

Abstract

Covered? Unraveling Damaging News about Islamic Fashion and How Journalists Can Write More Responsibly

During Fall 2012, I analyzed news stories about Islamic fashion. I asked how news media conceptualize the self and the *other* in news about Islamic fashion, and what textual devices they use to legitimate or de-legitimate Muslim interests. I applied the theory of the social construction of reality to my analysis. Thirty stories from media outlets around the world comprised the sample. Half of the stories were from media based in countries where Islam is a predominant religion. The other half were from media based in non-Muslim-majority countries. I conducted a textual analysis of the stories.

Media on each side of the sample construct portray the self and the other using a range of techniques. The same is true for the legitimation and de-legitimation of actors, ideologies, clothing styles and lifestyles. Media based in non-Muslim-majority countries more frequently use othering and de-legitimizing devices in coverage of Islamic fashion. Media from predominantly Muslim countries present a much more thorough, in-depth body of Islamic fashion coverage. However, their work is not without problematic descriptions and devices. The specific findings in my report shine light on ways that journalists represent Muslim interests in their stories, for better or for worse. Because of the media's potential to shape the way audiences perceive reality, journalists must consider the textual devices they use when reporting on matters of diversity.