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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Portrayal of Muslim's Images in International Newspaper's Blogging Forums and Its Impact on Readers</b>
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### **Abstract**

This study explores the portrayal of Muslim's image in the international newspaper's blogging forums and its impact on readers. The objective prolongs to find out the online interpersonal relations between the individuals of Muslim religion with individuals of other religions and the consequences of propagation of negative Muslim's image in the web blogging. For this purpose, Survey method was used to seek the impact on the targeted readers and Content analysis of the blogs encompassing six bloggers from two leading newspapers' online edition. The study implies Propaganda Model and Agenda Setting Theory by Norm Chomsky (1988) & Max McCombs and Donald Shaw (1968) respectively. The study reveals that propagation of negative Muslim's image is adversely affecting the relations of individuals in online communities and Muslims are deleteriously represented in the web blogs of international newspapers.

**Key words:** Portrayal, Muslims, Blogging Forums

## **Introduction**

This study “portrayal of Muslims in international newspapers’ blogging forums and its impact on readers” aims to explore the treatment of representing the image of Muslim community in international newspapers blogging forums in the recent era of social networking world. In this modern world one cannot negate the worth of the purposes of image. It helps us to judge the people, community, a state or a nation. In this age of information, the language of images has substituted far and wide to the languages of principles. Whereas blogging is the latest form of online interpersonal communication to gain widespread popularity and it is rapidly becoming mainstream media’s attention. The research tends to focus on "heavy-hitting" blogs devoted to politics, social issues and religions and how web blogging is affecting the mindsets of the individuals through recent innovation with the habit of consuming the internet. As it has recently become apparent that vast majority of blogs are written by ordinary people for much smaller audiences, and on largely personal themes.

## **Significance of Study**

The researcher is willing to seek the image of the Muslim world in perspective of social networking, i.e. blogging. Today the world has emerged in a new shape of global world and internet has revolutionary changed the mind-set of the individuals. As Baker and Moore (2008) consider blogging a social weapon. The research was carried out to see the behavioral changes in the bloggers after rejoining the blogs with the interval of 2 months. The psychological relation between bloggers and non-bloggers was carried out with the results of social relations and acquaintance contentment among the bloggers. Their study also recommended that bloggers have significant impacts on community especially in terms of “social support”.

## **Rationale of the Study**

The researcher aims to explore the portrayal of Muslim image in the web blogging forums of international newspapers. Though there has been extensive study both qualitative and quantitative on the blogs but the researcher has selected particular blogs from the international newspapers ‘online editions in order to seek the defiance for the Muslim world in the web blogging under the official forum of the international newspapers. Blogs are said to be the new form of interpersonal communication. Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye (2004) in his study revealed that majority of the internet users showed the survey result in favor of ‘non-traditional media i.e. web blogging than the traditional media i.e. print and broadcast media. Muslim world throughout the world has been discussed under every political and social issue. Muslim image on the other hand is completely dependent on the western media and its writers. Researcher seeks to explore the image of Muslims in the contemporary web blogging in terms of both negative and positive connotations. Web blogging in the field of mass communication is thoroughly related to theory of diffusion of innovation by Evert Rogers. This concept has developed new sociological platforms which allow the channels to have periodical changes in relation to practical field.

## **Objectives of the study**

- To explore the image of Muslims as community in the international blogs
- To find out the connotation of the recent events of Muslim world and its consequences discussed in web blogging.
- To explore the impact of the blogs on both Muslim readers and readers from other religions

## **Literature Review**

Lowrey W., Parrott S. & Meade T. (2011) discuss in their article that when public seems to take more interest in the blogs and bloggers begin to yearn for more heightened publicity, they tend to adopt the organizational way of blogging as in they turn their blogs

into organizations, follow certain policies by any sponsors and also turn their blog into advertising hub. In their study they studied total 151 public issue blogs and most of them demonstrated organizational forms with a set policy and staff. This is the point where their opinion based blog becomes a reporting based blog.

De Zúñiga, H. G. et al. (2011) discusses blogging in his article as a journalistic practice. He states that as the blogging is becoming famous and a part of the online media environment, research on the blogging has highlighted its journalistic aspects to influence readers and create controversies often because of its amalgamation with journalism, because bloggers tend to write often as unlicensed journalists.

Zuckerman, E. (2008) discussed that since the blogs expanded out of US context, bridge bloggers become the center of importance because of their ability to bridge the gap of language and culture online, in his paper, he discussed the complications of calculating the degree to which the blogosphere is categorized by dissimilar language societies and national populations. The researcher employed a qualitative evidence to inspect blogospheres emerging in southern Africa, Asia, Arab-speaking world and elsewhere, and to measure the importance of bridge bloggers in drawing networks among them.

Gill Kirkup 2010 in his paper describes a small-scale study which investigates the role of blogging in professional academic practice in higher education. It draws on interviews with a sample of academics (scholars, researchers and teachers) that have blogs and on the author's own reflections on blogging to investigate the function of blogging in academic practice and its contribution to academic identity. It argues that blogging offers the potential of a new genre of accessible academic production which could contribute to the creation of a new twenty-first century academic identity with more involvement as a public intellectual.

L. Kerawalla . et al. (2008) writes the significances of blogs under their study in which Masters-fellow scholars were taken as population who studied distant learning programme and blogged as part of its curriculum. The study was held in UK's Open University in terms of one the first study of its kind. The study consumed the activities of students in web blogging and the study analyzed through semi structured interviews acknowledged quite a number of factors influencing students' blogging. That included "perceptions of, and need for, an audience; perceptions of, and need for, community; the utility of, and need for comments; presentational style of the blog content; overarching factors related to the technological context; and the pedagogical context of the course".

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010) present in their research study that the basic notion of Social Media is top of the agenda it is a great media for consumption of business as well the research was carried out on the applications profitable like Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Second Life, and Twitter. The study incorporates the newly produced content in form of categories by their characteristics such as blogs and content communities. Cameron, D., Anderson, T. argue that weblogs have been indicated as the "next big thing" in education. Consequently blogging has discrete benefits over more communal negotiated debate in its sustenance of style, rights and uniqueness, and its community nature may exceed the tenacity segments of perceptive occurrence. Moreover it is the lack of security and the existing inadequacies of networking and stringing communications present greater experiments than the more familiar strung conversation or email list. Possibly the blog's utmost comparative benefit is for non- official and wide-open instruction that takes learning afar from the customary progress.

de Zúñiga, H. G (2011) states that web blogging has been reshaped into the permanent social source of information to the readers and community. The study shows the interrelations between journalism and blogging. According to her the propagation of the blogs and high profile controversies are affecting the role of journalism . the study also resulted that bloggers

are more efficient in transmitting information ; highlighting the news happening and writing profiles , thus they are acting more or less like “traditional journalists”.

Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz, L. (2004) states that individuals use blogs as source of catharsis. People blog because they feel contended and their expressions are free of any condition. Bloggers are aware of the global issues more than the normal people. Bloggers write on every topic and they tend to develop an association with their blogs and people commenting on it. The study suggests that the blogosphere management tools and design shall be revisited.

Domingo, D., & Heinonen, A. (2008) argues in favor of the blogging and from the perception of journalism that weblogs can be perceived as a innovative classification of news and current affairs communiqué. By stimulating the orthodox indulgent of journalism, weblogs have restored the opinions that assume a “paradigm shift in journalism in the Internet era”. Adding in the impacts of weblogs on journalism and make it more organized, a “typology of journalistic weblogs” along a variety extending from the minimum to the maximum entrenched in terms of their association to the conventional media.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study implies Propaganda Model and Agenda Setting Theory by Norm Chomsky (1988) & Max McCombs and Donald Shaw (1968) respectively. Propaganda Model relates to it in way that web blogging is another form of interpersonal communication cultivating particular mindset among its users. The stake holders (readers and commenter) are directly influenced with the rhetoric posts of the bloggers religions differences among individuals. The portrayal of Muslims among bloggers is discriminated, biased and shifted more towards negativity which is another form of propaganda against specific religion.

As far as agenda setting is concern the study examines how the bloggers posting under international newspapers pick up a certain issue related to Muslim world, highlight it and distort it as they wish; ignoring their own news which carries negatives aspects.. In World Wide Web systems like the blogosphere, interactions among writer and commenter are articulated through the hyperlink, and a sequence of trainings scrutinize the ‘elite’ bias, or the ‘power-law’ belief of these mounting, open webs where a few sites expertise the popularity of responsiveness (Drezner and Farrell ; Kottke, Shirky, Thompson).

### **Research Methodology**

A mix method research design has been adopted (Survey and Content Analysis) to collect data. The researcher has applied “purposive sampling method” to collect blog posts for content analysis by using the filters of tags, “Islam” and “Muslims”. For survey method, snowball sampling was used for 300 people who read blogs. Positive, Neutral, Negative were taken as Categories for content analysis. The blog post is “Positive” if Muslim image is portrayed significantly, Muslim values are respected, the writings are unbiased and not all Muslims are labeled as terrorists. Neutral if Objectivity, factual, no hard/derogatory words, neither the Muslims are praised nor defamed and Negative if: Language is harsh, defamed, negative connotations, Muslim world is taken as terrorists as whole, heavy criticism on Islam and Islamic rituals/values, writing is biased and negative portrayal of Muslims and Islam.

### **Hypothesis**

- H<sub>1</sub>.** Deleterious Muslim image in web blogging of international newspapers is adversely affecting the online social relations of Muslims with the individuals belonging to other religions.
- H<sub>0</sub>.** Deleterious Muslim image in web blogging of international newspapers is not adversely affecting the online social relations of Muslims with the individuals belonging to other religions.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

To test the hypotheses validity, the researcher applied correlation test. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The p value here is lesser than the significant level which approves the alternative hypothesis and rejects the null hypothesis.

### **Content Analysis of Blog posts of 6 writers, 3 from Reuters and 3 from Huffington Post, Ida Lichter's blog posts in Huffington Post**

Ida Lichter works as a women reformer and writes for Huffington Post. The approach she uses to write on Muslim women is precisely pitiful. According to her Muslim women is oppressed and essential reformations are required for them and for these renewals, they are dependent upon west. The researcher finds that out of 5 blog posts selected through sampling, 3 were totally negative and favored the study whereas 2 fell into the category of neutral. The researcher also finds that Ida Lichter was unable to write any positive or decent writings for Muslim women. The content analysis also shows that the feedback on her articles from the other writers and commenter contained the condemnation towards her writings against Muslim Women image.

### **Fahad Farouqi blog posts in Huffington Post**

Fahad Farouqi who writes as a blogger for Huffington Post under the tag of Islam (on Islamic issues) generally has a fair and unbiased tone for the religion discussed and its people. Out of 5 posts, 3 falls in the positive category while 2 are neutral indicating that none of his blog posts were against Muslims or contained biased and harsh tone for Muslim world.

### **David Rohde Blog posts in Reuters**

David Rohde writes for Reuters as a blogger and generally has a neutral tone for Muslims and Muslim world. Majority of his blogs i.e. 7, fall into the category of Neutral, almost 2 were positive while 1 fell into the category of Negative. David Rohde is the only non-Muslim blogger whose results show neutral tone for the Muslim, though not positive. He does discuss Muslim issues and its consequences in the world but he tends to give recommendations and suggestion in both ways. David has the ability to write in an amicable way showing both sides of the pictures to the audience.

### **Myra McDonald's Blog posts in Reuters**

Myra McDonalds's total 11 blogs were selected by sampling method out of which all fall into the category of "Negative Blogs" written against Muslims. Her distinct style of writing clearly suggesting her biases for Pakistan and Muslims all over the world. The tone she used for talking about US and Western policies was soft whereas the words and adjectives she used to refer to any issue regarding Muslims carried heavy bitter tone. No blog post was in the favor of Muslims or neither Muslim world nor any neutral blog post was found during blog posts analysis.

### **Tom Heneghen's blog posts in Reuters**

Tom Heneghen writes for Reuters. Total 2 of his blog posts were selected via sampling and both fall into negative category. The most frequent words used in his posts were "Islamists", "extremists", "militant jihadist groups" etc. he is a religion editor in the Reuters and runs the blog forum with the name "Faith world" under which different bloggers post their blogs related to religion and its issues around the world. the most interesting fact that researcher finds out in his blogging forum was that he has even added all the news stories hyperlinks in his blog posts which he regularly post on social networking sites i.e. twitter etc. his writing connotations are very much negative. Although the blogs had filter of Islam and Muslim on them therefore researcher could only find 2 of his blogs but both had negative view about Islam and Muslims. The writer also has biased opinions for the Muslims and is creating abhors against the Muslim community online.

### **James Dorsey blog posts in Huffington Post**

James Dorsey, who writes for Huffington Post, generally writes against Muslims, distorting their image worldwide. 8 of his posts 11 posts were of negative category while 3

were neutral. He is working as a senior sports correspondent in the gulf countries and discusses Muslim countries' sports issues in his blogs. His point of view in his we blogging is related mostly with the news item of sports. But he seems to discuss the cultural values and its aspect in the weblogs, which might become quite criticizing for the Muslim countries. Using negative remarks and then creating the issues in the Muslim countries on the basis of religious ethnicity. His blogs are also issued on online newspapers' editions.

### **Discussion & Analysis**

Researcher aims at analyzing and giving arguments to discuss the outcomes of the study via survey and content analysis For the survey purposes the total number of respondents was 300 (snowball sampling) and content analysis yet again purposive sampling was applied in which the researcher fixed filters to extract blog posts on Islam from different blogs in both newspapers .i.e. Reuters and Huffington Post.

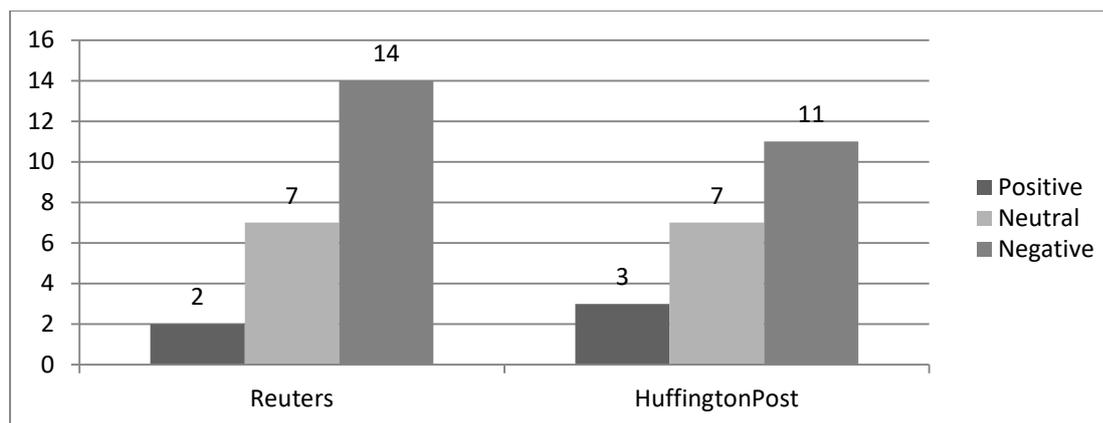
Cumulating the results of survey and content analysis the researcher has analyzed that the portrayal of Muslim image in web blogging by international newspapers is unswervingly derogatory and is propagated negatively throughout the world. Majority of the bloggers who post blogs on Islam have a prejudiced and biased approach and lack the proper knowledge of Islamic laws and Islam's history. Some of the writings in blogs suggest that as if the whole purpose of blogging for some writers is just to defame and degrade the Muslim world and spread hatred and disinformation about Islamic values throughout the world. This in return is jeopardizing the relations of Muslim individuals with people from other religions both online and offline.

According to the survey results 92% of the respondents agreed that yes Muslim image is indeed being targeted and affected by international newspapers throughout the world who at times write purposely against Islam by misinterpreting either the situation of the issue or Islam itself. 70% said it's propaganda against Muslims by western media to degrade the Muslim image. 77% respondents voiced that the image of Muslims currently prevailing and being propagated by western blogs is not justified. While 90% said that whole Muslim community is generalized and stigmatized such as terrorists; radicals; conservatives etc. Another term found in the blog writings was "Islamists" used to address those people who want Islamic laws in their region. In the light of statistical analysis, due to consistent portrayal of negative image of Muslims, online individual relations of Muslim religion is affecting at masses level, as the researcher found that almost 39 percent of the survey population agreed on the fact that negative image of Muslim in the web blogging is directly affecting the relations of the individuals and 45 percent of the population has even agreed to some extent where else only 16 percent of the population does not agree with the fact.

About 89% of the respondents were of the view that negative portrayal of Muslims in these blogs is actually creating hatred among religions online. People who become influenced by these blogs begin to hate Islam and Muslims which affects the lives of Muslims to a great extent.

To counter these attacks 93% of the readers of the survey population agreed on the fact that there has to be a proper and solid counter response to these writers and Muslims should now give feedback to all the negativity against them. Whereas only 3 percent negated the statement and were of the opinion that Muslims shall not respond to these blogs and around 4 percent admitted with the fact they know nothing about the issue. Interestingly having said this, the statistical analysis of the figure states that 72% of the population admitted that Muslim response towards negative propaganda against Muslims in the blogs of international newspapers is less adequate.

The results of content analysis showed similar results. Majority of the blog writings were against Muslim. Following is the comparative graph for Reuters and Huffington Post to analyze the frequency of blog posts that portray negative image of Muslims.



In both of the international newspapers’ blogs certain bloggers were selected through sampling by setting filters and to select only those blog posts which fall in the category of Islam. The above cited graph indicates the results noticeably that out of 44 blog posts explored, 14 in Reuters and 11 in Huffington Post are negative blog posts indicating their content quality as being biased and derogatory for Muslim image whereas only a small number of articles were unbiased giving some understanding to the Muslims and not maligning them for the sake of degrading.

Conferring the results blogs are targeting Islam whether intentionally or unintentionally and it also gives the impression that the journalists are mainly concerned about the quandary of Muslim world. They disremember the voluminous that non-Muslims themselves are facing the maladies of matriarchy. The leader of Muslims and great reformer Prophet Muhammad PBUH brought innovatory philosophies to the community he breathed with. In response to the harshly written article by Ida Lichter a commenter said that in comparison to whatever womenfolk is hallowed nowadays in the west, there might be other truths to follow. In His era standards of women were greatly raised by new renovations. It is imperative to apprehend Quranic educations from that perception. “Prophet Muhammad PBUH himself was a feminist and a reformer”. Societies have the perception that Islam is about the privileges males possess to beat females. It is mainly a command and a check from God who undoubtedly divulges the sights of gender equality in Quran. “It called men to learn patience and acknowledge God is against misogyny.”

The researcher in order to analyze the writings and responses of the readers better read the comments given at the below of the blog posts that depicted the anger of the readers for some writings and degree of responses. Ida is a Muslim woman reformist who according to her, writes against oppression on Muslim women but not many agree with her way of looking at things. One commented to correct Ida in an article that US women never had the right to vote till 1920’s 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in their constitution in which it was written that men and women both can cast vote. In Muslim community since the birth of religion Islam women always had the right to cast vote on all community substances. The history of Islam witnesses the empowerment of women in that time when no other religion could give equal rights to them. Women today living in oppression from Men or any other reason should follow it. The commenter was also of the view that “American Muslim women (and men) & non-Muslims too are the ones who can lead the way but we need everyone's help to promote change”. World needs to be educated what Islam really teaches on gender. Moreover not only this but the concept of women's rights that Islam teaches shall also be revealed whether it had pros and cons in it, the real facts shall be discussed not the regenerated false statements by the bloggers just to defame Islam and Muslims. The history shall be revisited as it is quite evident fact that numerous women converted into Muslim as they were honored by the Islamic teachings and privileges Muslim women avail in the religion Islam.

Another commenter Deeba chaudhry responded fervently to Ida Lichter's biased writings that in the name of elevating Muslim women truly dishonored over all Islamic trainings more and distorted Islam. Deeba also commented that Islamic communities and avant-garded groups who pursue to begin conventional Islam as the faith of a nation accomplish to come to supremacy. The example of Afghanistan is worth quoting. Prior to the Soviet invasion of this country, Afghanistan was moderately vulnerable and forbearing civilization in which women had a respectable transaction of contribution and she could collect the identical tutelage as men and could straightly join any skilled fields. Subsequently the Soviet menace had been terminated and all this transformed above to next span with the progression of Talibanization. The Taliban establishment wide-ranging with its religious police who would viciously dog-tired women in the roads for the dreadful transgressions such as giggling publicly which according to so called Muslims is forbidden in Islam. In Fourteenth century Islam had pronounced women's entire fiscal liberation, right to learning, self-determination of matrimonial and divorce, possessions and legacy rights. It is quite evident that currently way too many women are fated in the East to an unacceptable method of being. This is not because of Islam's principles but due to the negligence of spiritual instruction in dogmatic, societal and monetary foundations. Lastly the contemporary complications of womenfolk in Islamic humanities should be earnestly spoken as it is a religious and political responsibility of persons in influence to principal the skirmish to reinstate the women's self-esteem and privileges.

Seeking history of the west in the 19th Century the French religious leaders came up with decision that though woman is a human being but came into world to oblige man. Till AD 1850 in England women was tallied in the countrywide population censuses. It was in 1882 that a British by law granted women freedom to choose to spend her own earnings than to submitting it to their men. Professor Albert Connolly writes that during 1919 European women battled for the right to be nominated to Parliament and even went to jail and grieved physically in daring exculpation of their being. Recently held US Presidential Election is one immense case when the male presidential candidate was seen to be more favorable than the female candidate. Every time Americans and other Westerners think of Islam and the Middle East possibly one of the major imageries that come to mind for Muslim women is that she is sheathed in profuse mantles and her veiled face. This is absolute unfair discernment. Moreover it is totally biased opinion for Islam that it degrades women. This contempt is not just a peculiarity but is imbedded deliberately within the Islamic religion by west.

A Christian nun on the blog post of Ida Lichter concerning Muslim women and Hijab identified the biased tone of Ida and commented that she spent almost seven years of my childhood profoundly veiled "not in a Muslim niqab but in a nun's hobbit". All the nuns in the church wore baggy black housecoats with large rosaries and crucifixes and an extravagant headband. All people were able to see was a small section of our face but even from the side pose the face was totally shielded. The nuns all over the London looked odd rambling resolutely through the flamboyant festival of London during the wavering 60s but nonentity ever asked to exchange our hobbits for more conservative apparel. She further writes that when their order was started in the 1840s not long after Catholic liberation society was severely furious to see nuns boldly wearing their hobbits on the roads that people even assaulted them with rotten fruit and horse dung. Nuns were barred from Britain since the restoration period. Their reappearance seemed to represent the renaissance of savagery.

In an article "Women in Muslim world need a genuine reform", Ida discusses Islam and Hijab in a biased approach to which Salvador Bolan comments in the comments section that the article by Ida Lichter is one of the most belligerent piece of writing he has read in years. There is no doubt that many Muslims are ignorant of their own Islamic faith and might be one of the magnitudes of that is in some gears the social order dwellings unjustified

encumbrances on women which are really traditional observations but not religious practices. Placing this sideways conversely only a miserable and sad woman undeniably would associate a fervent woman's household to a chamber. Ida seems like having mislaid her ethical compass because only an immoral person would vitiate sacred religiousness so seriously.

All of the above comments both by Muslim and even non-Muslims show that indeed some blogs writings are nothing but propaganda against Muslim world which even some non-Muslims understand. This point was also highlighted in the focus group by Sarmad Bashir. He was of the view that not all non-Muslims get influenced by such type of blog writings rather they criticize it as they understand the logic behind this propaganda of western media and the true nature of Islam.

Fahad Farouqi from Huffington Post was the only blog writer whose writings were not biased nor full of hatred and misunderstanding towards Islam. And David Roudh from Reuters also had somewhat neutral approach but yet biased in some writings. The researcher has analyzed an interesting finding that biased writings are the result because first of all, the blog posts are published under international newspapers whose purpose is to serve western media, secondly, because most of the blog writers are paid as they become organizational bloggers.

The accumulative research describes the negative inclination of web blogging in the online editions of international newspapers, resulting in distortion of individuals relations and developing abhorrence among them where as there is a comprehensive requisite of counter writings in favor of Muslims. Or in other terms, a complete agenda from Muslim world should be introduced.

### **Conclusion**

The results showed that yes international newspapers are portraying negative image of Muslim world in their blogging forums, mainly Reuters and Huffington Post. Majority of the writings were against Muslims having biased opinions and defamatory approach for Islam and Muslim community in general. They portray Islam and Muslims in negative connotation and as if they are some strange erotic and backward adherents of a backward and inhumane religion either killing non-Muslims or killing their own women.

To answer the second question, results show that to some extent yes indeed the negative portrayal of Muslims through web blogging has bad consequences for Muslim community because it is affecting their online relations with the individuals of the other religions. The role of inter-personal communication majorly disturbed and the virtual image of the Muslims is deteriorated which is again affecting the image of the whole community throughout the world.

Some of the readers do respond regularly but majority of the Muslim readers usually avoid commenting. Muslim world lacks the communication skills and they tend to ignore the fact of either condemning and or justify their image as whole. The cognitive image of the Muslims is disturbed due their less responsive attitude and behavior.

Web blogging in Reuters and Huffington Post is indeed negatively affecting Muslim image and due to this, the online relations of Muslims with other individuals from different religions do get affected to some extent as they begin to misinterpret Islam and its culture but the affect is not that severe as according to focus group and content analysis results, the researcher found out that not all non-Muslim readers get influenced by the negatively written writings against Islam, they use their logic and understanding towards Muslim matters.

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