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You had me at Halal:

Why western marketers need to start speaking to Muslim audiences.



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Muslim audiences are begging to be spoken to by brands, so why aren't brands speaking back?

It's no secret there's long been a stigma around Muslims. If you live in the western world, you've no doubt seen the actions of a few amplified as representative of the whole in western media, and the knock-on effects felt through each fiber of society. As a result, as marketers, where our brands talk a big game around diversity and inclusion, we seemingly prefer to avoid contentious topics that make us uncomfortable.

Yet, given the value there is to be gained - both morally and financially - marketing to Muslims might be one of the most straightforward, advantageous and inclusive paths to growth for many brands.

So why should marketers care?

For one, Islam is the world's fastest growing religion, with Pew Research forecasting it to grow from 1.9 billion followers today, to over 3 billion by 2060.

And with volume comes spending power.

Even during the pandemic, Muslims globally spent a collective US\$2.2 trillion in 2021, which is set to grow an additional 9.1% in 2022, and potentially reach over US\$2.8 trillion by 2025. In the U.K. alone, a phenomenal 5.2% of U.K. spending comes from just 3% of the U.K. population, and Muslims remain the fastest growing demographic.

A snapshot of younger western Muslims will show they're ambitious and career-focused, tech-savvy, self-empowered and youthful. Many are likely to be affluent and thriving and just as influenced by media, social trends, personalities and role models as non-Muslims — they just respond better to those who represent them, specifically by the values they choose to live by.

It's no surprise, then, to see celebrities becoming more open and comfortable in disclosing their faith; Bella and Gigi Hadid, Riz Ahmed and Hasan Minhaj, Mohamed Salah and Paul Pogba, and many others have become more vocal about the role Islam plays in their lives via online platforms, with every step considered and designed to build a stronger following in doing so.

In fact, Marvel's latest superhero, Ms. Marvel, has been a cultural success for Disney+, with Muslim audiences embracing her wholly on social media. In Kamala Khan (Ms. Marvel's pseudonym), played superbly by Muslim Pakistani-Canadian actress Iman Vellani, audiences see a Muslim female lead not only openly embracing her religion, but positively reflecting how openminded and modern Muslim households can be.

"Back in the day, there was no one like that for me to aspire to," says actor, filmmaker and presenter Islah, who has worked with Disney+, Amazon Prime Video, Natwest Bank and TikTok. "I developed The Cornershop Network to champion ethnic representation and what being a British Muslim can be - through comedy and drama - and we've gained a strong following of people who see themselves in our work. It's taken time, but now brands want to be a part of our fabric - and we want them to too, if they do it right."

"We've made a concentrated effort to move away from only Ramadan and Eid periods and the tokenism that brings. **We're Muslims all year round, and that has to be reflected not only in when brands speak to us, but how they want to leverage our strengths for their own benefit.**"

But there's still a problem: most western Muslims will gladly tell you how they feel undervalued and under-served by the brands they admire, follow and consume.

In the U.K., where Muslim consumers spent a cool £20.5 billion in 2011 alone (measured at the last census - a value most likely to have vastly grown since), or in the U.S. where YouGov data suggests 54% Muslim audiences claim to have influence on the communities around them (compared to 19% for non-Muslims), that's a fairly big problem to ignore.

Where to show up

One of the key factors in driving that consumer spend comes from the subcategories that have evolved to meet the needs of Islamic living. Halal food, modest fashion, Muslim-friendly travel, beauty and cosmetics, financial services and dating apps are all relatively new in servicing the needs of this audience. Yet here too, western brands are failing to address the needs of Muslim customers properly.

There are plenty of opportunities for brands to take the lead. Take the non-alcoholic beers and spirits category, for example. Where alcohol is a taboo in Muslim households, by offering alcohol-free options and eliminating that conflict, behemoths Diageo (Gordons, Tanqueray, Ritual Zero Proof) and Pernod Ricard (Ceders), or indie brands like Punchy or High Point, are in a prime position to capture the curiosity of this untapped audience and gain a new base of buyers who actively look for new ways to be acknowledged by western society and the brands they see.

Brands could leverage cultural events like Eid and wedding seasons, where food, drink and gifting play a central role in gatherings and celebrations, introducing excitement and intrigue to tables and homes. With Eid in particular — as with Christmas — people are readily looking to spend, meaning brands should take a considered approach to media and marketing.

Where brands like H&M and Asos stepped in to make modest fashion mainstream, imagine a brand like Diageo's Seedlip started seeking out and sponsoring a Muslim mixologist to host Muslim-focused events and tastings. A little curation, some drinks know-how and flavour blending can go a long way in helping bring the Halal experience home - and win the minds of a youthful segment who thrive in status and novelty.

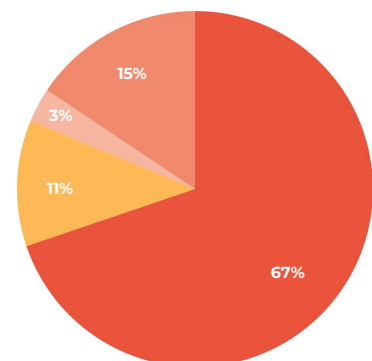
So, how does a brand show up to a party it's never attended or talk to an audience it's never engaged with before?

Change the approach, not the brand

From a creative angle, it takes a step of faith, but certainly not wholesale change. In fact, if the pandemic taught marketers anything, the less a brand strays from its core brand building focus, the better chance it has of driving growth. Instead, use the opportunity of a new segment to reorganize your brand marketing and include Islamic nuances in your thinking.

From a media perspective too, it feels like an easy solve: understand trending topics and their relationship to Islamic culture, build audience profiles around interests, contexts and channels, and use data to understand intent. When Muslims in the U.S. and U.K. Muslims have high racial diversity, there are many opportunities for brands to speak to different subsects.

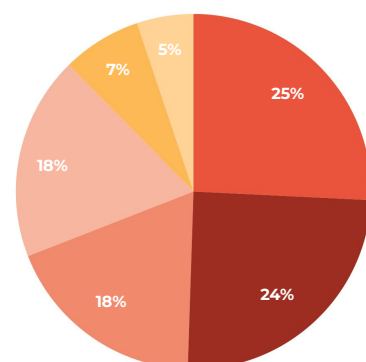
Ethnic breakdown of Muslims (U.K.)



● South Asian ● White ● Black ● Other Ethnicities

Source: TGI, U.K. Audiences, April 2022

Ethnic breakdown of Muslims (U.S.)



● Black ● White ● Asian ● Arab ● Mixed Race ● Hispanic

Source: US Census 2020

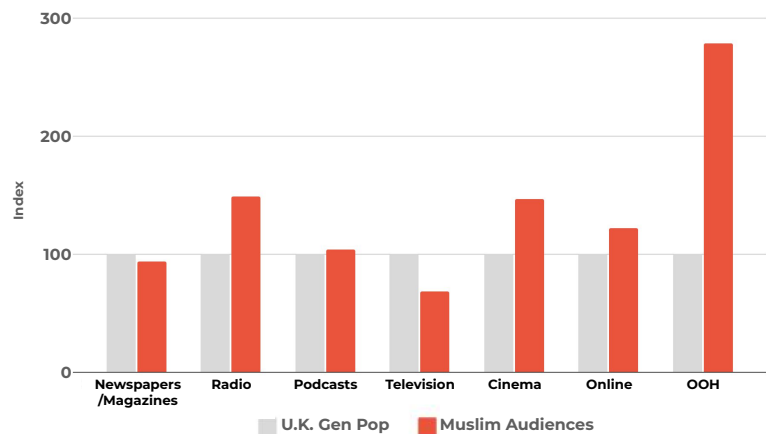
Back to our own studies of how Muslim audiences absorb and respond to physical and digital spaces and media, we see an interesting story develop.

According to TGI data, while Muslims consume media on par with the wider U.K. public, particular channels — outdoor, cinema, radio and online — are far more persuasive in influencing purchase behavior, and by breaking down those channels, we can establish a role for advertising.

In the U.S. too, a similar channel mix — print, cinema, radio, streaming services and podcasts — is on average over twice as attention-catching for Muslim audiences, compared to non-Muslims (YouGov, June 2022).

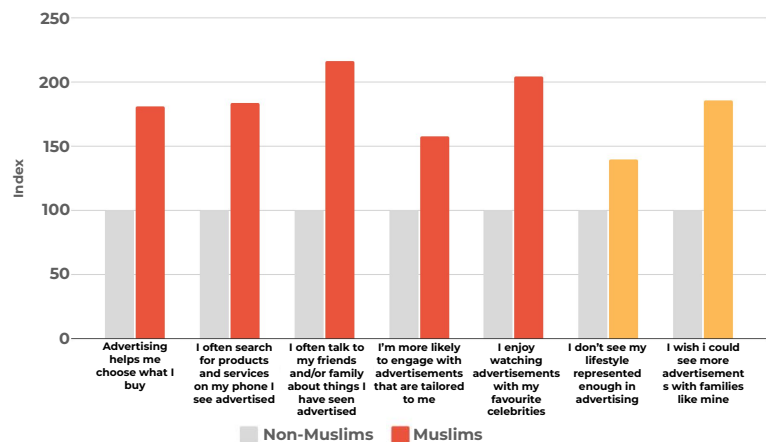
Taking those channels into account, we can chase high volume, richer quality reach.

Which channels influence you the most when making a purchase decision? (U.K.)



Source: TGI, U.K. Audiences, April 2022

Attitudes to and actions from advertising (U.S.)



Source: YouGov Profiles, U.S. Audiences, June 2022

Media planning for Muslim communities

Now, it's relatively easy to find cities where generations of Muslims have congregated over time, largely in an attempt to find familiar faces and voices, and a sense of belonging.

London, Leicester, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham each have swathes of Muslim populations, as does [Bradford, the recent winner of the U.K.'s City of Culture 2025](#) bid. Likewise in the U.S., similar Muslim-heavy communities exist across the states of Illinois, Virginia, New York and New Jersey, Texas, Michigan and more.

In these circumstances, thinking outside the box can benefit media buyers. One such idea comes from YemeTech, a U.K. based digital platform which uses community data for urban and spatial planning around the concept of '[15-minute neighbourhoods](#)'. The tool analyzes how local areas behave (using demographic, socio-economic, business, and action-based data) and identifies gaps that development, regeneration and sales teams can take advantage of. YemeTech founder and CEO Amir Hussain has historically used the tool to help real estate developers understand the impact their plans will have on cities and towns, as well as how [local councils can aid underserved communities](#).

He believes the same data can be used to design media availability. **"The best outcomes are those which adopt local behaviors,"** suggests Hussain, **"rather than forcing an existing community to change behaviors they've built over time."** By looking at indicators around well-being, faith, income, desirability, and most critically, social activity like commuting or socializing, we can integrate our clients' influence more effectively and credibly, while bridging any equality gaps."

With potential to adapt Yemetech's platform for new use cases, media buyers can help brands connect with Islamic communities in the most meaningful way possible — whether that means OOH, or localized experiences - and allow brands to drive positive social value.

For further mass communication across the country, there are the dedicated radio channels reaching South Asian and Arabic audiences — the largest (but not only) demographic of western Muslims.



Commercial stations in the U.K. like Sunrise Radio and Asian Sound Radio cover the country to provide cultural and religious programming in a multitude of languages and dialects, including Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Swahili, Mirpuri and English, developing a sense of belonging among their audiences.

There has also been an increase in Indian and Pakistani movies playing at major cinema chains in both markets, where new traditions are to make each visit an event in itself by taking family and friends. Invest wisely and you've captured the attention of many like-minded customers at once, not to mention other religious groups including Hindus, Sikhs and other denominations who make up the remaining viewing audience.

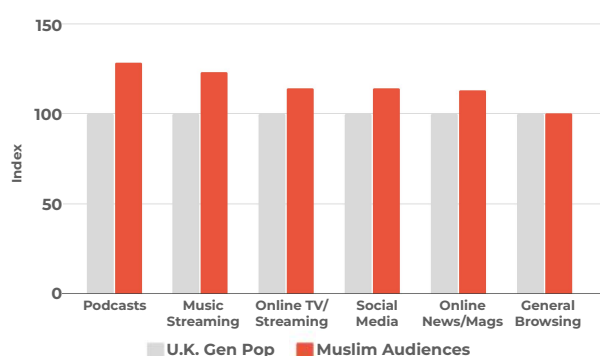


Capturing attention online

The biggest area of interest is undoubtedly online. In the U.S., Muslims index at a similar level to non-Muslim audiences, while Muslims index higher in time spent across multiple activities than the U.K.'s general population. Audio in particular shows Muslim audiences spend 1.5 times more listening to podcasts and music streaming

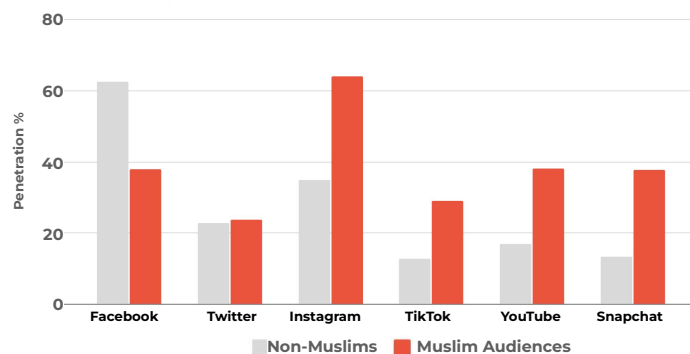
than the general population in the U.K. Likewise, Muslims tend to use Instagram more than non-Muslim audiences, at 63% to 35% respectively.

Online activities (30 mins+ a day) (U.K.)



GW, U.K., April 2022

Social media penetration, Muslims vs non-Muslims (U.K.)



Source: TGI, U.K. Audiences, April 2022

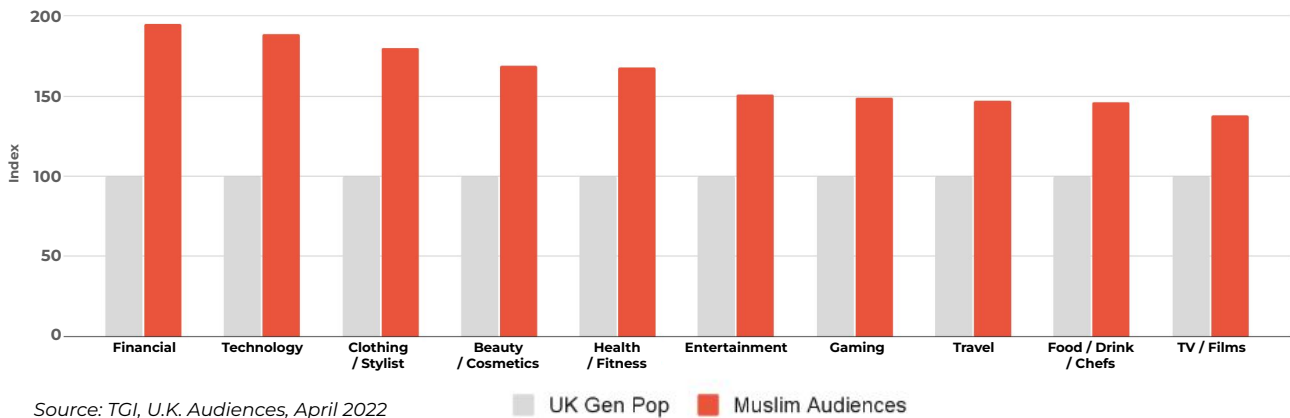


Muslim influencers have rushed to embrace the visual platforms — Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube — knowing that there's an audience that's looking to find voices like their own.

But it not just about following influencers. Digging even further into our data, we see Muslim audiences over-reach on almost all aspects of modern culture.

This audience — ranging from 18-64 year olds — want to be more informed, more opinionated and more influential among their peer groups, where standing out and the opinions their peers influence their lifestyle and purchase choices.

What kind of content do you follow online (U.K.)



For marketers, rather than building an online approach from the ground up, team with a media partner who specializes in targeting Muslim audiences to be present to those spaces. You'll already recognize newsbrands leading the conversations, such as Al Jazeera, CBS News, the New York Times, The Independent, Metro and the Evening Standard. There are also more focused platforms, such as [The Muslim Network](#) or 5 Pillars.

Once such partner, [Amaliah](#), which focuses on amplifying the voices of Muslim women, acts as both an online publication and consultancy that advises brands on how to bridge the gap - and has successfully worked with brands such as Dove, Uber Eats, Lloyds Bank and Next.

According to Amaliah CEO Nafisa Bakkar:

"The partnership route not only enables brands to have an authentic voice and concentrated reach when speaking to Muslim audiences, but also gives brands a new authority amongst a higher quality, higher engaged audience who will call out stereotypes when they see them. Yet inversely, the same group will strongly advocate, vouch for and champion the brands they see acknowledge them properly."

Focused platforms drive results too: in a world where attention is the new Holy Grail, Amaliah's content has seen **dwell times of 4-6 minutes on online content**, where others non-specialist platforms who Islam-wash their campaigns see merely seconds.

Is it too late to join the conversation?

Despite major commercial moments for Muslims having passed for 2022, there are plenty of advantages for brands to start approaching this audience now.

If anything, marketers should use the time between now and next Ramadan to build salience and familiarity among Muslim audiences, readying themselves to capture demand when necessity strikes.

It's important to remember that being inclusive to Muslims doesn't make brands non-inclusive to any other religion or faction out there.

By laying the foundations of communications throughout the year, placing products or brands as solutions to the changes and challenges Muslims want to overcome, it becomes hard to lose in the long-term — specifically when Ramadan and the two Eids return next year.

And when, according to Ogilvy's 'Great British Ramadan Report 2021', U.K. Muslims spent an estimated £200m on goods in one month of Ramadan alone, top of mind brands win first and most.

My advice? Maybe it's time to say 'Bismillah', and make a start from there.



Thank You.

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