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**Generation M: young Muslims changing the world**

by *Shelina Janmohamed*

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The past decade has seen a growing interest in Islamic marketing, as shown by the launch of *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, which published its first article in 2010 and by Marketing Theory's release of a special issue entitled "Islamic Encounters in Consumption and Marketing" (Sandikci and Aliakbar, 2013). While many topics have already been studied and published in marketing journals and books, Shelina Janmohamed's *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World* is particularly refreshing and useful for academics and managers. One of the reasons behind my enthusiasm for this work is that it underlines how we are living a particular moment in history – a time when levels of education and employment for Muslim women, terror attacks and current public debates about Islam, demographics, marketing and the internet are creating the conditions to shape a whole new generation of Muslims that marketplaces cannot afford to ignore. Muslim millennials represent two-thirds of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims, and the Muslim middle class is expected to triple to 900 million by 2030. Interestingly, shortly after the release of Janmohamed's book at the end of 2016, Thomson Reuters (2016) published its State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2016/17, which emphasized for the first time the growing importance of millennials who should contribute to a projected food and lifestyle market size of \$3tn by 2021. For readers' information, Shelina Janmohamed is the Vice President of Ogilvy Noor, a branch of Ogilvy dedicated to Islamic branding and marketing.

The book comprises 15 chapters structured around five sections: "Salaam, Generation M!", "The Global Muslim Lifestyle", "Culture: The New Muslim Cool", "The Twenty-First-Century Ummah" and "The Faithful Future". From beginning to end, Janmohamed's message is relatively clear: Generation M is a new generation of Muslim millennials who are determined to be heard and seen in marketplaces more often and hopefully less often pointed to as a potential political issue in non-Muslim countries. In a nutshell, Generation M uses consumption as a tool for empowerment similar to how the Cheetah generation in Africa uses entrepreneurship. *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World* provides a deep understanding of this generation by taking a sort of phenomenological approach (i.e. by asking young Muslims directly what it means to be young and Muslim today) in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries and by considering that Islam and globalization together form a co-constitutive relationship. Janmohamed presents very different profiles of individuals who all share a similar narrative about Islam and consumption. These consumers are men and women not only drinking halal beers and wine, wearing haute couture and running online sex shops but also going to the mosque, engaging in an "ecojihad" and more generally respecting the main tenets of Islam.



Throughout the book, we can see how consumers make Islam and modernity malleable concepts that fit well together to serve a coherent identity narrative. In fact, identity is at the heart of Generation M's motivation. From what the author writes, we understand that Muslim millennials grew up in a world traumatized by the events of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Allah. And this might be what makes a difference between Muslim millennials and millennials who are very similar in many respects: They are both tech-savvy and self-empowered, they want a meaningful life and they look for authentic brands. Young Muslims, especially in non-Muslim countries, where they form a religious minority, have often had to develop as people in a world that makes quite an issue out of who they are, and it therefore excludes them in many ways. One could relate this moment of identity construction to Erikson's (1950) life stage in which people struggle to find equilibrium between what they appear to be in the eyes of others, on the one hand, and what they feel they really are and have been so far, on the other hand. In the case of Generation M, we can see that young consumers decide to take pride in, rather than repress, who they are. Heroes of pop culture illustrate this generation well, for example, Kamala Khan, a fictional 16-year-old Pakistani-American Muslim girl who is a new Marvel superhero, or Maher Zain, a popstar and R&B singer from Sweden who sings about his attempts to be a better Muslim and "live life as a faithfully inspired twenty-first-century citizen". One outcome of this pride in being Muslim is that nothing can compromise faith to the point that faith becomes cool and thus marketable. The interplay between consumption and religious faith is evident in Janmohamed's book. Consumption is at the service of faith, just as faith enriches the consumption experience. Examples of such interplay abound: Women swap their hijabs during dedicated events, men and women look for tayyab products (i.e. truthful and good products that respect human labor, animal well-being or the environment), Islamic finance is increasingly more successful and halal travels are becoming more and more appealing. This interplay allows Generation M-ers not only to express their identity but also to expand and experience it in novel ways.

Much more could be said about *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World*. For example, a very challenging argument from Janmohamed is the upswing of the ummah – Muslims' consciousness to be part of a supra-national community based on faith. This argument provides food for thought because Generation M indeed includes all millennials who experience a faithful relationship with Islam, regardless of their understanding and practices of faith. Generation M is made up of millennials who never drink alcohol and those who occasionally drink wine, those who do not pray five times a day and those making the hajj to Mecca, those who participate in hijab swap events and those who never wear a hijab or Shi'a consumers and Sunni ones.

The American artist Basem Hassan considers that he is "part of the birth of a new Muslim cultural identity that's truly a historical event to witness" (cited by Janmohamed). For my part, I think that Shelina Janmohamed also plays an active part in this birth with this new book, which should be reason enough to read the book. For those who do not have any expertise in Islamic marketing, *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World* is a very good start to observe this birth of a new Muslim cultural identity. And for those who are already experts in the field, you will undoubtedly find convincing, irritating and challenging arguments to inspire you.

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