her Muslim background is a privilege because of the ripple effect of it helping millions of consumers.





## SABENA KHAN

Associate Media Director  
Mindshare <sup>21</sup>

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Khan describes herself as a South Asian woman of Muslim origins. To her, being South Asian and Muslim are the two identities that she holds close, but it wasn't until high school that Khan learned that culture and religion are two separate things. Growing up, her parents would force her to wear shalwar kameez, modest Pakistani traditional wear, to school up until high school. However, she put her foot down when she realized she could still wear modest American clothes - modesty was the essence of Islam, not cultural clothing.

To Khan, simply, it's a blessing being a Muslim in the Advertising industry. She believes it's a platform to educate people who would never have thought twice about Islamic standards. She does recognize there's a double standard for Muslims, but she chooses to be opportunistic about it. But, it does get taxing. Sometimes she feels she has to pledge who she is to America at all times and constantly express, "I love America, too!"

Being in a predominantly white work space, there's times where what she's saying isn't feeling validated or regarded. For example, company-wide, they received an email about being mindful of those fasting on the day of Yom Kippur - which to Khan was awesome. But, it made her wonder, "What about when Muslims are fasting for a month during Ramadan?" Simply put, there is much more education that needs to be spread around and the only way to do so is if there are more Muslim voices in these spaces.

Although meshing her identities was difficult, Khan decided that her differences are what set her apart and helped her land her first job in the industry. Even though she finds herself navigating a space where there aren't many people like her, Khan finds comfort in knowing she's a trailblazer and opening doors to the next generation of Muslims.

# شكرا جزيلًا

“THANK YOU”

In this report, you found a glimpse at a deeper understanding of Muslims in America. Focusing on First-Generation American Muslims, we found what makes them unique as a demographic and how they contribute to our nation’s rich diversity. A sad reality of privilege is there’s no requirement to step outside of what you know. But, by reading this report, you’ve taken one step forward in empathy and building bridges with an impactful minority community. So, to that end, thank you.

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