MIRRORING REALITY OR ESTABLISHING A VIRTUAL REALITY: THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA ON PEOPLE'S OPINION ON MUSLIMS

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Abstract: *The paper marks an intersection between previous studies conducted on the image of Muslims in the media and a survey conducted among Bulgarian and international informants on their perception of Muslims and the way the media have influenced their opinion on that religious group.*

Key words: *Muslims, media reality, virtual reality*

1. Introduction

Muslims are one of the fastest growing and most contested group of people that have entered the public eye mostly through their presentation in the media. Although it is believed that locality can trigger differences in presentation, various studies unanimously show that coverage on Muslims is predominantly negative influenced by the associations that exist between Muslims and terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and ISIS/ ISIL. Due to the international character and range of terrorist activities there are almost no people who have remained immune to the negative image presented by the local and the international media.

At the same time, there is the notion that people are not just passive observers who believe everything they see or hear, but they rely on their background knowledge of the matters discussed (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 9; Freyenberger, 2013) and can assess which part of the information they are presented with to appropriate and which to discard as fake, exaggerated or simply ideologically motivated.

The paper is an attempt at assessing the influence the media have on the public as well as personal opinion of their audiences. To this end, a survey has been conducted among groups of international students studying in Bulgaria as well as Bulgarian students and adults and the findings have been compared to previous studies on the topics most discussed in the media in the UK and Bulgaria (see Poole, 2002; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018).

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2. Previous research in the field

Most research on media presentations focus on the fact that the media not only create but also alter reality to such an extent that they create a mediated reality or different versions of reality (Fowler, 1991; Poole, 2002; Cottle, 2003; Dobreva, 2011). In addition, no one can deny the role of the media in manipulating or at least affecting public opinion as they are everywhere and provide their interpretations of various events. If the viewers have not encountered anything of the kind they might easily form their opinion of the matter at hand based solely on the presentation they have been subjected to. All this gives reasons for scholars to talk about "fabricated" reality or realities (Dobreva, 2011; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018) or biased and preferential reporting (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 7; Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 159; Entman, 2007; McNair, 2009). Thus, a kind of virtual reality is created simply because the events and matters presented and analysed are so remote to the audience they target that the images they create are unrealistic.

Talking about the presentation of Muslims in the media, both studies taken as basis for this research show a variety of topics employed by both the British and the Bulgarian media. In her analysis covering a period of 6 years, Poole (2002) analysed 51 different topics in the UK newspapers, while in a similar study, however, conducted over a shorter period of time, Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva (2018) reviewed a total of 31 issues presented by both the British and the Bulgarian printed media.

Despite some differences in the topics covered, the general conclusions drawn by both scholars showed the influence of international news on the general image of Muslims in the UK and Bulgaria respectively. This in itself triggered different attitudes towards the members of that group as well as the establishment of different stereotypes which in their bigger part were negative associated mostly with terrorist activities.

Scholars working on the stereotypes that are present in Western perceptions of Islam show some contrasting ideas: on the one hand, there are the images of the "ideal, pure Arab" and the "mega-rich 'oil sheikhs'" as presented by Klein (2009), while on the other, the images of the "'terrorists,' 'suicide bombers,' people who are 'anti-West,' and 'oppressors'" (Abbas, 2011, p. 71; see also Allen, 2005; Karim, 2006; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018). To all this Poole (2002) adds:

> Muslims are homogenized as backward, irrational, unchanging, fundamentalist, misogynist, threatening, manipulative in the use of their faith for political and personal gain, and yet with politically unstable governments and movements. (p. 18)

In her analysis on the stereotypes employed by the Bulgarian and the British media Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva (2018) has mentioned the stereotypes of the terrorist, the veiled woman, the Muslim victim, and the homogeneous group of Muslims.

Research Questions

In order to study the influence of the media on the public opinion of Muslims and to test its scope, the following questions have been developed:

- How would you describe a Muslim? – The question aims at assessing existing stereotypes as well as common perceptions in the minds of the informants.
- Do you personally have Muslim friends or acquaintances? – This question is provoked by the generally held notion that stereotypes and general perception of various issues may change based on personal experience which is especially true of ethnic and/ or religious groups.
- What is the image of Muslims presented by the media? – The question aims at establishing the knowledge informants have of the image most frequently featured in the media.
- Does the image of Muslims presented by the media influence your attitude to people from that group? If so, how? – These two questions are closely related to the theory mentioned above that media shape and influence reality while at the same time the way this media reality is established is also governed by the willingness of the separate individual to accept it or not. They also aim at assessing the extent to which media presentations of Muslims have influenced personal attitude.

3. Methods

As the paper compares the findings of broader studies on the image of Muslims in the media which are based on Content and Critical Discourse Analysis and a survey the results of which are also analysed through the prism of the same two approaches, it can be concluded that the methods of analysis employed are both quantitative and qualitative.

4. Data Analysis

A total of 65 international students have been used as informants in addition to 52 Bulgarian informants[*]. The groups of informants most prominently featured

in the survey are the one of 21-30 year-olds, followed by the one of informants under 20. The prominence of these two groups is suitable to the goals set in this paper as these two groups can generally be defined as comprised of young adults who are generally characterised with high Internet literacy, great involvement in social media and a different way of perceiving information. The latter has also been influenced by the new ways of media content presentation, such as live-streams, blogs, vlogs, among other which allow for up-to-the-minute presentation of the event and rely mostly on visual perception rather than on verbal expressions and it is a well-known fact that visual images stick more easily.

The social information required from the informants was related to their religious background in order to assess how much their stereotypes are influenced by their own experience. At the same time, the informants who are Muslim might provide additional insight into the characteristics that they attribute to members of their own group and contribute to the autostereotypes the group have about themselves.

In addition, the major group of informants comes from various backgrounds and is comprised of international students studying in Bulgaria. Thus, they have been exposed both to the Bulgarian, but even more so, to their home media. This fact, even though not a subject of this research, will provide ideas of the influence other national media have on people's opinion on the matter. Thus, the scope of the comparison goes even further than just the media in the two countries taken as the basis of this study.

5. Results/Key Findings

Looking at the responses provided by the informants to the first question which is mostly aimed at understanding the idea they have of Muslims, i.e. "How would you describe a Muslim?", it should be noted that only 1 out of 65 international students and 6 out of 52 Bulgarian informants have stated that they do not have a clear idea of how to describe a Muslim.

The interesting observation here is the fact that 3 of the Bulgarians who cannot describe a Muslim are actually members of the same religious group. This could be attributed to the fact that all three informants are members of the young adults group, so they might lack religious self-identification or they might not be too religious and therefore not feel different from Christian Bulgarians. It has also been stated that Bulgarian Muslims are more integrated and more similar to Bulgarian Christians, frequently sharing the same holidays and celebrations (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018). In addition, some of the international students who have filled the survey, have shared in private conversations with one of their lecturers that Bulgarian Muslims are not true members of the religious group as they are not so devout as they should be. All this can also

account for the fact that the same response, which can basically be generalized as "no idea", has been provided by 3 members of the older groups of Bulgarian informants, i.e. 31-40 and 41-50.

Most of the other answers provided by both Bulgarian and international informants gravitate around two main ideas: Muslims are a religious group, i.e. describing Muslims as religious, following the Sunnah, praying to Allah, etc., and the fact that they are "similar to us", i.e. just normal human beings. Both notions are generally positive to neutral in their expression, which leads to the conclusion that the group of Muslims is generally well accepted by both the Bulgarian and the international informants.

There are also some responses that provide more specific characteristics of a Muslim. Thus, for example, international respondents from the group of under 20s Christians state the following: [1] "They don't eat cows" (Ukrainian)*; [2] "A person that wears robes and have beliefs" (Seychellois); [3] "A person from the Middle East" (Ukraine).

As one can easily see the first statement shows lack of in-depth knowledge of Muslim culture which is actually supported by the fact that the informant does not have any Muslim friends or acquaintances and his/ her understanding of that group is based solely on the general knowledge, the media presentations or the stereotypes transferred from one generation to the next. The inaccuracy of this statement can also be a result of indifference to that particular group which is something characteristic of younger generations – they do not pay so much attention to detail, they tend to be more open-minded and focused on the things that are of interest to them.

Apart from this single case of flawed perception, one can see the focus on clothing which is generally associated with the typical Muslim appearance – a robe, which is usually associated with the image of Arabs or oil sheikhs mentioned above. The topoi mentioned, although very generic as the Muslims in this vast area are quite different and not all of them wear robes, is also conducive to the stereotype of oil sheikhs.

Appearance is the focus of two other responses provided by Bulgarian informants: the first one is from the age group of 21-30 year-olds, who has defined a Muslim as [4] Dark hair, sometimes dark skin; the other, from the age group of 41-50s, who has stated: [5] Mostly a man with a beard and a long hair". Both dark hair and sometimes dark skin as well as beard are considered a stereotypical feature of Muslim identity especially when we talk of media

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* The author has attempted to preserve the statements as authentic as possible, however, some spelling, grammatical, syntactical, and stylistic mistakes have been corrected to allow processing ease. In brackets are the nationalities of the international students from Dobrich campus of Varna University of Management.

presentations where Arab beard is considered also a sign of radicalization (see Friedel, 2016; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2015; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2017; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018). The latter can be attributed to the stereotype of Muslim terrorist presented by the media as the members of the various terrorist organizations are usually presented with long beards. The features also have to do with the typical appearance of an Arab or the Maghrebi roots which Muslims usually share (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018). It should be mentioned though that long beards are not considered typical of the Bulgarian Muslims (see Sadkova & Kabak, 2017). This can lead to the conclusion that the image, at least in these two cases, is greatly influenced by the media rather than by personal experience.

It is interesting to note that none of the informants has mentioned the head covers and the veils worn by some Muslim women which have provoked so many debates in various countries all over Europe. This is also telling of the prototypical male dominated perception of the world. The reason for that can also be found in the general media presentation of Muslims as terrorists, primarily male, as will be discussed below.

The answer, provided though jocularly by one of the Bulgarian 21-30 informants, actually touches on the terrorist stereotype generally associated with Muslims: [6] Allah Akbar. The phrase which has become the slogan of all terrorist attacks is easily recognizable by the general public. Its popularity can also be attributed to the influence of the media as there is no possible way for the audience to know what a terrorist has said prior to blowing himself up if the media covering the story have not mentioned that someone has heard the words uttered. Descriptions such as [7] "Fanatic" (a 21-30 years-old Christian) and [8] "Rather like fanatics" (a 51-60 years-old Christian), provided by Bulgarian informants, further stress on the mediated reality audiences are subjected to, as terrorists and terrorism are not phenomena Bulgaria has intimate experience of.

At the same time, 4 of the under 20s non-Muslim international informants as well as 3 informants from the group of Christian 21-30 have mentioned "politeness", "kindness", "law-obedience" and "hard work" as features that describe a Muslim. Two of the latter are Bulgarians who study at Varna University of Management but have been considered a part of the international group as they are mostly in the company of international peers and thus can be influenced by their opinion. Moreover, they are also exposed to daily exchanges with Muslims who are different from the Bulgarian Turks. Still, the long-time Bulgarian experience is definitely visible in their stereotypical ideas of Muslims.

A Russian under 20s of a different religious adherence has also shared [9] "In my experience religious Muslims are calm, restrained, even jammed". The positive descriptors are somewhat supported by an under 20s Muslim informant who has explained that: [10] "A Muslim is a person who follows the Quran and

the Sunnah of our prophet. A Muslim person should not harm anybody because Islam promotes safety of all people despite their beliefs" (Tajikistan). The same notion is further supported by informants some of whom Muslims aged 21-30 who have stated that the members of their religious group are

> [11] [t]raditional and conservative (Argentine); [12] very quiet; they try to be always happy and to help everybody (Albania); [13] Sympathetic, believe in all human are equal (Jordanian); [14] Polite people, follow rules (Ukrainian).

Bulgarian informants from the same age group provide similar statements:

> [15] Good people when they are among other ethnic groups; [16] People who always follow their own traditions, people who have strong value system, protect what is their own and fervently defend it; [17] It depends on the separate person, but in general they are compassionate, welcoming and hospitable; [18] In my opinion Muslims are intelligent people.

The similarity of perception transcends ethnic experience and culture boundaries. What these statements also do is that they also support the attempts of various Muslim activists who are trying to disperse the negative association that exists between Islam, aggression and jihad.

In addition, a Bulgarian informant aged 31-40, who has described him/herself as a Buddhist, extends the positive qualities attributed to Muslims further:

> [19] Muslims who are true believers are humble, generous, helpful and caring people. It really depends on how devout a person is. If it's someone who strictly follows his/ her religion, then at least on the outside, they would wear the type of clothing which will distinguish them as Muslims. If they don't follow their religion strictly, they would look like anybody else.

All these statements mark the positive side of the opinions on the Muslim religious group. They also show that when people are aware of each other the negativity in the media presentations does not have such a strong impact on the opinion of the audience. This also has to do with the way stereotypes are altered. The closer the distance between the stereotyped and stereotyping group, the smaller the influence from the outside – people form their own opinion based on personal experience.

It is interesting to note that the positive statements mentioned so far coincide with the stereotypical idea of Bulgarian Turks who are actually the biggest Muslim group in the country. Bulgarians generally describe their Turkish neighbours as hard-working, hospitable and kind (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2018, pp. 176-177) but also naïve and easily manipulated by their political leaders. This idea lurks in the description provided by a Bulgarian informant in the age group 41-50: [20] In the cities – normal people, but in the villages – a little retrograde – too religious, low educated.

The same descriptors (segregated, illiterate, gullible) are used by the British about moderate Muslims. The international student from Argentine (e.g. [11]) mentions "conservatism" which is a characteristic usually attributed by the British to South Asians who live in very close communities and extended families and practice intermarriages. The same characteristics are mentioned by an older Argentinian student (21-30), and it can be assumed that the Russian student who used *jammed* in [9] had the same idea in mind.

Statement [15] is also interesting to analyse as it touches on another idea frequently reiterated by the media as well as by the scholars working in the field of religious studies and radicalization as well: segregation provides a fertile ground for radical ideas. It is not by chance that Muslims only neighbourhoods, especially those where illiteracy and unemployment are high are the breeding grounds for future terrorists (Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009; Korteweg, Gohel, Heisbourg, Ranstorp, & de Wijk, 2010).

Another stereotype that is touched upon in the informants' perception of Muslims is their heterogeneity. International informants in the second age group of 21-30 and a Bulgarian in the same age group have stated:

> [21] It is difficult to describe because they are all very different. The Muslims I know are laughing a lot, extremely friendly and the religion is important to them (Finnish); [22] To be honest Muslims who follow their faith and beliefs are so nice and lovely people. But! Lots of them who are not devoted paint a bad picture (Montenegrin); [23] I don't believe in stereotypes, so I couldn't describe someone without meeting them.

This group of definitions is charged with high implicitness. In [21] and [22] one could see the juxtaposition between people whom the respondents know and such that they do not know which is exemplary of the distinction between Self/Own and Other while at the same time there is also the distinction between the religious vs. the not-so-religious members of the community. In contrast to the generally held notion that moderate, i.e. not so religious Muslims, are more open-minded and tolerant, or, in general, more like Christians, statement [22] seems to imply the opposite. Naturally, it can also be a matter of inaccurate way of expression and it could also be that the intention of the informant was to use "radical" instead of "not devoted". The last statement in this group, i.e. [23], is also ambiguous. Viewed on its own, it perfectly matches the definition of a stereotype and the individual's involvement in its creation. The ambiguity comes from the fact that the Bulgarian informant who has provided this answer has actually stated that he/she has quite a lot of Muslim friends and acquaintances which contradicts the initial claim.

In addition, some Bulgarian informants define Muslims as "troubled" people: [24] "A troubled person, but a person non-the-less" as well as [25] "not very considerate when there are other people around them ... especially if they are

of other nationality". Both statements are provided by Bulgarians who are in the age range from 21 to 30, so these are people who might not have had too much experience with other religious groups. The use of "troubled", which on its own can be ambiguous as to what exactly is meant, actually shows the influence the media have had on that particular informant and the general image of the terrorist that is being broadcasted. The latter has been confirmed by the informant him/herself in their answer to the last question in the questionnaire.

The other statement, i.e. [25], can be related to religious freedoms and rights. In Bulgaria although Turkish is not considered an official language, it is freely spoken on the streets by Bulgarian Turks and there are classes in mother tongue taught in schools. Thus, ethnic Bulgarians can very frequently be in a situation in which someone sitting next to them is talking in Turkish even in administrative buildings and public places. This is actually what many of the more nationalistically inclined people oppose.

Looking at the image the media present, i.e. question 3 of the survey "What is the image of Muslims presented by the media", respondents' feedback almost unanimously revolves around the negative image of the Muslim terrorist. One of the answers is actually accompanied with a picture of a person wearing a turban, firing a gun with the Twin Towers and a plane in the background. This is not surprising as various scholars consider the events from September 11 as pivotal in the establishment of Muslim identity (see Ahmed, 2005; Allen, 2005; Lyon, 2005; Karim, 2006; Gale & Hopkins, 2009).

Forty-four of the international informants and 40 of the Bulgarian ones have mentioned one aspect or another of this negative image of the terrorist. In addition, 4 of the international and 8 of the Bulgarian informants have stated that they are not aware of the image the media promote or they simply do not want to answer this question.

There is a group of answers that show difference in presentation between local and international media or between American and European ones. Some of the images presented are described as:

> [26] In France the image of Muslims presented by the media is: they are a part from the population; they just enjoy the French social system and sometimes they are described as terrorists but not all media show this image; [27] There are different images presented in the media. It depends on the country; [28] In the American media the image is very bad. What is more, they are racist. The European media are more open-minded; [29] They are presented in the foreign media as terrorists and extremists; [30] [The image of Muslims] is very bad of course in the Western media; [31] Well, with Muslims crossing Bulgaria to get to Germany the picture presented is not good; [32] I can't think of a clear image of Muslims presented by the Georgian media.

This group of answers focuses first on the difference between local and international press which was also commented on by Poole (2002) and later on analysed by Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva (2018) and second, on some of the stereotypes which are different from those already mentioned.

It is interesting to note that although the informants are aware of the images and stereotypes presented by the media, they have not appropriated them and that is why they have not mentioned them as responses to the first question. Thus, for example, none of the informants has described Muslims as people who avail from the welfare system or as in the case of [31] none of the Bulgarian informants have mentioned refugees as one of the images they associate Muslims with. At the same time, the coverage that seems to influence informants' image of Muslims is that provided by [28] American or [29] "foreign media"*.

There is also some ambiguity as to the reference "Western media" in [30] as it is not clear whether the informant supports the opinion expressed in [28] in reference to the American media or has in mind the European media west of Albania which is his/ her place of origin.

Another group of responses from the international informants touch on the ideological function of the media and the influence they have on public opinion. At the same time, they show some positive images of Muslims:

> [33] In our country Muslims are men who help anyone if they can. The image of Muslims broadcasted on the TV in other countries is not of real Muslims, those Muslims use religion for their goals; [34] The image of Muslims presented is good and shows how Muslims and Islam respect and cooperate with the other religions and that's the big evidence which proves that Islam and the Muslims are not terrorists and that Islam is a religion that calls for peace and freedom; [35] A rich person riding a camel or an expensive car; [36] Some of them are good. But I like Christians; [37] Media can't give an image (for me).

The first two of the responses, i.e. [33] and [34], continue the trend from the previous section of distinguishing between local (positive image) and foreign/ international media (negative image) and show awareness of the images covered by both of them. In addition, it should also be mentioned that [33] is the account of a Kazakh and [34] of an Egyptian, both of whom are Muslim and the population in both countries is predominantly of that religious denomination. Thus, it could be assumed that it is only natural that the image of Self being broadcasted is a positive one.

The image mentioned in [35] actually coincides with the image of the rich sheikh which is positive, though rarely mentioned by the informants on the first question. The last two responses in this group though, express the personal

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* In this case "foreign" refers to non-Moroccan media as the informant is of Moroccan background.

opinion of the students. In the case of [36] one can also talk about a kind of prejudice or even discrimination as despite the positive image presented by the media, the person has decided to express his/her personal preference to Christianity. On the other hand, [37] in a way denies the role of the media in spreading particular images.

Looking at the answers provided by Bulgarian informants one can notice the same trend of audience awareness of particular images that have not been appropriated by them and therefore can be said that have not fossilized into stereotypes:

> [38] Brainless voting machines; [39] Muslims are presented as some kind of invaders in Europe; [40] Big bearded savages who beat their wives and terrorize the West "in the name of Allah"; [41] We all listen that the Muslims have come to Europe and try to misbalance strong countries like Germany, France, and England. In fact, this is all made by the Americans who want to make wars because they have weapons to sell!; [42] The media is trying to influence people's opinion about Muslims – if it's good to become bad.

Based on the hype around the refugee crisis in the past few years, it is not surprising that two of the respondents, i.e. [39] and [41] mention the image of the refugee and the way it is being broadcasted in the media. At the same time, [41] as well as [42] provided the reason for the media presentations which, similar to some of the answers above, hint on the ideology in the media. Response [38] presents a typically Bulgarian phenomenon – the image of Bulgarian Turks as a major voting force which has been wooed by their politicians at the time of elections.

There are also opinions that presented the media and the images they show in a positive light:

> [43] The media usually present their positive side; [44] I think they are doing a good job; [45] Usually negative but lately there have been more TV programmes that focus on the virtuous and peace-loving Muslims, such as "Hug me – I'm Muslim"; [46] Some media present them as radical fundamentalists, though in our local media they are presented as being Western-European cultivated and prone to more open relations and views.

The statements coincide with the generally positive accounts of the images provided as responses to the first question by the Bulgarian informants. However, these statements contradict the idea of the media presenting a virtual reality but rather support the idea of them mirroring the existing reality.

Looking at the last question, testing the media's influence on public opinion, i.e. "Does the image of Muslims presented by the media influence your attitude to people from that group? If so how?", there are only 9 responses which are in the affirmative. The remaining 56 responses state that the opinion of the informants

has not been influenced by the media and the reasons provided (whenever there are such) verge from "I'm not stupid" to "Because I have Muslim friends". Eight of the Bulgarian informants have provided positive answers while 5 have refrained from answering this question, thus the majority of 41 people have stated that the media do not affect their opinion. The reasons provided are similar to those shared by the international students.

Some of the reported ways media have influenced informants' opinions are mostly related to informants being wearier when around Muslims in public places, making people feel worried about their future, making them generalize the community as radicals, people are scared of possible terrorist attacks or other illegal activities. There is one answer that deserves special attention as it provides the opinion of a Muslim: [47] "As a Muslim I am constantly offended and prosecuted because of my religion mainly by people who believe what they read or hear on the media and have no proper knowledge on the religion". As explicitly stated Muslims are the real victims of negative media portrayal and the lack of interethnic exchange and communication.

Conclusion

The paper focuses on a survey conducted among Bulgarian and international informants trying to gauge the influence the media have on the image of Muslims that both groups have. Based on the findings and the reported influence the study aims at deciding on one of the two statements held about the media: creating a virtual reality or mirroring the existing reality.

Analysing all the answers provided by the informants the conclusions reached are:

- The majority of the responses to the question related to the existing individual stereotype of a Muslim shows prevalence of neutral to positive perception of Muslims as "just humans with a different religion";
- There are only a few responses that focus on the negative stereotype of the Muslim terrorist;
- The answers to the second question show that the majority of the informants have friends or acquaintances who are Muslim which has led to the conclusion that the stereotypes they have of Muslims are influenced by personal experience, rather than presentations in the media.
- The latter has been supported by the responses to the last question where the majority of the informants refute the influence of the media.
- Still though, the third question provides interesting feedback on the

images generally presented by the media which show prevalence of negative presentations mostly associated with the events from September 11 and the more recent terrorist attacks.

All these conclusions lead to the deduction that the media do portray predominantly negative images of the Muslim community, however, globalization and personal contacts have prevented the fossilization of these images into stereotypes in the informants' consciousness and thus the media do not have an impact on personal perception.

Therefore, it can be stated that the media do create a kind of virtual reality which can influence public opinion, however, at least the younger generation, represented by the informants surveyed, remain immune to it and live in their own intercultural realities, counting on their own experiences and forming their own opinions based on them.

Implications

Although the number of surveyed Bulgarian informants and international students is sufficient (being over 100) for the conclusions drawn, it would be interesting to trace out the opinions on the matter of a bigger number of informants of various age groups. Thus, the conclusions made would sound even more convincing and of a bigger substance. In addition, the survey could also include more countries and lead to more conclusive evidence on the influence of the media.

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