

## **Image of Islam in U.S. Media after 9/11: A Survey of American and International Students**

**Baker H. Alkarimeh\* Mohammad K. Mahroum\*\***

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study is to survey American and international students to identify their attitudes towards the image of Islam after 9/11 attacks in various U.S. media (TV, radio, newspaper, magazine and electronic).

The study used the survey method and the population of the study included 100 American and international students at Arkansas State University. This study used five research questions that contained 61 variables in addition to demographic variables: gender, age, religion and education. Through analyzing 100 surveys, the study found that the majority of respondents believed that the U.S. media have produced the term of terrorism and they portrayed Islam as a terrorist religion. The results also indicated that the participants believed that the U.S. media portrayed Islamic nations as terrorist groups. However, the international students believed more than American students that 9/11 attacks were the worst because such attacks were associated with religion and they paved the way for increasing violence in the world.

**Keywords:** Image; Islam; U.S. media; terrorism.

### **Introduction**

September 11, 2001 was a starting point to many changes in the world. After this tragic day, the United States (U.S.) started its war against terrorism that is related to Islam. This catastrophic war became the headlines in newspapers and on television screens everywhere in the world. The Islamic world has also become a center of attention by journalists and nations around the world. Fabulous images are created and mixed with real life, and media used them effectively to mobilize public opinion for building futuristic plans and interests (Merazy, 2005). Terrorism's images of Islam and the description of the American wars as the Crusades in the U.S. media recall the role of history, myth

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\* University of Toulon, France.

\* Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

and media (Richard, Donald, Jane, Nancy & Eileen, 1984). The mythical images could control as we deal with these images every day without questioning the sources (Alsoah, 2002). The snake symbol, for example, that we see on the facades of pharmacies is a Sumerian symbol which goes back four thousand years BC, where the Sumerians used it to indicate that the snake is a master of healing. Hitler, as another example, used the swastika that anciently was used by several human civilizations such as Pharaonic Egypt to indicate to the eternality and happiness of life, and it was an effective sacred symbol among ancient people, then Hitler in the twentieth century revived this symbol again, but with a new concept (Alsoah, 2002). After September 11, U.S. President George W Bush used terrorism and crusade terms while the media repeated them over and over again. The crusade term was used in the Middle Ages to indicate the holy war towards Palestinian territories. After 9/11 Western people have seen Islam as a frightening and terrible religion (Rinella, 2002). The purpose of the study is to survey university students to determine their perspectives of the image of Islam in the U.S. media after 9/11. The study has two hypotheses and four research questions:

H1: Participants believe that the U.S. media portray a negative image of Islam.

H2: Participants believe the U.S. media portray Islamic people as terrorists.

Research questions:

RQ1: What image of Islam do participants believe the U.S. Media portray?

RQ2: Do participants believe other groups affiliated with different religions are portrayed as terrorists in the U.S. media?

RQ3: Do participants believe the 9/11 attack is the worst terrorist attack in history?

RQ4: What are participants' attitudes toward the U.S. media coverage of Islam?

RQ5: What is the relationship between the country of origin and participants' perceptions of U.S. media portrayal of Islam?

### **Justification**

The term "terrorism" can be dated back to the oriental studies in the middle ages. These studies were more descriptive than analytical; they produced some general concepts of Islam and submitted to the West such as Islam was spread by the sword, fear and intimidation (Arkoon, 1995). On the other side, Orientalism did not renew its methods but kept the old ones. The goal of Orientalism is simple: the Middle East is still the Middle East, and the West is the West. Instead of seeking to change the reality of Arab or Islam, Orientalism merely provides uninteresting superficial description about Arab-Islamic civilization (Said, 1994). The 9/11 attacks created a new world characterized by violence and terrorism. Since then, the age is considered to be a terroristic age

(Friedman, 2005). Friedman (2005) found that 9/11 has launched a third world war where the terrorism was a factor, but it is essentially a comprehensive religious ideology war, and to confront this war, it needs an alternative ideology based on pluralism, tolerance and dialogue. Moreover, 9/11 attacks had a major impact on shaping or reshaping the image of Arabs and Muslims in the West. Thus, this image has already passed a stage of distortion that existed even before 11/9 to a stage of removing all Arabs and Muslims (Merazy, 2005).

In contrast, media were a main factor to distort the image of Islam. A study was conducted in October 2001 with the participation of twenty students from the Fulbright program with a similar number of students at the University of Maryland, a number of American students stated in this study that the first impressions of Arabs and Muslims have been created by the U.S. media and Hollywood's movies. Similarly, Arab students stated that their impressions of the Americans were also from the same media (Merazy, 2005).

Hatred of Muslim community and Muslims in general in the West has become a phenomenon in all European countries. In France, for example, mosque and headscarf became an image of terrorism; in England, The daily Times in June 2004 mentioned that the British Muslims felt that they were not part of the country, and they were unacceptable, the British people looked at them as ticking bombs. Likewise, In the USA, aggression has increased on Muslims and Sikhs because they used to wear clothes like a dress of Indian Muslims (Shiap, 2002).

However, media had an important role in creating certain images of Islam and Muslims (Shiap, 2002). Depending on media and political procedures, societies and individuals built their terroristic images of Islam as an absolute truth (Shalapi, 2004). Consequently, the U.S. media were able to provide over the previous years this negative image of Islam, and were able also to create effectively a new era marked with terrorism (Shalapi, 2004; Shiap, 2002).

### **Literature review**

In history, terror has a root in Latin language which means to frighten or to make terrible (Chaliand & Blin, 2007). The term "terrorism" is flexible and ambiguous; it is a social construction related to time and place, and it is not a neutral descriptive term but a controversial concept (Crenshaw, 2007). The common definitions refer to the horrible acts that can create fear in the societies for ideological goal and it also consists of acts of unlawful terror and war (Riley& Hoffman, 1964). Furthermore, terrorism is a subjective expression in nature; it might give a positive meaning for some groups (McCormack, 2001). However, there is a limited scale in which terrorism could be defined, several studies failed to recognize the application of terrorism before the French revolution (McCormack, 2001).

In modern times, according to Walzer (2002) terrorism is “the deliberate killing of innocent people, at random, in order to spread fear through a whole population and force the hand of its political readers”(p. 130). Each religion, however, throughout history had extremists; religious books are used to lure followers to kill others (George, 2006). The perpetrators in religious terrorism have to use religious scriptures to justify and explain their violence, or to gain recruits (Hoffman, 1999; Armstrong, 2005). Nevertheless, the term was not effective before 9/11. Islam, when linked to terrorism, has become more complex and ambiguous than ever, especially within the bilateral confrontation between the West and Islam (Sha'pan, 2002).

Terrorism has become a major theme on the U.S. agenda since 9/11 because of the complex mixture of sequence events; there was a political agenda built on the event; the media played a major role to execute this political agenda, especially the war on terrorism, which began and did not end (Spiro, Michael, Cristina, Arlana & Trenton, 2006). The political speech and especially George W. Bush's speech influenced the media agenda, and directed them towards the war on terrorism (Yusuf& Wayne, 2006). In addition, there is a key role of policy in guiding the media, particularly in the times of crisis; coverage of events after 9/11 was restricted by government procedures (Pia Mifsud, 2007).

However, negative images of Arabs and Muslims, as a special agenda, were used by the U.S. media to achieve certain goals. These images were not produced directly, but re-produced by using Oriental studies of Arabic and Islamic world to serve a particular case (Marouf, 2000). Two theories explain how the U.S. media covered Islam after 9/11. These theories are agenda sitting theory and framing theory. According to the agenda setting theory, propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the 1970, mass media set the agenda for public opinion by highlighting certain issues. Shaw and MaCombs (1972) stated that “the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about.” (p. 5)

Shahira, Cho, Wayne & Song (2006) surveyed the influence of visual agenda setting on the emotions of individuals and restoring images. They found that the images after 9/11 re-confirmed terrorism, such as the images of dead people in 9/11, but displaying images from the Arab streets, such as images of celebrations in Palestinian streets, in the same time of 9/11 attack, increased concerns more than the death's images of 9/11 attack. Consequently, when the media arrange displaying visual events in contradictory levels, it would result more fears of terrorism. On the other hand, Spiro et al. (2006) found that the presidential speeches influenced the media agendas and directed them to face the issue of terrorism around the world. Therefore, after 9/11, there was cooperation between the media and political agendas against terrorism (Spiro et al., 2006).

However, there are two levels of agenda setting. In the first level, the media bring the people's attention and control their choice by telling them what they should think about. In the second-level of agenda setting, the characteristics of objects or issues become the central attention of the media; the media suggest how the people should think about the issue (McCombs, 2004).

Framing theory is a part of agenda setting theory that focuses on a specific aspect of an issue/event, while excluding others. The concept of this theory is mainly related to the work of Erving Goffman (1974).

Deepa (2008) drew attention to the literatures in oriental studies to analyze old and new ways, showing five frames that were used to represent Muslims, Arabs and the Middle East post 9 / 11 attack. These frames are: "Islam is a monolithic religion; Islam is a uniquely sexist religion, Muslim mind is incapable of science, rational thinking and reason, Islam is an inherently violent religion, and West spreads Democracy, while Islam spawns Terrorism" (p.3). Media and writers have used certain frames back to the oriental studies to influence negatively public opinion in order to achieve the interests in the Middle East (Deepa, 2008).

Based on the previous, framing Muslims and Arabs has been carried out in two forms: the image that supports the heroic image of the U.S. through portraying 9/11 as Hollywood stories represented by American superheroes (McKinley & Thomas, 2003); The second image supports a distorted face of Islam by relying on the oriental studies that described the East as a fictional novel, which consists of people and events outside of real life (Said, 1994).

### **Image of Islam in U.S. Media**

The U.S. media cooperated with the George W Bush administration after 9/11 (Douglas, 2007). They made two different worlds: the world of freedom and democracy represented by the U.S. and the world of barbarism and terrorism represented by Arabs and Muslims (Douglas, 2007). The U.S. media therefore exploited, cooperated with George W Bush administration, the fear of the violence, killing and exaggerations from foreign enemies (Douglas, 2007; Nancy, 2007). Agenda setting and framing theories may explain the mechanism of media action in creating those worlds and polices, and by ordering the events in a particular way and focusing on a specific image to be sent to the public. Consequently, the American media has supported, as a result of intensive terrorism coverage, the war on Iraq and Afghanistan through shaping the public opinion, and international community against terrorism (Nancy, 2007).

In contrast, the governmental officials, in particular, tended to describe the threat of terrorism in worse and weighty terms more than non-governmental officials (Jonathan, 2008). However, the U.S. government adopted the publishing of information and the coverage of events through preventing

journalists to enter the crash site (Phillip, 2001; Jonathan, 2008). On the other hand, the term “terrorism” has gained a special meaning after 9/11; it was difficult to avoid some of the innuendo that referred to Islamic fundamentalism or Islamic ideology; it was difficult, on the other hand, to find documents that could link Islam to terrorism directly (Pia Mifsud, 2007). In parallel, the reactions of leaders of the U. S. and the European Union (U.E.) led the Muslims population to sympathize with the terrorists and their actions (Jaap, 2007).

In addition, Western journalists and documentary filmmakers did not go beyond the usual narrative and stereotypical image of Muslims (Robart, 2007). Many television documentaries broadcasted exclusively by the United States after 9/11 were to enhance the understanding of George W Bush administration and the neo-conservative of the nature of war on terrorism (Robart, 2007). These documentary films showed a complete ignorance of Islam, and they were filled with prejudices (Robart, 2007). Similarly, the *siege* movie, fore example, showed Western conceptions of the Arab community in general, and Islam in particular. This movie showed a vague or superficial understanding of the Arab world, where the Arab world was always portrayed as a representative of terrorism, ignorance and backwardness (Marouf, 2000). These concepts have not appeared just in this movie, but in most movies that depicted Arab or Islamic world (Marouf, 2000).

All these negative pictures have made a fear of Islam and Muslims. These pictures appeared in different forms such as language, culture, and politics. There are many terms and expressions have been made to pursue the prejudice against Muslims (Haja, 2008). These expressions or linguistic frames, for example, are: Islamic terrorism, Islamic Intolerance, Islamophobia and Islamic extremists (Haja, 2008).

As a result of the above, the U.S. media have linked between religion and terroristic attacks, and there was an insistence of the U.S. administration and the U.S. media to link Islam to the attacks. In contrast, media used agenda setting and framing theories to lead public opinion, and direct their concerns towards what the U.S. administration wanted. In addition, Islamic religion seemed to be a complicated issue, where the Islamic religion appears, in one way or another; it is consistently correlated with threat.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to survey university students to identify their perspectives of the image of Islam in the U.S. media after 9/11. Five research questions were posed for this study and focused on students’ perspectives and attitudes toward the image of Islam in the U.S. media after 9/11 attacks. The population of study was a convenient sample at a mid-south university. A

questionnaire was administered for the USA and international students in an introduction to culture anthropology class, and at the university's union.

The questionnaire contained 61 variables. Demographic data are related to gender, age, education and religion. Respondents were asked also to identify from a list of five variables "TV, radio, newspaper, magazine and internet" the amount of time they spend with those media each day. In addition, they were asked to identify from a list of different media what media they use to gather information. Those media were divided to TV "NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX and CNN"; radio "NPR"; newspaper "Washington Post, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Democrat Gazette and Jonesboro Sun"; magazine "Magazine Time, Newsweek and Atlantic monthly"; website "NBC.com, CBS.com, ABC.com, FOX.com and CNN.com". To answer research question one: What image of Islam do participants believe the U.S. Media portray? Respondents were asked to address three likert statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Those statements are: "The U.S. media have produced the term of terrorism"; "The U.S. media portrayed Islam as a terroristic religion"; and "The U.S. media portray Islamic people as terroristic groups". Research question two asked: Do participants believe other groups affiliated with different religions are portrayed as terrorists in U.S. media? Respondents were asked to identify all organizations that they believe are terrorists. Those organization are "HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement), FATAH (Palestinian group), Hizballah (party of god), Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Al-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad), Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), National Liberation Army (ELN), Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), al-Qa'ida, Real IRA, and Revolutionary armed forces of Colombia (FARC). **These organizations classified as terrorist groups by the U.S. government.**

In addition to those variables, respondents were asked to identify all religions that they believe are portrayed as terrorists in the U.S. media. Those religions are "Christian, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Atheism, Judaism and no religion". Research question three asked: Do participants believe 9/11 attack is the worst terroristic attack in history? Six Likert statements, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, were developed to answer this question: "The U.S media portrayed 9/11 attack as the worst in history"; "The U.S. media blame Islam as a religion for 9/11"; "9/11 attacks opened the way for increasing the violence in the world"; "9/11 attacks were the worst because it is associated with religion"; "9/11 attacks were the worst because it was the reason of the America's wars against terrorism"; and "9/11 attacks were the worst because of the continuous emphasis on the attacks by the U.S media". Research question four asked: What are participants' attitudes toward the U.S. media coverage of Islam? Six Likert statements, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, were used to measure this question: "Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the

world ”; “The U.S media avoid talking about any positives in the Islamic religion”; “The image of Islam in the U.S. media has not changed since 9/11 attack”; “Focus on the negative image of Islam in the U.S. media has increased violence in the world”; “The U.S. media cover Islam only when there is violence in the world”; and “Coverage of Islam by U.S. media is an unfair coverage”. Research question five asked: What is the relationship between country of origin and participants’ perceptions of U.S. media portrayal of Islam? Respondents’ answers will be compared relying on all variables that included in previous four research questions by using independent t-test. Data analysis will be measured using frequencies, percentages, chi-square and independent t- test. The test of significance is set at  $p < .05$ .”

### Findings

One hundred surveys were completed in an introduction to culture anthropology class and university's union at a mid-south university. Among the respondents, there was a significant number of female ( $\chi^2=56.420$   $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The main age was 20-22 years (30%) among different age “18 – 19, 23 – 25, 26 - 30 and 31 - or older”. Graduate students were the major education 39 (39%) among different education “freshman, sophomore, junior and senior”. Among different religions “Christian, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism and no religion”, significant numbers of respondents were Christian ( $\chi^2=99.800$   $df=5$ ,  $p=.001$ ). However, the total amount of time that the majority of students spend with media was the Internet (98%), which included CNN.com as a significant informational resource among different Internet sites; and TV (88%), which included “CNN- TV” and “ABC-TV” as a significant informational resource among different TVs, networks.

Research question one asked: What image of Islam do participants believe the U.S. media portray? Three Likert statements were used to measure degree of agreement with three statements. A significant number of respondents agreed that “The U.S. media have produced the term of terrorism”  $\chi^2=51.182$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Students also agreed that “The U.S. media portrayed Islam as a terroristic religion” ( $\chi^2=54,091$   $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and that “The U.S. media portray Islamic people as terroristic groups” ( $\chi^2=67,909$   $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Research question two asked: Do participants believe other groups affiliated with different religions are portrayed as terrorist in U.S. media? Respondents initially were asked to identify all organizations that they believe they are terrorists. More than seventy percent of respondents thought that “al-Qa'ida” is the terrorist organization” ( $\chi^2=19.360$   $df=1$ ,  $p=.001$ ). On contrast, respondents overwhelmingly disagreed to include remain organizations as terrorist groups. Those disagreement ratios were: (83%) HAMAS (Islamic Resistance Movement); (92%) FATAH (Palestinian group); (87%) Hizballah (party of God); (96%) Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU); (88%) al-Jihad (Egyptian Islamic Jihad); (91%) Kurdistan Workers' Party



(PKK); (94%) National Liberation Army (ELN); (88%) Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ); (92%) Palestine Liberation Front (PLF); (89%) Real IRA; and (89%) Revolutionary armed forces of Colombia (FARC). In addition, respondents were asked to identify all religions that they believe are portrayed as terrorists in the U.S. media. Those religions are “Christian, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Atheism, Judaism and no religion”. A significant number of respondents believed that Islam has been portrayed as a terrorist in U.S. media” ( $\chi^2=48$   $df=2$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Research question three asked: Do participants believe the 9/11 attack is the worst terrorist attack in history? Six Likert statements were developed to answer this question. (Table 1) shows the level of agreement and disagreement with the statements.

**Table 1:** Respondents’ perceptions of 9/11 by Frequency, Percentage and Chi-Square

Statements	Strongly Agreement	Agreement	Disagreement	Strongly disagreement	Chi-square
The U.S. media portrayed 9/11 attack as the worst in history	28/28.0%	52/52.0%	18/18.0%	2/2.0%	54.091 df=3 001
The U.S. media blame Islam as a religion for 9/11	12/12.1%	37/37.4%	44/44.4%	6/6.1%	41.808 df=3 001
9/11 attacks opened the way for increasing the violence in the world	12/12.4%	48/49.5%	32/33%	5/5.2%	47.206 df=3 001
9/11 attacks were the worst because it is associated with religion.	11/11.3%	32/33%	48/49.5%	6/6.2%	46.711 df=15 001
9/11 attacks were the worst because it was the reason of the America's wars against terrorism.	9/9.2%	45/45.9%	39/39.8%	5/5.1%	51.061 df=3 001
9/11 attacks were the worst because of the continued emphasis on the attacks by the U.S media.	8/8.1%	53/53.5%	35/35.4%	3/3.0%	66.939 df=3 001

N=100  $p \leq .05$

Note: not all frequencies will equal n=100 due to lack of response on some questions or statement.

Research question four asked: What are participants’ attitudes toward media coverage of Islam? Six Likert statements were used to measure this question. A significant number of respondents agreed “Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world” ( $\chi^2=54.408$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). The

majority of respondents disagreed that “The U.S. media avoid talking about any positives in the Islamic religion” ( $\chi^2=54.408$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and that “The image of Islam in the U.S. media has not changed since 9/11 attack” ( $\chi^2=51.182$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Furthermore, participants disagreed that “focus on negative image of Islam in the U.S. media has increased violence in the world” ( $\chi^2=41.081$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and that “the U.S. media cover Islam only when there is violence in the world” ( $\chi^2=57.646$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). However, a significant number of respondents believed that “Coverage of Islam by U.S. media is an unfair coverage” ( $\chi^2=40.750$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Research question five asked: What is the relationship between country of origin and participants’ perceptions of U.S. media portrayal of Islam? This question was posted to measure difference between international and American students about their perspectives of the image of Islam in the U.S. media after 9/11 by using independent t- test. The test of significance is set at  $p < .05$ .”

Between both American and international respondents, American respondents ( $m=1.2600$ ) were more likely to be males ( $t=2.316$ ,  $df=89$ ,  $p=.023$ ) than international students ( $1.4800$ ). Among respondents, American students were more likely to be sophomores (38%) while the majority of international students (58%) were working on their graduate degrees ( $\chi^2=19.08$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Americans (88%) were more likely to be Christian while (30%) of the international students claimed no religion ( $\chi^2=61.97$ ,  $df=5$ ,  $p=.001$ ). Among international students, Islam accounted for (28%) of the international students religion, (16%) were Christian, (12%) were Hinduism and the remnant was Atheist and Buddhism. Respondents both American and international students were asked to identify from a list of five variables" TV, radio, newspaper, magazine and internet" the amount of time they spend with those media each day. In this case, the higher the mean the more time spent with the medium. Significant differences in the amount of time were between respondents in spending time with TV, radio and Internet. American students ( $m=1.6250$ ) spend more time than international students ( $M=1.2250$ ) with TV ( $t=2.802$ ,  $df=86$ ,  $p=.006$ ). American students ( $m=1.4681$ ) also spend more time than international students ( $M=1.0811$ ) with radio ( $t=2.799$ ,  $df=82$ ,  $p=.006$ ). In contrast, international students ( $M=2.6327$ ) spend more time than American students ( $M=2.0408$ ) with Internet ( $t=-2.880$ ,  $df=96$ ,  $p=.005$ ). However, there were no significant differences in the amount of time the American and international students spend with newspaper and magazine.

In addition, respondents both American and international students were asked to identify from a list of different media what media they use to gather information. In this case, the lowest mean equals the more often the media source was used. International students ( $M=1.5600$ ) tended to use the New York

Times more than American students ( $M=1.8200$ ) as a significant resource ( $t=-2.900$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.005$ ). International students ( $M=1.8600$ ) used the Wall Street journal more often than American students ( $M=1.9800$ ) ( $t=-2.245$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.027$ ). In addition, international students ( $M=1.4600$ ) paid more attention than American students ( $M=1.6800$ ) to CNN.com to gather their information ( $t=-2.256$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.26$ ).

In contrast, American students ( $m=1.6800$ ) tended to use CBS-TV more than international students ( $m=1.8800$ ) to gather information ( $t=-2.463$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.016$ ). American students ( $m=1.3800$ ) also used ABC-TV more than international students ( $m=1.8400$ ) ( $t=-5.294$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.001$ ). And, American students ( $m=1.6800$ ) more than international students ( $m=1.9000$ ) used ABC.com ( $t=-2.777$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.007$ ).

Research question one asked: What image of Islam do participants believe the U.S. media portray? There were no significant differences between both American and international students that "The U.S. media have produced the term of terrorism;" The U.S. media portrayed Islam as a terrorist religion; and "The U.S. media portray Islamic people as terrorist groups".

Research question two asked: Do participants believe other groups affiliated with different religions are portrayed as terrorist in U.S. media? In this case, "the lowest mean equals the more often the group was portrayed as terrorist in the U.S. media". International student ( $M=1.8400$ ) believed more than American students ( $M=1.9800$ ) that the U.S. media have portrayed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a terrorist group ( $t=497$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.014$ ). However, there were no significant differences between both American and international students about other groups.

In addition, both respondents were asked to identify all religions that they believe are portrayed as terrorists in the U.S. media. In this case, "the lowest mean equals the more often the religion was portrayed as terrorist in the U.S. media". American students ( $m=1.6000$ ) believed more than international students ( $m=1.9000$ ) that the U.S. media portrayed Buddhism as a terrorist religion ( $t=-3.656$ ,  $df=98$ ,  $p=.001$ ). However, there were no significant differences between both American and international students about other religions.

Question three that asked: Do participants believe 9/11 attack is the worst terrorist attack in history? (Table 2) shows the level of differences between American and international student with the following statements.

**Table 2:** Level of difference between respondents if 9/11 is the worst terrorist attack in the history by Mean, t, Sig.

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Sig</b>
The U.S. media portrayed 9/11 attack as the worst in history.	American 2.0600	1.644	.103
	International 1.8200		
The U.S. media blame Islam as a religion for 9/11.	American 2.6000	2.022	.46
	International 2.2857		
9/11 attacks opened the way for increasing the violence in the world.	American 2.5200	2.946	.004
	International 2.0851		
9/11 attacks were the worst because it is associated with religion.	American 2.7200	2.909	.005
	International 2.2766		
9/11 was the worst because it was the reason of the America's wars against terrorism.	American 2.5000	1.275	.205
	International 2.3125		
9/11 attacks were the worst because of the continuous emphasis on the attacks by the U.S media.	American 2.4200	1.305	.195
	International 2.2449		

Research question four that asked: What are participants' attitudes toward the U.S. media coverage of Islam? (Table3) shows the level of differences between American and international students of media converge of Islam.

**Table 3:** Differences between respondents' attitudes of media converge of Islam by Mean, F, Sig.

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Sig</b>
Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world.	American 2.6200	3.476	.001
	International 2.1458		
The U.S media avoid talking about any positives in the Islamic religion.	American 2.5400	1.732	.087
	International 2.2917		
The image of Islam in the U.S. media has not changed since 9/11 attack.	American 2.6600	1.977	.051
	International 2.3673		
Focus on the negative image of Islam in the U.S. media has increased violence in the world.	American 2.7800	3.278	.001
	International 2.2857		
The U.S. media cover Islam only when there is violence in the world.	American 2.5800	1.661	.100
	International 2.3469		
Coverage of Islam by U.S. media is an unfair coverage.	American 2.4600	3.253	.002
	International 1.9783		

Hypothesis one was: people believe that the U.S. media portray a negative image of Islam. Respondents believed that Islam have been portrayed as a terrorist in U.S. media. A significant number of respondents agreed that “Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world.

Hypothesis two was: “people believe the U.S. media portray Islamic people as terrorists”. Participants believed that: The U.S. media portray Islamic people as terroristic groups” ( $\chi^2=67,909$   $df=3$ ,  $p=.001$ ).

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to survey university students to identify their perspectives of the image of Islam in the U.S. media after 9/11 attack. Five research questions and two hypotheses were posed for the study that focused on student perspectives and attitudes toward the image of Islam in the U.S. media.

Students believe the U.S. media have produced the term of terrorism; the U.S. media portrayed Islam as a terrorist religion, and they portrayed Islamic people as terrorist groups.

Although most of the organizations that have been mentioned as terrorist organizations, classified by U.S. Department of State American, and although the U.S. media have opened the door widely to talk about these organizations, the students did not identify those organizations except Al-Qa'ida. There was a unique number that included al-Qa'ida as a terrorist group. Other organizations, in contrast, had a distinguished number of disagreements that they are terrorist groups. This shows that the effect of the U.S. media was dependent on the size of event. It is known that Al-Qa'ida has attacked the United States itself, and the U.S. media have adopted a policy to face this group; they have also recruited the international media against this group for many years while other organizations were not the same volume of coverage like the scale of al-Qaeda's coverage. However, among all religions, Islam was the only representative of terrorism in the U.S. media in this study. This result is significantly associated with al-Qa'id, where there is a broad consensus that al-Qa'ida is a terrorist organization as it has been appeared in the U.S. media, and there is also a broad consensus that Islam has been portrayed as a terrorist among all religions that this study has included. The reason of this broad consensus among respondents could be because al-Qa'ida has announced itself as an Islamic organization, and linked itself to the Islamic perspective. Therefore, when the U.S. media present al-Qa'ida, they present it as a representative image of Islam.

Research question four was: what are participants' attitudes toward media coverage of Islam? A significant number of students believed that Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world, and thus, coverage of Islam by U.S. media is an unfair coverage according to the majority of students. However, majority of student did not believe the image of Islam in the U.S. media has not changed since 9/11, and they did not believe also, as a majority, that focusing on the negative image of Islam in the U.S. media has increased violence in the world; but they believe, as in previous paragraph, that

9/11 opened the way for increasing the violence in the world; it was the reason of the America's wars against terrorism and because of the continuous emphasis on the attacks by the U.S media.

The international students believe more than American students that Islam is shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world; 9/11 attack was the worst because it was associated with religion, and because it paved the way for increasing violence in the world. They believe also more than American students that the U.S. media blame Islam as a religion for 9/11; and as a result, coverage of Islam by U.S. media is an unfair coverage, and the negative image of Islam in the U.S. media has increased violence in the world.

The findings support the hypothesis that viewed that participants believe the U.S. media portray a negative image of Islam. Islam has been portrayed as a terrorist in the U.S. media, and Islam was shown in the U.S. media whenever there are explosions in the world. The findings also support the hypothesis that stated that participants believe the U.S. media portray Muslims as terrorists. A significant number of students believed that the U.S. media portray Muslims as terrorist groups.

However, although a convenient sample has several advantages such as ease of availability, saving time and money, it also has several disadvantages: there is a possibility of biases because the sample represents views of a specific group; there is a possibility of a sampling error, because of the way the sample was selected; and finally, there are limitations of generalizing the results because of the two previous disadvantages although the findings of this study can identify trends for other researches. On the other hand, regardless of sample's disadvantages, this sample was convenient regarding to the number of students and nationality but the participants were randomly selected. Nationality (American and international students) was very important in this study because of the nature of the study, which one of its goals is to make a comparison between American and international students to understand how both groups of participants interpret media and what factors could affect their precisions when they expose to them.

## صورة الإسلام في وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية بعد أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر 2001: دراسة مسحية على طلبة الجامعات الأمريكية

بكر حسن الكرايمة، جامعة طولون، فرنسا.

محمد خليل محروم ، جامعة اليرموك، إربد، الأردن.

### ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف إلى آراء طلبة الجامعات الأمريكية واتجاهاتهم حول صورة الإسلام في وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية المختلفة (المرئية والمسموعة و المطبوعة والإلكترونية)، واستخدم الباحث المنهج المسحي في تنفيذ هذه الدراسة بواسطة الاستبانة الإلكترونية، وتكون مجتمع الدراسة من الطلبة الأمريكيين والدوليين في جامعة أركنساس الحكومية، وطبقت الدراسة على عينة قوامها (100) مفردة. وتضمنت الاستبانة خمسة محاور (أسئلة) اشتملت على (61) متغيراً في الجوانب الديموغرافية والجنس والدين والتعليم والدين.

وبينت نتائج الدراسة أن غالبية اتجاهات أفراد عينة الدراسة وتصوراتهم تشير إلى أن وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية، بمختلف أشكالها، قد أنتجت مصطلح الإرهاب، وتصور الدين الإسلامي كدين إرهابي، وأن الشعوب الإسلامية هي جماعات إرهابية متطرفة.

كما أشارت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن أفراد عينة الدراسة من الطلبة الدوليين يعتقدون أن وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية في تغطيتها الإعلامية ربطت أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر 2001 بالدين الإسلامي والمسلمين، مما أسهم في تعزيز الصورة السلبية والمتطرفة للإسلام والمسلمين في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، و عززت الصراع الفكري والعنف في العالم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصورة - الإسلام - وسائل الإعلام الأمريكية - الإرهاب.

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