Imperatives for research designs with Muslim women

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to improve the quality and efficacy of data collected from Muslim respondents, particularly women, through an examination of Islamic teachings and illustrated using a "conservative" paradigm of practice. The paper is designed to be helpful to researchers in designing both their projects and their data collection methods.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is conceptual, in that it provides an overview of some important, often overlooked or misunderstood areas on which studies have been based and gives frameworks and also ethical pointers to researchers.

Findings – Framed to explain approaches to "conservative" Muslim women in societies across the globe, what is presented herein allows insight into all varieties of Muslim practice. This is achieved by explaining the possible objections to different methodologies and techniques of research for Muslim women at the "conservative" end of the practicing spectrum – this allowing a highlighting of ideas and ideals applicable across the spectrum.

Practical implications – Useful for academic researchers and also commercial researchers, potentially saving both time and money by pointing out possible errors in research design while also ensuring good ethical practice. The paper is offered to assist researchers in eliciting full and frank responses from Muslim respondents based on informed and thoughtful research design and data collection and providing possibly contextualisation(s) of what is said to enhance data analysis and interpretation.

Originality/value – Believed to be the first paper of its kind in English, this conceptual paper provides insight for researchers aiming to get the most useful and ethically sound outcomes for those interviewed, as well as those interviewing.

Keywords Religion, Ethics, Women, Culture, Research methods

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Research is increasingly being conducted with Muslim consumers in recognition of their increasing number and associated spending power. However, the structures on which this research is based may lead us closer to misinformation, than information, on the group under study.

In so saying, some guidelines to conducting research with more "conservative" Muslim women, with explanations for why their responses/reactions may be so, would greatly enhance both research design and, arguably, collection success. The definition of "conservative" Muslim women here, refers to those Muslim women who, no matter where they live, which income strata they belong to, how "open" their society is, their family backgrounds or education level, approach their practice of Islam from a conservative perspective. This approach is reflected in their conduct, expectations, norms and, usually, their dress. These women are "conservative" in that they avoid

anything considered "doubtful" in the teaching, consistent with this report from the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed(s):

> Narrated An-Nu'man bin Bashir: The Prophet (peace be upon him) said "Both legal and illegal things are obvious, and in between them are (suspicious) doubtful matters. So whoever forsakes those doubtful things lest he may commit a sin, will definitely avoid what is clearly illegal; and whoever indulges in these (suspicious) doubtful things bravely, is likely to commit what is clearly illegal. Sins are Allah's Hima (i.e. private pasture) and whoever pastures (his sheep) near it, is likely to get in it at any moment" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 3, Book 34, Hadith 5).

The choice to consider the practice of conservative Muslim women was made here, as they represent a very important foundational source for information on Muslims samples and are notoriously hard to gain access to (Tuncalp, 1988; Sandikçi and Ger, 2007). Therefore, the positions they hold and responses they may give, in the face of various commonly utilised interviewing and data gathering techniques and practices, can shed light on similar responses encountered when interviewing those considered less conservative in terms of their practice by interviewers and/or research designers. Having the opportunity to access them, and understanding their views, norms and the perspectives they are teaching their children, can help respondents overcome feelings of mistrust or discomfort with providing insights for researchers, and allow cooperation to the benefit of both groups. Instead of increasing our understanding, many papers may, in fact, contribute to our misunderstanding at the same time as increasing our confidence that we do, indeed, have knowledge (Mukherji and Sengupta, 2004) of ethnic and religious groups, such as Muslims, whose individual, social and cultural mores are integrated and enmeshed in a holistic way that are not familiar to most western observers. A knowledge of Islamic teaching would provide a framework for understand that would avoid such naivety and encourage a more informed and sensitive appreciation of the meanings and practices that reflect a different worldview.

Three key reasons provoke this research. First, in the extant literature, with particular reference to marketing literature, due to misunderstanding, or misexplanation of responses, conclusions are reached which are inaccurate (e.g. Witkowski, 1999). Second, some of the designs in use could be considered unethical considering Islamic norms (e.g. Ger and Sandikci, 2007 and/or western ones such as interviewing using undeclared proxies e.g. Sandikçi and Ger, 2007). Third, while Muslims are increasingly of interest to researchers, still only small numbers of Muslim women are interviewed (Sobh *et al.*, 2012) or even surveyed (Rabolt and Forney, 1989) and of these still fewer are "conservative" women and/or are interviewed under ethical conditions (i.e. under full disclosure by interviewers) (e.g. Sandikçi and Ger, 2007). It is believed that introducing key aspects of the foundations of Islam, to inform the ways in which research with Muslim participants in general and Muslim women, in particular, could be more fully understood and more appropriately framed. Using this knowledge, it is hoped that researchers will confidently design and conduct research projects, which allow Muslim women to speak for themselves, rather than just be "spoken about" as is typically the existing literature. The paper is written to support especially western, non-Muslim researchers accessing and gathering data from groups of Muslim women, particularly those who are the most difficult to access and so are typically the least represented by their own voices in English language research (Read and Bartkowski, 2000; Bullock, 2002). The paper points to possible issues that may be encountered in the field. As such, to our knowledge; it is the first paper of its kind, at least in the English language. Furthermore, it also provides a framework to help and inform academic reviewers and editors when assessing research involving Muslim samples. In discussing some key Islamic teachings[1] the paper provides a brief overview of some fundamental concepts and addresses some important procedural issues to consider when interviewing Muslim women. The overall aim of this paper is to help ensure that research

concerning Muslim women is informed, respectful and cognisant of the underlying principles that guide behaviour and attitudes in the Muslim world.

Finally, it is important to understand that the "Muslim world" extends across many countries and includes a vast array of practice and practices some of which authors refer to as "secular Muslim" in format (Sandikçi and Ger, 2005). In order to contribute to the literature this paper outlines relevant key aspects of the Islamic teaching and offers insights into the practice or understandings of those further from the "secular" end, and this includes women all over the Muslim and non-Muslim world who are grouped by their practice rather than their race, nationality, geographical location or political affiliations. While not all of the issues herein may be encountered by researchers, if some of them are, this paper aims to assist in explaining how and why they may have come about. "Secular Muslim" (i.e. secular), practice is unlikely to embrace much mystery for a western and/or non-Muslim (especially) researcher as this is the dominant lifestyle in the western world. In addition to this, many western people think they do know about Islam and Muslims, when their "knowledge" is gleaned from the media (Said, 1997).

Marketing and Islam

Marketing, as a discipline, is organically western, or even North American (USA) and this is reflected in the emphases of journal outputs and boards (e.g. Andriopoulos and Slater, 2013), samples and contexts (Rosenstreich and Wooliscroft, 2006), and of research frameworks and assumptions (Venkatesh, 1995). Increasingly, the idea of globalisation has influenced marketing thought and practice, which tends to mean the global reach of a western culture, transmitted through media (Belk, 1995), which is the US' biggest export. And, arguably, it is most important (Bernays, 1955).

There have been some calls within marketing, and the wider social sciences, to "cast a wider net" in terms of the thinking and understanding of observed practice of "others" in relation to western models of consumption and their presumed universality. These calls have come from perspectives such as "whiteness" research (Burton, 2009a, b), collectivist values and importance of families (Kagitçibasi, 2007; Harb and Smith, 2008), ethnic/national aspects (Venkatesh, 1995) and also religious world views (Boulanouar, 2011). There have also been some lengthy and strong academic challenges to the globalisation thesis, on which much marketing thought rests (De Mooij, 2010).

This paper attempts to advise how some of these issues related to Muslim women could be considered. Using "conservative" Muslim women as the illustrative perspective could well explain "aberrations" or perplexing points in collected data amongst Muslims not regarded as conservative, and can also show how the "conservative" group could be successfully approached in order to hear their voices in the business literature. While there have been several papers written on the difficulties or particularities of conducting research utilising Muslim samples (e.g. Tuncalp, 1988), particularly with covered Muslim women (e.g. Sobh and Belk, 2009), there is limited evidence from the published literature that all necessary ethical implications of researching this particular population have been considered adequately. For example, Ger and Sandikci (2007) discuss their series of papers on Turkish Muslim women and their consumption and note, "we constantly had to reflect upon our distaste and consciously attempt to empathise with our informants" (p. 516). However, "no matter how much we tried to empathise and see them as "normal", deep down, we could not" (p. 512). This because, "It was an enigma for us why modern urban educated women would choose to cover out of their own volition" (p. 512). This disrespecting of the participants concerns, requirements or worldview by the researchers is an on-going problem. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, "research in itself is a powerful intervention, which has traditionally benefited the researcher, and the knowledge base of the dominant group in society". The dominant group in a global society, and in marketing literature

written in the English language, is that of western societies, especially North America. The best and brightest of many nations are sent to the west to study and this further perpetuates the considered universality of paradigms and perspectives (Venkatesh, 1995).

With particular relation to consumer research, Burton's (2009a, b) meta-analysis of articles in the *Journal of Consumer Research* raised concerns about privileging and universalising "whiteness" in research paradigms and designs. An example of this, consistent with Burton's concerns about the assumed universality of Western paradigms, is Witkowski (1999), who measured the "western"-ness of dress of Lebanese and Kuwaiti women. In the paper, Lebanese women are expected to be more "western" in their dress than Kuwaiti women. "To be specific, the Kuwaitis will be more likely to wear hijab than the Lebanese" and, "Kuwaiti respondents will be less likely to wear cosmetics and jewellery" (Witkowski, 1999). Of specific interest for this paper are the parameters of the hypotheses. For example, it is not unusual for Muslim women to wear jewellery either in public or in private. Especially if women have their faces covered, they also very typically wear cosmetics in public. If the cosmetic being assessed is kohl, in Islamic teaching this is considered both a beautification and a medication for the eye, and, as such, is permissible and common for Muslim women to wear in public and in private (Al-Qaradawi, 1984). The importance of its use, therefore, as an example of westernisation, is negligible.

De Mooij (2010) expansively addresses how global products are used both symbolically and culturally in different ways in different nations, and the fact that people all over the world consume the same brand, or even the same product, does not make them culturally alike – nor is it likely to facilitate such an outcome. The basic premise of the globalisation thesis is that consumers would become more alike in culture and values as a result of consuming the same, or same types, of products. This has not been borne out by values research to any extent, although the tendency in the English language literature has been to focus only on (frequently demographic) similarities across consuming groups, rather than looking at the differences – therefore generally acting as if the convergence of values has, in fact, occurred. Ronald Inglehardt, a prominent values researcher, has spoken of how after 30 years of research the biggest surprise he had was that rather than dying out, religion is becoming more important worldwide (Hossli, 2007) – this surprise is due to an assumed universalisation of the "modernisation thesis" in the western lexicon. That is, a belief that increased wealth means more choice, and more choice means more freedom (Toffler, 1970), which is expected to translate into a rise in secularism, a shrinkage in the family unit and increased individualism – all of which has been questioned by other researchers (e.g. Kagitçibasi, 1996).

Similarly, there is much interest in the "westernisation" of Muslims, but what is identified as westernisation is often simply the consumption of globalised/western products, rather than an actual transformation into someone with a western cultural perspective. Research with Muslims suggests respondents see it instead as simply taking what is liked from other cultures and rejecting what is not liked (see Sobh *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the symbols or signs being read by western people and researchers as proof of enculturated western values are, in fact, simply human beings using new technologies as they best suit them – there is no convergence of values (De Mooij and Hofstede, 2002; De Mooij, 2003). The following example, recounted by (Nasr, 2009), illustrates this issue: the Iranian soccer star Amir Hossein Sadeghi looks and comes across as very "western". After scoring a critical goal Sadeghi "lifted his jersey in the way goal-scorers all over the world do. Beneath was something you don't see every day in the world of pro soccer, however: a white undershirt bearing the visage of the Shia messiah, the Hidden Imam, with the legend 'O'Mahdi'[…] he is not the kind of secularist that a westerner may assume he is, and the future that his generation has in mind is a mixture of modernity and Islam, or in Sadeghi's case, of Giorgio Armani and the Hidden Imam" (p. 200).

Much research into Muslim women falls into Burton's (2009b) criticised realms – it is research talking about Muslim women, rather than research based on talking with them.

Qualitative research often requires much researcher involvement with respondents – talking to them in person, visiting their houses or places of work or leisure, seeing various aspects of their personal life, even in "business interview" settings (Creswell, 2003). Such an approach to qualitative research has the ability to reveal meaning and motivation as well as quantity/ frequency (Kvale, 2008), and so can make a contribution in terms of both increasing the presence in, and the impact of, Muslim women's own voices on academic literature. Against this backdrop, an introduction of Islam as an ideology is required.

Islam is a comprehensive way of life (Maududi, 1960; Al-Qaradawi, 1984; Al Faruqi, 1977) and is the fundamental framework around which Muslim societies are structured. Islam affects all aspects of Muslim culture, ranging from the legal system (Charrad, 2001, Mattson, 2008) to cultural and societal norms (Said, 1998; Alserhan, 2010; Arham, 2010).

From Saudi Arabia to India, Muslims share a cultural framework that, regardless of how "flexible" their practice, is significantly affected by Islamic teaching (Sander, 1997; Nawal, 2009). This unifying culture crosses geographical and political borders (Busnaina *et al.*, 2010). For example, Armstrong (1993) attributes the Muslim awareness of "omnipresence" as a palpable reality in Muslims' everyday lives to their different way of seeing the world and research has shown that however exposed Muslim women are to "globalisation" (Nasr, 2009) and to whatever extent they "negotiate their identities" (Sobh *et al.*, 2012), they remain deeply affected by their Muslim upbringing (Sander, 1997) and belief system (Nawal, 2009).

The all-encompassing role that Islam plays in Muslim lives means that an understanding of the teachings, as well as their potential impact on research participants and their responses, can contribute significantly to ensuring both the ethical appropriateness and efficacy of primary research involving Muslim respondents. Despite the size of the Muslim population (estimated at 1.5 billion worldwide, Pew, 2011), there is still little understanding (and much concern) among many researchers and organisations as to the potential to offend Muslim consumers (Edwards, 2010), and this is particularly true in the case of Muslim women.

The paper now provides an overview of some concepts from Islamic teaching, before discussing the implications of these for consumer research – specifically for the design of consumer research projects and the successful collection of data. Finally, it considers how aspects of the Islamic teaching introduced here may manifest themselves during data collection. It is worth mentioning that the general concepts which follow cross the lines of religion/culture, meaning they have implications for researchers too, and this will be discussed later in the paper.

General concepts

While Islam is known generally as being a comprehensive way of life, it is sometimes represented linearly as legalistic and rule-bound, rather than synergistically as interlacing and balanced (Elmessiri, 1997). This can lead to overlooking the fundamental core of Islam, which is a belief in *tawheed* ("one-ness" or unity) of the Creator and which was the primary concept the Prophet Mohammed called for in the first 13 of his 23 years of Prophethood. That 13 years was the period before any of the obligations which are more widely known were revealed such as fasting Ramadan, praying five times each day, giving charity and performing the pilgrimage to Makkah. One part of this concept of unity, and the one which is most relevant here is called *Tawheed ar-Ruboobiyyah* (maintaining the unity of Lordship), and that means believing that Allah "is the Creator of everything, and is the Disposer of Affairs of everything, and He has no partners besides Him in that" (Bin Baaz, 1999).

The idea that all things are interlinked and all creation intertwined and unified is pivotal to Islamic teaching and to understanding the Islamic worldview to which Muslims adhere and commit. This maintenance of unity (*tawheed*) addresses the considerations of both societal (horizontal) and individual (vertical) requirements for a Muslim. When looking at very specific behaviour, as in any research project, the concept of *tawheed* is like a stage set

onto which the actions of specific behaviour are encountered in the interview situation. It also highlights how all things are linked together for Muslims. Further, and, importantly for researchers, the concept of *tawheed* ensures that Muslims view all humankind as under the Lordship of Allah. Therefore, there is a relationship between all humankind and tensions in the research relationship are more likely to be due to past experiences (e.g. colonisation, foreign policy) than to an idea that Muslims and non-Muslims are organically different or created differently[2]. For this reason, an understanding of the Islamic worldview is a necessary background to understand why and how Muslim respondents may behave or answer during data collection.

Under the umbrella of *tawheed* in Islamic teaching, four key concepts need to be understood – the nature of public and private, the role of modesty, the importance of intention and the practice of gender separation. These concepts are discussed, in turn, below.

Public and private

The nature of public and private space in Muslim societies, and the behaviours that are appropriate within them, differ from those in western societies to some degree, although there is much that overlaps (Belk and Sobh, 2011; Boulanouar, 2006, 2011).

In Islamic teaching, the definition of public and private space is determined by who is present in the space rather than by its physical location. For example, the *majlis*/salon/lounge[3] of a private home becomes a public space for a Muslim woman of the house if a male visitor who is eligible for consideration as a marriage partner for her occupies it. This remains true whether she (or he) is already married, they are of quite disparate ages, or even do not like or know one another. This reality is likely to be encountered particularly in the Middle East, but is applicable to Muslims practicing in this area of the spectrum all over the world.

The role and conception of the place of family within Muslim cultures is central to the consideration of what is a public, and what is a private, situation and much Islamic law is designed to deal with family related issues (Sowell, 2004). Even the architecture of the homes reflects the centrality and sanctity of the family in Islamic life. In many Muslim countries, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, the outside facing walls have small or no windows, and are generally unadorned. "Home life" takes place inside, with "receiving" areas at the front of the house, and the "heart" of the home to the back and/or upstairs. "Family life is hidden away from strangers; behind blank walls although inside may lie courtyards and gardens, refuges from the heat, cold and bustle of the outside world […] Outsiders are pointedly excluded" (Fernea and Fernea, 1995). Similarly, there are degrees of "private" which are reflected in permissible clothing, permissible speech and permissible behaviour. Thus, the "private space" is flexible – it depends not on the location, but who occupies it, and this may change at any given time.

Modesty (haya')

Modesty is an integral part of Islamic teaching, in fact, the Prophet Mohammed (s) said, "Every *deen* ("way of life") has an innate character. The character of Islam is modesty" (Malik, c750/1997, 47.2.9). Within Islamic teaching modesty is manifested across all spheres of speech, thought and action and so effects the "day to day" lives of Muslims.

Modesty is manifested in a number of ways – physically, conceptually/psychologically and spiritually/religiously. A key point in relation to research is that of modesty (*haya'*) and speech. Islamic teaching warns against slander and "backbiting", and also idle talk such as gossip, talking about others, spreading rumours and talking about trivial matters. With regard to public and private considerations within families and particularly between husbands and wives, the teaching requires them to keep the secrets of their spouses and family members and not to embarrass or slander them outside the family. For example, in the case of Arabs, Field (1984) states families are much more "real" than institutions.

This same idea includes personal face-to-face relationships which are very important to Muslim people. This has significant implications for data collection.

Haya extends beyond the most obvious and easily illustrated presentation of a person to the mind and actions of that person. Another important aspect of modesty is that of lowering the gaze. In the *Qur'an*, Muslims are required to "lower their gaze" (*Qur'an* 24, pp. 30-31) in order to protect their own modesty and that of others (Boulanouar, 2006). It is also important to understand the sensitivity for Muslims of what is heard and discussed, a point which will be elaborated on below.

Intention (nia)

The concept of intention (*nia*) has particular importance for understanding how to conduct appropriate research in Muslim societies. According to this teaching, for an act to be accepted as lawful (*halal*) and pure, the intention must be correct (Nawawi, c1254/1999; Al-Bukhari, 836/1994) and this must be true from the beginning of the act until the end of it. It must be remembered that for a Muslim every act is an act of worship. For non-Muslim researchers, any project will only be considered *halal* and pure for participation or consideration by Muslim participants or researchers, if they believe the project to be well intentioned, and if they can participate with a suitable *nia* themselves. The fact that Islam does not accept that the "means justifies the ends" but promotes the opposite, that both means and ends must be well intentioned and originating in a clear *nia*, can be a cause for much suspicion of both researchers and research, by Muslim samples (e.g. Nestorovic, 2010; Alghorani, 2011).

Gender separation

From the age of puberty, Muslim males and females are encouraged to keep company with their own gender and also not to be alone together. The taught norm in Islam is that women and men are separated, adhering to the Prophet's warning that, "Whenever a man is alone with a woman the Devil makes a third" (Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 3118). This cautions the potential for disallowed relationships.

Muslim societies, particularly Middle Eastern ones, have traditionally had single sex schools, separate mosque entrances for women and men and separate celebrations for each gender – even for the same event. This means that women, in the company of women and children, can celebrate in unrestricted circumstances (heads uncovered, dressed in party clothing and otherwise bejewelled and made up, participating in dancing and singing) and men can do the same. This does not mean that one gender is inferior to the other, nor does it mean that all Muslims follow this model but, as is made clear in both the *Qur'an*[4] and Sunnah[5], the norm is for separation.

Muslims in general are encouraged not to draw attention to themselves in terms of dress or speech or loud laughing, for example, and it is a part of maintaining the privacy and respect for the other gender that encourages the lowering of the gaze – not making direct eye contact with – the other gender. Closely related to this conception of *haya* is that of speech – there is no allowance for idle talk between genders. Cross-gender communication is for "legitimate reasons" only, such as official information seeking or work related discussion.

Implications for research

While some of the research implications of the above teachings have been identified these are now addressed more specifically.

Research topic/subject/communication

Given the different worldview of Muslim consumers, some topics or subjects which are freely discussed in the west, may be more sensitive for Muslim respondents. Research by

Fam *et al.* (2004) has highlighted products and services which may be viewed as "offensive" within Muslim samples. Given the considerations of *haya*, along with the wider teaching, Fam *et al.* (2004) found a statistical distinction between Islam and the other religions surveyed in relation to the advertising of four product groups (gender/sex related products, social/political groups, health and care products, addictive products) in Asia and attribute this to Islam not having "evolved with modernity" (p. 548) as other religions have and to "Islamic followers still follow[ing] their traditional beliefs and values" (p. 548). This result is reiterated in their later paper (Waller *et al.*, 2005), which surveyed two Muslim and two non-Muslim countries in relation to attitudes towards the advertising of products such as alcohol, charities, cigarettes, condoms, female contraceptives, female hygiene products, female underwear, funeral services, gambling, guns and armaments, male underwear, pharmaceuticals, political parties, racially extremist groups, religious denominations, AIDS/STD prevention and weight loss programmes (p. 8). As this expanded list shows, there are a number of items that are affected by considerations of Islamic *haya* within it, and in each of the four product groups Waller *et al.* (2005) identify. In fact, in their 2004 paper, Fam *et al.* found, "Basically the Islamic followers found the advertising of gender/sex related products, societal related products and health and care products most offensive relative to the other three religions [Christianity, Buddhism and Non-Religious Believers]" (pp. 546-547). Similarly, towards the advertising of addictive products, they found Muslims and Buddhists were offended by these advertisements. Addictive products are not permissible in Islamic teaching, with a specific prohibition on alcohol in all its forms and throughout its process – that is, it is forbidden to be involved in any aspect of its production, consumption or sale (Ibn-Majah, c1300/1996, 3:30:3380, Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 2776) and so to advertise products such as this is regarded as haram, blatant and immodest.

Similarly, in addition to topics of communication, communication styles are important. This extends to how issues are brought up, especially in relation to modesty with many Muslims preferring to be indirect, and to not broach particularly personal issues "head on". So, direct questioning related to the body and its functions, for example, may be ineffective. That is, it may not elicit useful responses. While some topics may be "sensitive" for Muslim respondents, some topics which are generally regarded as "sensitive" in the west may not be (McCosker *et al.*, 2001). An example is the discussion of religion. In many western countries to ask someone about their religious beliefs or affiliations is regarded as personal, this is very often not the case amongst Muslims, who discuss religion in connection with everyday life, reflecting the holistic nature of the teaching. This is not universally true of course (e.g. in Turkey), and consideration of the specific context is necessary.

Location
If intending to interview women, the most suitable location may be either a university (if they are students) or in their own homes (Hessini, 1994). Consideration of a location is important, and "a cross-cultural perspective illustrates that women or the private domain are not uniformly inferior, although they might appear so to the observer who employs Western concepts of privacy" (Tseëlon, 1991, p. 116). Similarly, other locations may be unsuitable. For example, for some respondents being seen at a café is undesirable and is uncommon cultural practice, whereas suggesting such a location (seen as "neutral") may be quite natural to the researcher. Further, gaining access to a Muslim home requires a relationship between the researcher and the householder or a friend of the householder, and can be quite difficult to secure. Men may often meet outside of the home, but many women will prefer to meet inside the house, a place some researchers consider her "sanctuary" (Davis, 1993; Hessini, 1994). In such a sanctuary women will feel comfortable so will talk freely and naturally, allowing the employing of various techniques specifically useful to women, such as feminist interviewing techniques (Coates, 1996). Access is more difficult if

access to the women of a house is required, and she is not known personally, especially if the researcher is male. A male researcher faces the double challenge of not only gaining access to the home, but also of gaining access to the women of the house. However, there are some options. For example, a male researcher could use a locally connected female co-researcher or translator to accompany him, and he could also use her contacts in order to find interviewees. Depending on the particular population of interest, however, some Muslims would not consider this an option, as having a strange man in contact with the women of the house can be seen as completely unacceptable no matter what practical steps may be put in place to minimise objections.

If intending to interview men, a public place such as a café may be suitable, but this is less likely if the researcher is a woman as, in some areas, women do not frequent public cafes and many Muslims of either gender would not like to be seen in public with a man/woman who was not their spouse or a member of their family. Another possible location for interviewing men is the *majlis*/salon/lounge of the house. Usually located by the front entranceway, this allows access to the house, but is far away from the others in it. However, a Muslim man being interviewed by a woman would often like another person present, in keeping with the *Hadith* although in rare cases he may refuse entirely to be interviewed by a woman.

It can also be very difficult to interview a person on their own, even if all the considerations of gender and location have been made. As is standard in many cultures (e.g. in the Maori culture in New Zealand) it is common for a Muslim to want to have another person or other people present when answering survey or interview questions. This has implications for research validity. There is, for example, the potential for social desirability bias being introduced by having another person/other people present. While Islamic teaching requires Muslims to tell the truth, not mislead about oneself, to talk about only the things they know about and not to show off (Muslim, c840/1982, 20:4688), it is unlikely, especially in the case of Muslim women, that an interview or even a survey will be completed by an individual on their own. In this case it is important for the researcher to use interviewing/research strategies in order to "check" or consider the effect of such bias on their interpretations and analysis. Further issues relating to gender will be considered in the section below on Research techniques.

Sampling frame

As mentioned above, personal relationships, and face-to-face encounters, are very important in Muslim cultures. This can present a problem with creating a representative probability sample, especially if required for women, given the difficulty in accessing them individually (Tuncalp, 1988). All relationships for Muslims are personalised, whether participating in groups or individually, as those who have conducted business amongst Muslims will attest, and there is much emphasis in knowing "about" people, consistent with high context cultures (Hall, 1976; Torstrick and Faier, 2009). The initial stages of business relationships are, in fact, take a very similar to those between Japanese businesspeople and their collaborators. Given this, the simplest method for recruiting interviewees may be the snowball method, based on positive word of mouth from one interviewee to the next, with some kind of relationship being crucial to getting that first interview. Tuncalp (1988) suggests graduate students can be the necessary link to begin the process. Whether a graduate student relationship would be enough to gain a researcher access depends in large part on the intended location for the interview/survey.

Research techniques

Some research questioning techniques that are in common use and are widely accepted in western traditions may not be as effective when used with Muslim samples. These include projection techniques, self-reporting and the use of photographs or representational media.

Projection techniques often involve the participant being asked to "imagine" what someone, such as their close friend, might think, feel, like, or do (Donoghue, 2010). For some, doing so might be understood as inconsistent with Islamic teaching. In Islamic teaching the *nia* (or, intention) of another person is known only to Allah, and cannot be assigned or guessed at by another. Typically, many responses to questions such as, "Why does s/he do that?" will be answered with *Allahu A'lm* (Allah knows). Similarly, in order not to lie, a Muslim respondent will commonly answer "I don't know" because he or she truly does not and will be reluctant to make conjectural responses. A teaching which relates directly to this translates as: "And do not pursue (i.e. do not assume and do not say) that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart – about all those [one] will be questioned" (*Qur'an*, 17, p. 36). These responses are not particularly usable, and nor do they lead to valid conclusions. Anecdotally, a recent research project, eliciting responses to open-ended projection questions resulted in over 25 per cent (of a sample of 300 respondents) answering "I don't know"; and a similar number leaving the question unanswered.

Similarly, self-reporting measures are not always usable. Questions such as "are you a good Muslim?" may be left unanswered or answered "no" in keeping with their own expectations (i.e. a humble response). However, some respondents will also answer "yes", either trying to respond culturally correctly to a western environment or because they are less modest. Consistency checks using reverse-coded questions can be employed in the research to ensure validity (Fowler, 2008).

The use of photographs of people as prompts is increasingly common in consumer research (Sobh *et al.*, 2008; Holman, 1980). Use of these can be a problem on two levels: one, as mentioned above, if there is any requirement of either projection or attribution; the other is the use of photos of people or animals. Many researchers have mentioned the use of mannequins or models with blanked out or blurred faces in advertising for Muslim clothing and have often attributed this to the "erasing" or subjugating of women (e.g. Sandikçi and Ger, 2007; Kilicbay and Binark, 2002). However, one interpretation of Islamic teaching is quite clear that representations of any living creature are not acceptable. Depiction of the creation by other than the creator is prohibited in Islam: "The makers of such figures will be punished and will be told, 'Bring to life what you have created'". (Al-Qaradawi, 1984; Al-Bukhari, 836/1994, 3:34:318). This might be relevant to only a particular sample of Muslims, and perhaps understandably those least researched. In response, researchers or advertisers interested in engaging with these women may blur the faces of models advertising clothing, or manufacture toy dolls with featureless faces, so as to meet the requirement of the teaching. Similarly, respondents may refuse to be photographed or have their homes/goods photographed – especially in the case of a bedroom or clothing for the private sphere (i.e. at home amongst family).

If these techniques are used in a context of anonymity, then there is a greater chance that useable data will be collected. One such approach used with success was to have the clothing of respondents held up by another person and photographed in this way, allowing the owner (and wearer) of the clothing to remain anonymous (Boulanouar, 2011).

Women and men
There are two main categories for consideration in this section. One is that of the mixing of women and men, the implications of which have been discussed earlier in relation to Islamic teaching and also with regards to the location of the interview. Another more specific consideration is the classification of the men and women involved, namely, "western" and "non-western" and "Muslim" and "non-Muslim".

The relationship between western and non-western groups introduces issues of trust and highlights the history of misrepresentation of non-western groups in the western body of writing (Kahf, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) particularly as a result of the portrayal of Muslim culture in western media (Said, 1997). Many non-western and particularly Muslim

respondents are increasingly unwilling to be interviewed for media or academic research due to a fear of misrepresentation borne of either interviewer ignorance or arrogance (Razzaque, 2005). This is a serious challenge to academic researchers, and further reinforces the importance of personal relationships in the process of securing an accessible sample.

While Muslims interviewing Muslims may seem to offer a way of overcoming some of the above issues, this can introduce other biases. As Glesne (2006) states, "similarity may ease some aspects of access but does not always increase information" (p. 112) – so sometimes differences of race (Rhodes, 1994) or religion can benefit from the interaction because the interviewee will explain more to someone deemed unfamiliar with the context and also allow more follow up questions and probes. However, the issue of trust is paramount and further emphasises the unequalled benefit a personal relationship can confer. A similar situation has been recorded in the literature with regard to indigenous peoples who have been colonised (e.g. Mikaere, 2011). This point is raised specifically for the consideration of researchers in developing appropriate research designs.

Data collection methods
The concept of privacy of speech also encompasses keeping the secrets of spouses and family. Therefore there can be issues for data collection in that questions that compromise the bounds of familial privacy may not be answered, or may be answered incompletely. As mentioned earlier, it is often difficult to interview women (especially) alone, due to privacy concerns – but also gender separation issues if these are relevant. Similarly, it is often difficult to get interviews completed "efficiently" as the nature of high context and collective cultures means that time must be taken over personal/small talk, and also refreshment and hospitality, during the appointed time (Boulanouar, 2011; Torstrick and Faier, 2009). It is recommended that researchers allow more time than they might normally consider sufficient in another context.

While surveys have the benefit of offering participants' anonymity, there needs to be special consideration given to the survey dissemination as cultural factors can mean that response rates are typically lower than in the west. Distribution can be facilitated by working through institutions such as the Chamber of Commerce or using a hospital database, for example, but the lack of personalisation/introduction often leads to a very poor response rate and, additionally, there is the difference in the measurement of time in many Muslim countries, making what may be regarded in western terms as a "reasonable turnaround time" unrealistic in these contexts. Mall intercepts can be difficult, due to a lack of formal introduction, gender or trust issues, while phone interviews suffer from similar problems as do mail outs, including unwillingness to speak to strangers and unfamiliarity with the researcher (Tuncalp, 1988). These methods can be ineffective within other sample populations too, but often for different reasons.

In relation to data collection methods, it should be noted that women may regard their voices as *awra* (private) and, as such there are a number of issues to address. These women may take the view that their voice is not to be heard by any non-*Mahram*[6] men – therefore, there would be no possibility of being interviewed by a man. Some would not have their voices recorded, as they would not then have control over who heard it. Some, too, would feel that making a recording of their voice is, in some way, taking a part of them, and would feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. In this case, it requires practising taking excellent written notes! As has been mentioned, requests to take photographs or video record an interview are likely to be rejected. The likelihood of a refusal to have their image recorded visually is much more likely to be encountered than the objection to the recording of the voice, but it is essential to consider these aspects when formulating research designs.

The use of focus groups requires special consideration regarding the teachings around gender separation as well as issues to do with recording images and voices, in addition to

those common to other methods such as the topic/subject of the research and the location in which it is to be conducted.

The voice of Muslim people is under-represented in contemporary consumer research, partly due to the reasons and considerations discussed above. There is also, in many Muslim countries, more of an emphasis on oral culture than a text based one. Additionally, many Muslim countries do not have a tradition of seeking the opinions of their citizenry over issues due to governance structure or economic considerations in the way that such questioning is common in the west. Consequently, many Muslims are not used to filling in questionnaires and surveys, or even being asked for their opinions. Further, coming from collective cultures where the focus is on "us" rather than "me" (Nisbett, 2003; Kagitçibasi, 2007) conceptualising and expressing one's individual thoughts is not necessarily a typical or familiar practice.

Conclusion

This paper is not an exhaustive overview of the application of Islamic teaching by "conservative" Muslim women, nor is it a discussion of the range of understanding and practice of a group numbering over 1.5 billion. It has sought to illustrate, using the least heard, least well represented and least well understood group of Muslims, how some everyday research techniques and methods may be received. From this explanation, it is hoped that researchers are better able to design projects which meet their collection objectives with regard to useful and usable responses and, in so doing, add to our overall understanding. This, in turn, supports both better political and business relationships between people both within and between societies.

An informed understanding of Islam and of the lives of Muslim people would greatly enhance the abilities of researchers to gain access to respondents and would also greatly enhance the quality of the data collected, in addition to the benefits for its analysis and interpretation. By highlighting some important considerations underlying the culture of Muslim samples (i.e. Islamic teachings), how these manifest themselves in issues, and formulating ways to deal with them, planning from the initial research design phase through to the data collection phases can be done ethically and with a good degree of success.

While some of the above discussion may lead researchers, particularly those from a non-Muslim, western background to conclude that the barriers involved are too great, this is not the case. Given the size and consumer power of the Muslim population worldwide, it is important that a better understanding of their consumption behaviours and attitudes is gained.

Currently, much of the research in the western non-Muslim published literature arguably both misrepresents and under-represents Muslim consumers and their consumption practices, and that misrepresentation could be limited if researchers familiarise themselves with key teachings of Islam, and consider the possible research implications of those teachings, before designing their research methodology.

In future studies, it is suggested that familiarity with the potential issues outlined herein allows research frameworks to incorporate scope at each stage of the process. As earlier examples show, consumption of global brands and symbolism and exposure to mass media in terms of programming and news, does not equate to consumption of the culture from which the symbols originate. Having familiarity with the teaching on which "conservative" Muslims enact their Islamic practice means flexibility in design is possible. It is always easier to make something more relaxed than more careful.

An aim of this paper was to facilitate researchers' abilities to access Muslim women samples across the full spectrum of practice and, therefore, facilitate a wide range of future research outputs addressing the consumption issues and practices of Muslim women.

Finally, it should be noted that this paper does not provide an exhaustive analysis of Islamic concepts relevant to utilising Muslim women samples. Hence, further research on Islamic concepts would doubtless prove fruitful for research methodology and design.

Notes

1. This paper uses Islamic scholars as references for matters of Islamic teaching. This is done because Islamic scholars are products of a different education system than Muslim western-trained academics. Islamic scholars are required to be experts in Arabic language, to have memorised the *Qur'an* and fulfil other requirements as well as being accepted as a scholar by other accepted scholars (Roald, 2001). *Women in Islam: The Western Experience*, Routledge. A range of scholars is referenced here. "Islamic Studies Academics" cannot issue fatawa (Islamic rulings), are not recognised by Islamic scholars, so are palatable to other academics but are not specialists in this field, and are not accepted as sources of legislation for Muslims.

2. Islamic teaching holds that all humankind is created with free will, so some people will be Muslim and some not, and that is their free choice, not an inherent difference between people.

3. *Majlis* (Middle East), salon (Morocco); lounge are all different names for a room with the same purpose, receiving guests.

4. The Islamic Book of Revelation.

5. Tradition of the Prophet of Islam.

6. *Mahram* are those eligible for marriage, non-*Mahram* are ineligible.

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