




SPECIAL FOCUS: SPOTLIGHT ON PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Attribute Agenda Setting on Twitter and the Wall Street Journal: The Case of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar

Mariam Alkazemi^{1*} , Sameneh Oladi Ghadikolai², Marilynn Oetjens³ and Edward L. Boone⁴

¹Robertson School of Media and Culture, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA, ²School of World Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA, ³Undergraduate Research Assistant, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA and ⁴Statistics and Operations Research, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA

*Corresponding author. Email: mfalkazemi@vcu.edu

Abstract

This study examines attributes associated with U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. Omar's unique intersectionality of identities as a Black, immigrant, Muslim woman presents a rich case study for an examination of attribute agenda setting. A sample of Tweets, all Wall Street Journal articles referencing the congresswoman, and Google searches were obtained for the hashtags (“IlhanOmar,” “GoBack,” and “WelcomeHome.”) from May 2019 to January 2020. The Tweets and articles were then coded for a variety of dimensions. Analysis of the frequencies of words associated with the coding and the hashtags showed that the majority of the messages were negative despite the hashtag for which they were collected. A cross-correlation time series analysis showed that articles and editorials published by the Wall Street Journal predicted spikes in Google searches and Twitter messages. This article pinpoints underlying sociological phenomena about the representations of gender, race, religion, and immigration status to show the arguments that link attributes of Ilhan Omar together on Twitter.

Keywords: Agenda setting; content analysis; Islamophobia; Twitter; Identity politics

Muslim women face unique obstacles in American politics. The politicization of Muslim women has regained momentum after the 2016 election of former U.S. President Donald Trump. Our study examines attributes of Representative Ilhan Omar in legacy and social media. Muslim women are portrayed as submissive, oppressed, and exotic in Western media. Ilhan Omar has challenged this narrative by becoming the first veiled Muslim woman in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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We focus on Twitter because it is the platform that former President Trump used to communicate with his conservative base and because right-wing social media accounts continued to use it even after saying they would move to the alternative communication platform Parler.¹ Furthermore, during the time frame of this study, May 2019 to January 2020, Parler did not have responses on some of our keyword/hashtag combinations. Also, the *Wall Street Journal's* (WSJ) editorial stance tends to be conservative as well. The current article examines the interaction between the conservative newspaper and Twitter hashtags that both support and oppose Omar. While in office, President Trump had targeted Omar's national origin, religion, and immigration status. To measure the overall internet interest in Omar, Google Trends was used. These three platforms give the ability to see how interest is influenced by WSJ, then echoed by Twitter and Google Trends. Twitter allows for tone and content analysis while Google Trends shows the overall interest in the keyword.

The Trump presidency was unique in many ways because of his strategies, which included lying and name-calling to divert media attention away from his policies.² Further, he relied on support from a number of right-wing news media outlets, including Fox News, to embrace ultra-nationalist, "anti-immigrant and xenophobic messages."³ When he made racist and Islamophobic comments about Omar, conservative media outlets amplified his messages.⁴

This study employs intermedia attribute agenda setting to examine the relationship between online search data, the WSJ, and Twitter. Through this examination, we can further examine how third-level agenda setting works, while also documenting the effects of traditional media on Twitter during the Trump presidency in this particular case.

Attributes of Ilhan Omar

Attribute agenda setting describes the attributes of an object in the media, which can be cognitive or affective.⁵ This section will provide some context on the attributes of Ilhan Omar. It is grounded in a sociological analysis of Muslim women in the United States.

Muslim women living in America include immigrants, first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants, and native-born women who come from various ethnic, social, economic, and political backgrounds. Considering

¹ Jeff Horwitz and Keach Hagey, "Mercer Cash Backs Upstart App Parler," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 16, 2020, <http://proxy.library.vcu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/newspapers/mercer-cash-backs-upstart-app-parler/docview/2460671536/se-2?accountid=14780>.

² Henry A. Giroux, "Trump and the legacy of a menacing past," *Cultural Studies* 33.4 (2019): 711–39.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ E. L. Schlei, "The monster at the end of this: A feminist media analysis of coverage of Representative Ilhan Omar (Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2020), <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/1037>.

⁵ Salma Ghanem, "Filling in the tapestry: The second level of agenda setting," *Communication and democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory* (1997): 3–14.

the diversity of Muslim women in the United States, there are multitudes of ways to express their identity. Despite such diversity, Muslim women and their experiences are often represented as a monolith. For example, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are two American Muslim women who were elected to Congress for two consecutive terms. The demands and expectations of American Muslim women from their native or adopted country vary depending on the generational gap and their immigration status. Some new immigrants push for tolerance of diversity and others demand acceptance of religious expression. In the case of Ilhan Omar, the election campaign she ran on highlighted her identity as a Black, refugee Muslim woman. Omar uses her identity politics to emphasize American principles of diversity and inclusion.⁶

Immigrant Muslim women have faced discrimination and Islamophobia, which has increased since the September 11 attacks. Although American Muslim women come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they share intersected experiences as women and members of a minority religious group. Ilhan Omar's overlapping identities as a Black, immigrant Muslim makes her an ideal target for Islamophobic and racist attacks. African American Muslim women are in a unique category considering their history of participation in the Civil Rights movement and activist work. These women often apply a social justice framework inspired by their activism and faith to address women's issues in their communities as well as the larger American society.⁷ African American women's experience with racism and segregation had also impacted this outlook toward social justice issues. Inspired by the activism of such women, Ilhan Omar tweeted the Maya Angelou poem "Still, like air, I'll rise," in response to a Trump rally in North Carolina where participants shouted "send her back."

During her campaign for Congress Omar openly discussed her struggle as a Muslim woman in the post-9/11 world and its impact on reshaping her personal and political identity. In her recent book *This Is What America Looks Like: My Journey from Refugee to Congresswoman*, Omar highlights her journey from Somalia to the United States. Fleeing civil war living in a refugee camp in Kenya as a young girl, experiencing poverty and war, and becoming a refugee and immigrant are all experiences that shaped and reshaped Omar's identity as a Muslim woman and her sociopolitical outlook. In high school, she helped form the "Unity in Diversity Program" in order to address the racial, cultural, and ethnic challenges the school faced. Later while running her election campaign for Congress, she ran under the platform of justice and equality.

Her journey to America began at the age of 12 when her family managed to secure sponsorship for resettlement in the United States. She was assured that America was "the land of equal opportunities" and a refuge for those fleeing war and persecution. However, she quickly realized that the promised land

⁶ Maha Bashri, "Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas: Local News Coverage of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in the US Mid-term Elections," *ESSACHESS-Journal for Communication Studies* 12.24 (2019): 129-46.

⁷ Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Activism: More than a Prayer* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 163.

of equality and justice was a mirage. “I was black. I was Muslim. I also learned I was extremely poor and that the classless America that my father talked about didn’t exist.” Her social, economic, racial, and religious background put her in the category of unwelcome “other.” This sense of otherness continued after she was elected to serve in Congress. Omar’s story as a Somali refugee Muslim woman made her the target of bitter and reprehensible accusations, including that of being an anti-Semite, an anti-American subversive, and a covert Islamist – in addition to multiple death threats. At the same time her positionality and progressive agenda have made her the symbol of a counter-narrative during Donald Trump’s presidency and put her at the heart of a contentious debate over America’s identity.

American Muslim women involved in politics have been under pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to American Constitutionalism and secularism. Their allegiance is constantly under question. Muslims who live in the Western world have historically been able to navigate their commitment to both Islamic law and American law. This is in part due to the fact that Islamic law requires Muslims to honor treaties and follow the law of the land even if it is in conflict with their religious obligation.⁸ Immigrant and native-born Muslims involved in Western politics have always found ways to navigate such demands and adapt to new environments. In his book *A History of Islam in America*, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri explores how attitudes toward and the practices of American Muslims have evolved: at times, Muslim and American identities have converged and peacefully co-existed, while at others, they have been involuntarily, or synthetically, separated.⁹ GhaneaBassiri questions the binary construction of Islam versus the West, which wrongfully sets a religious tradition against a geographical location.¹⁰ He critiques the assumption that the life and aspirations of Muslims are intrinsically different from those of most Americans.

Muslims women like Ilhan Omar are reconstituting the discourse on Islam in America by taking on high-profile roles. However, there continues to be incongruities in media representations of Muslim women in the American political scene.¹¹ Such representation dates back to the eighteenth century, when the West depicted Muslim women as subservient, exotic, secluded, covered, and in need of saving. The representation of Muslim women as victims of their religious traditions became dominant in the Enlightenment era onwards, and veiling and seclusion became the symbol of oppression of Muslim women.¹² By the nineteenth century, Muslim women gained more prominence in the Western

⁸ Asifa Quraishi, “Five Myths about Sharia,” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-sharia/2016/06/24/7e3efb7a-31ef-11e6-8758-d58e76e11b12_story.html.

⁹ Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America : From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lesa Hatley Major and Renita Coleman, “The intersection of race and gender in election coverage: What happens when the candidates don’t fit the stereotypes?,” *The Howard Journal of Communications* 19.4 (2008): 315–33.

¹² Mohja Kahf, *Western representations of the Muslim woman: From termagant to odalisque* (University of Texas Press, 2010).

and colonial narrative of Islam. This marked a departure from the representation of Muslim women in the medieval era, when Western historians described them as powerful sovereigns with formidable sexuality that needed to be tamed. As Edward Said highlighted, the neo-Colonial and Western misrepresentation of Muslims and the Middle East created a view of the East as a vastly different and inferior “Other,” which misconception continues to this day. Said’s works skillfully demonstrated how the Western media continues its Orientalist representations of Muslims and Islam.¹³ By portraying Muslim men as oppressors, and Muslim women as being oppressed, the West has continuously justified its intervention in Muslim-majority countries.¹⁴

Ilhan Omar’s intersectionality of identities as a veiled black, immigrant, Muslim woman makes her experience as congresswomen more challenging in comparison to Rashida Tlaib. The veil had been historically perceived by secularists and Westerners as a sign of oppression. As Alison Donnell argues, the constructions of the veil as symbol of exoticism and eroticism with a “xenophobic, more specifically Islamophobic, gaze through which the veil, or headscarf, is seen as a highly visible sign of a despised difference.”¹⁵ While both Omar and Tlaib face xenophobic attacks, Omar has received more coverage pertaining to her dress code, ethnicity, immigration, and gender. Omar was a frequent receiver of remarks such as “go back” and “terrorist” in comparison to Tlaib. This is mainly due to the fact that Omar is visibly a Muslim immigrant who wears her identity on her sleeve and runs her platform on diversity.¹⁶ As a veiled Muslim woman, Omar had to challenge the ban on wearing headdresses in Congress. By appealing to American values of diversity and freedom of religion, she garnered the support of other members of Congress in overturning this restriction. Veiled Muslim women involved in the sociopolitical arenas wear the veil for many reasons, to follow religious doctrine as often as they wear it to assert their identity or take a symbolic stand against injustice and misrepresentation.¹⁷

The image of the Muslim woman shifts when the West’s relations with Muslim nations changes. The changing role of women within Western cultures also informed the portrayal of Muslim women as exotic and subservient.¹⁸ The Western media presents a monolith image of Muslim women and their coverage seldom brings attention to their diversity and professional achievements. When you look at some of the Muslim female politicians such as Ilhan Omar you see a clear example of how Western media have continued the

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books. Gender, Place and Culture), 207; Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine how we See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books).

¹⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others,” *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002): 783–90.

¹⁵ Alison Donnell, “Visibility, Violence and Voice? Attitudes to Veiling post-11 September,” in *Veil: Veiling, Representation and Contemporary Art*, eds. David A. Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2003) 123.

¹⁶ Bashri, “Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas,” 129–46.

¹⁷ Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

neo-Orientalist perception of Muslim women as victims of their cultural and religious traditions, in need of liberation. Although these stereotypes dominate media portrayals, there seems to be a minor change in coverage that focuses on their diverse identity.¹⁹ Omar, with her presence and activism both in U.S. politics and on social media, disrupts stereotypes about Muslim women. Although social media has offered a space where the voices of women and minorities can be heard, it mirrors the discrimination, contradictions, and injustices that occur in real life, or IRL as social media users would put it.²⁰ Muslim women who are vulnerable to harassment in the work place or on the street, are also targets of harassment and Islamophobia online.²¹ Voices of Muslim women that challenge the hegemonic and neo-Orientalist representation is silenced both online and in the real world.²²

Muslim women in America face the greatest challenges of the Muslim population due to various forms of discrimination due to sexism, xenophobia, and migration. These women encounter Islamophobic representations of Muslim women that reduce their existence to oppressed victims and their faith to extremism. They also face patriarchy both within their religious communities and the larger American society.²³ American Muslim women have countered such adversarial narratives by actively participating in the civic and political landscape of America. Through engagement within the political and civil discourse, Muslim women have provided an alternative model of representation of Islam and Muslims in America. Their increasing civic participation plays an integral part in dismantling the argument made by neoconservatives and Islamists that these women are propagating Islamist or secular ideologies; instead, they demonstrate a new identity, which blends their American and Islamic backgrounds.

The nature of Muslim women's activism in America has also changed. A new generation of Muslim women are leading a movement that embraces and merges the Islamic and American traditions of activism in pursuit of justice and sociopolitical change.²⁴ American Muslim women have played a significant role in U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics after 9/11. For instance Ilhan Omar, as the first refugee Muslim women in Congress, made multiple attempts to challenge the Executive Order travel ban enacted by President Trump. Upholding her campaign promises, she advocates for criminal justice reform, Medicare for all, and environmental justice, among other social justice causes. For many white liberals, refugees, and immigrants, Omar's presence in Congress is a sign of hope in overturning discriminatory policies.²⁵

¹⁹ Bashri, "Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas," 129–46.

²⁰ Faiza Hirji, "Claiming our Space: Muslim Women, Activism, and Social Media," *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 6.1 (Spring 2021): 78–92.

²¹ Jennifer Golbeck, "Online Harassment: A Research Challenge for HCI," in *Online Harassment: Human-Computer Interaction Series*, ed. J. Golbeck (Cham: Springer, 2018), 1–2.

²² Myra Macdonald, "Muslim Women and the Veil," *Feminist Media Studies* 6.1 (2006): 7–23.

²³ Shahnaz Khan and Okori Uneke, "Muslim women: crafting a North American identity," *Canadian Woman Studies* 20.3 (2000): 200.

²⁴ Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution*, 265–98.

²⁵ Habiba Dahir, "The leadership of Ilhan Omar-Representing voices of refugees," *Leadership & Developing Societies* 3.1 (2018).

Attribute Agenda Setting

Agenda setting describes the process whereby the media do not tell people what to think, but instead tell people what to think *about*. The concept was first articulated when McCombs and Shaw²⁶ demonstrated empirically that there is a transfer of salience from the public agenda to the media agenda. Ghanem²⁷ determined that the second level of agenda setting involves not only a transfer of an agenda, but also the transfer of the attributes of an object that appears in the media. More recently, Vu, Guo, and McCombs²⁸ found that attributes are connected through networks. The third level of agenda setting demonstrated the importance of big data analyses in the current media environment. Through social network analysis and other big data tools, the concept of compelling arguments allows some aspects of an attribute to resonate in people's minds more deeply than other aspects.²⁹

Intermedia agenda setting research describes the process whereby one media outlet influences the contents of another. Our study relies on big data analysis to examine the attributes of Ilhan Omar in online search data, the *WSJ*, and on Twitter to examine the agenda-setting relationship. After doing so, the article will reflect on the compelling arguments that tie attributes of Ilhan Omar together in these media messages given the political climate in which they appeared.

Studies in the area of agenda setting have often been applied to public officials. For example, Wanta et al.³⁰ found that the relationship between the media and the president's State of the Union address was not the same when examining Carter and Reagan. In fact, Wanta et al.³¹ also point out that there are inconsistencies in the relationship between two of Reagan's State of the Union speeches, calling for the use of time series analysis to examine whether the popularity of a president or the circumstances of a time period interfere in this relationship.³²

This study includes time series analysis to shed light on the relationship between the press and public attitudes expressed on Twitter on a unique representative in the United States Congress. In studying Twitter messages about Obama by members of the media and members of the general public in the

²⁶ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The agenda-setting function of mass media," *Public opinion quarterly* 36.2 (1972): 176–87.

²⁷ Salma Ghanem, "Filling in the tapestry: The second level of agenda setting," *Communication and democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory* (1997): 3–14.

²⁸ Hong Tien Vu, Lei Guo, and Maxwell E. McCombs, "Exploring 'the world outside and the pictures in our heads' A network agenda-setting study," *Journalism & mass communication quarterly* 91.4 (2014): 669–86.

²⁹ Magdalena Saldaña, "Attribute agenda setting and information overload: Computer-assisted analysis for understanding compelling arguments," *The Agenda Setting Journal* 1.1 (2017): 23–44.

³⁰ Wayne Wanta, Mary Ann Stephenson, Judy VanSlyke Turk, and Maxwell E. McCombs, "How president's state of union talk influenced news media agendas," *Journalism Quarterly* 66.3 (1989): 537–41.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

Arabic language, Alkazemi, Fahmy, and Wanta³³ found that the tone of the media was more neutral than that of the general public, which has often been used as a substitute for public opinion data. Previous communication studies have not accounted for the personal qualities of the politician under study.

Particularly, the intersection of gender and race is important context to consider because Bratton, Haynie, and Reingold³⁴ found that African American women legislators were more likely than other legislators to at least support one piece of legislation affecting either women's interests or Black interests. With regards to Ilhan Omar, Twitter posts, as analyzed, have described her in xenophobic terms and have been critical of her stance on Israel.³⁵ Despite this, few agenda setting studies have examined the transfer of salience of Ilhan Omar, whose personal qualities are connected to one another in intricate and complex ways.

Trump's presidency is an unusual historical circumstance. Given his delivery of highly personal attacks on Omar in a highly polarized society, the current study examined hashtags that relate to Omar that may be supportive or antagonistic toward her. Smith et al.³⁶ found evidence of polarized clusters on Twitter, and thus this study examines the hashtags that include both narratives that gained salience in response to President Trump's telling Omar to go back to where she came from: "#WelcomeHome" and "#GoBack."

Research Question One: How are the 'WelcomeHome' and 'GoBack' Tweets different in the cognitive and affective attributes connected to Omar?

Google Trends provides a solid resource to assess the overall internet interest in "Ilhan Omar." This has been used by Aguilera³⁷ to assess interest in psychological burnout in Italy. Chykina and Crabtree³⁸ used the platform to examine anxiety over deportation after Donald Trump's election; Nghiem et al.³⁹ looked at the platform to measure interest in conservation with respect

³³ Mariam F. Alkazemi, Shahira Fahmy, and Wayne Wanta, "The promise to the Arab World: Attributes of US President Obama in Arabic-language tweets," *International Communication Gazette* 80.2 (2018): 119–34.

³⁴ Kathleen A. Bratton, Kerry L. Haynie, and Beth Reingold, "Agenda setting and African American women in state legislatures," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 28.3-- (2007): 71–96.

³⁵ Lawrence Pintak, Jonathan Albright, Brian J. Bowe, and Shaheen Pasha, "Islamophobia: Stoking Fear and Prejudice in the 2018 Midterms," *Social Science Research Council* (2019), <https://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/islamophobia-stoking-fear-and-prejudice-in-the-2018-midterms>.

³⁶ Marc A. Smith, Lee Rainie, Ben Shneiderman, and Itai Himelboim, "Mapping Twitter topic networks: From polarized crowds to community clusters," *Pew Research Center* 20 (2014): 1–56, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2014/02/20/mapping-twitter-topic-networks-from-polarized-crowds-to-community-clusters/>.

³⁷ Ana Maria Aguilera, Francesca Fortuna, Manuel Escabias, and Tonio Di Battista, "Assessing Social Interest in Burnout Using Google Trends Data," *Social Indicators Research* (2019): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-019-02250-5>.

³⁸ Volha Chykina and Charles Crabtree, "Using Google Trends to Measure Issue Salience for Hard-to-Survey Populations," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 4 (2018): 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023118760414>.

³⁹ T.P. Nghiem Le, Sarah K. Papworth, Felix K.S. Lim, and Luis R. Carrasco, "Analysis on the capacity of Google Trends to measure interest in conversion topics and the role of online news," *PLoS ONE* 11 (30): e0152802, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0152802>.

to online news; and Jun *et al*⁴⁰ provided a comprehensive study of the use of Google Trends across a wide range of areas and showed how the tool can be used to measure overall interest in a topic across time. In the field of communication, online search traffic has been found to have a reciprocal agenda-setting relationship with mass media given the changing media landscape.⁴¹

The Wall Street Journal

When it was run by the Bancroft family, the *WSJ* focused on economic and financial news in ways that few other American newspapers did. When the ownership changed hands to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, its editorial pages altered its tone to both Republican and Democratic candidates.⁴² Wagner and Collins⁴³ found that Democrats were more likely to be the subject of editorials, which negatively portrayed them. Under this logic, the *WSJ* would likely be critical of Congresswoman Omar, who has an affiliation with the Democratic party. Thus, an examination of the transfer of the salience of attributes from the *WSJ* to Twitter is an interesting case study.

Further, examining the attributes of Ilhan Omar in the *WSJ* is interesting because she is an American Congressperson with a unique personal background that is reflected in media coverage related to international affairs. Research involving editorials and the *WSJ* typically involve foreign policy and show that it leans conservative. For example, Golan and Lukito⁴⁴ found that *WSJ* editorials advocated for the promotion of human rights in China as a solution to challenges in Sino-American relations, while the *New York Times* editorials were more likely to suggest imposing economic pressure on China. This observation shows that media polarization reflects key differences in foreign policy when it comes to how liberals and conservatives believe social change is approached. While conservatives believe social change is achieved through cultural change, liberals believe social change is achieved through policy.⁴⁵ This trend was supported with regards to the troubled Iranian-American relationship. Using discourse analysis, Izadi and Saghaye-Biria⁴⁶ (2007) found that the *WSJ* was more likely to refer to the Iranian government as "the mullahs" than the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. Further, the authors

⁴⁰ Jun Seung-Pyo, Hyoung Sun Yoo and San Choi, "Ten years of research change using Google Trends: From the perspective of big data utilizations and applications," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 130 (2018): 68–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2017.11.009>.

⁴¹ Matthew W. Ragas, Hai L. Tran, and Jason A. Martin, "Media-induced or search-driven? A study of online agenda-setting effects during the BP oil disaster," *Journalism Studies* 15.1 (2014): 48–63.

⁴² Michael W. Wagner and Timothy P. Collins, "Does ownership matter? The case of Rupert Murdoch's purchase of the Wall Street Journal," *Journalism Practice* 8.6 (2014): 758–71.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Guy J. Golan and Josephine Lukito, "Newspaper editorial pages frame China similarly," *Newspaper Research Journal* 38.2 (2017): 215–30.

⁴⁵ Walter C. Jr. Clemens, "Democracy as Chimera," *The New York Times*, Sept. 10, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/11/opinion/global/democracy-as-chimera.html>.

⁴⁶ Foad Izadi and Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria, "A discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran's nuclear program," *Journal of communication inquiry* 31.2 (2007): 150.

demonstrate that the *WSJ* advocates for the elimination of the threat of Islam rather than the development of a safer world in its editorials on the enrichment of uranium in Iran.⁴⁷ This orientation of the *WSJ* makes it extremely interesting to study attributes of Ilhan Omar, who Trump has attacked for her personal attributes as the Muslim daughter of Somalian refugees.

Similarly, Amin points to the fact that American national identity is based on exceptionalism in addition to a religious mission to spread moral values. Bolstered by the world's biggest military and economy, the United States views itself as responsible for creating an international order in which the United States spreads peace and democracy around the world.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Amin⁴⁹ argues that Iran sees its Islamic government as a form of resistance to this global status quo. These self-reflections are important in managing the relationship between the two countries, according to Amin.⁵⁰ In his analysis, Amin⁵¹ shows that conflicting ideologies appear in the *WSJ* in a way that suggests that Iran is a security threat. Given Omar's complex identity and the stereotypes surrounding American Muslims, the newspaper comprises an interesting case study.

Finally, it must be reiterated that the *WSJ* is owned by Rupert Murdoch. Rahman and Emadi⁵² cite an Australian nonprofit, which found that more than 2,891 news items from 5 Murdoch-owned newspapers reported on Islam in Australia in a way that is disproportionate, dangerous, and divisive. Therefore, the newspaper's editorials are likely to associate attributes of Omar that are consistent with conservative social media commentary. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between attributes that appear in the newspaper and Twitter to assess the intermedia agenda setting effect.

Research Question Two: Did the attributes of Omar that appeared in *WSJ* coverage predict her attributes in Twitter messages?

Methods

To assess the overall internet interest in Representative Omar, data was collected using Google Trends during the time frame between May 1, 2019, through February 6, 2020. Specifically, the volume of Google web searches using the tag "Ilhan Omar" was collected for each of the weeks. In addition, the Twitter platform was queried via the API to obtain all Tweets concerning "Ilhan Omar" across the same time period. Three hashtags were gathered from Twitter including "ilhanOmar," "GoBack," and "WelcomeHome." From May 1, 2019, to February 2, 2020, Tweets including the phrases "ilhan," "Omar," and "Go Back" and Tweets including the keywords "Ilhan," "Omar," and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Amin, Forough, "An 'existential threat' or a 'past pariah': Securitisation of Iran and disagreements among American press," *Discourse & Communication* 14.3 (2020): 233–52.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Khairiah A. Rahman and Azadeh Emadi, "Representations of Islam and Muslims in New Zealand media," *Pacific Journalism Review: Te Koako* 24.2 (2018): 166–88.

“Welcome Home” were collected. This resulted in 8,769 Tweets for the “Go Back” phrase and 5,122 Tweets for the phrase “Welcome Home.” Articles from the *WSJ* that contained “Ilhan Omar” were obtained for the same time period, which resulted in 78 articles. In comparison, over the same time frame, Parler only had 7 messages containing ‘Ilhan’ ‘Omar’ and ‘Go Back’ and 2 messages containing ‘Ilhan’ ‘Omar’ and ‘Welcome Home.’ With so few Parler messages over the same timeframe, the platform does not provide a rich enough set of messages to give more than anecdotal evidence toward agenda setting.

Figure 1 below shows the weekly volume of Twitter messages, Google web searches and *WSJ* articles for the term “Ilhan Omar” across the time frame. Notice that there is quite a bit of activity from early July to early September. What is particularly interesting is that the Tweets clearly have a different profile than simple web searches.

The Tweets obtained for the study were then coded and analyzed along the following nine attributes: Countries, Anti-Semitic, Personal Life, Race, Religion, Political Figures, Tone, Terror, and Gender/Sex. Countries specifically looked to were Somalia, Iran, Israel, the United States, Other, Multiple, or no countries. The anti-Semitic attribute shows whether the Tweet implies that Omar is anti-Semitic or if the nature of the Tweet in general is anti-Semitic. Personal life attribute considers whether the Tweet mentions Omar’s brother, husband, or parents or is sexual in nature. The political figures dimension looks to determine which political figures are associated with Omar in the Tweet specifically: Trump, Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Obama, Rashida Tlaib, or other. Tone attempts to classify the Tweet as being overall negative, neutral, or positive in its portrayal of Ilhan Omar. This category was coded by humans able to judge connotative meanings. Terrorist shows that there is either implicit or explicit portrayals of Omar as a terrorist. Gender/sex considers whether the Tweet refers to Omar’s gender or sex life in a way that is derogatory, violent, or in reference to her being a Person of Color. Race refers to the Tweet mentioning a specific race or ethnicity or includes racist sentiments. Religion looks at the Tweet and classifies whether it refers to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or multiple religions.

The Tweets were first classified as having the word “terrorist” or “women” and then whether “go back” or “welcome home” were contained in the Tweet. A sample of 20% of Tweets were coded by two coders and a post-coding agreement was calculated, which showed an agreement of 81.3% across all items. The inter-coder reliability values for Cohen’s Kappa is 0.674, Fleiss’ Kappa is 0.673, and Krippendorff’s alpha is 0.673. Given that the coders had sufficient agreement, one coder continued to code all of the Tweets.

WSJ articles were obtained from Factiva for the time range of May 2019 to January 2020 with the search term “Ilhan Omar” and terms “welcome home” and “Go Back.” The “Ilhan Omar welcome back” search gave 0 articles across the time frame and the term “Ilhan Omar go home” gave 72 articles.

To test between the groups, the overall attributes were tested across the two groups of Tweets, those pertaining to terrorist and women. Furthermore, the “go back” groups were tested across the two classifications and “welcome

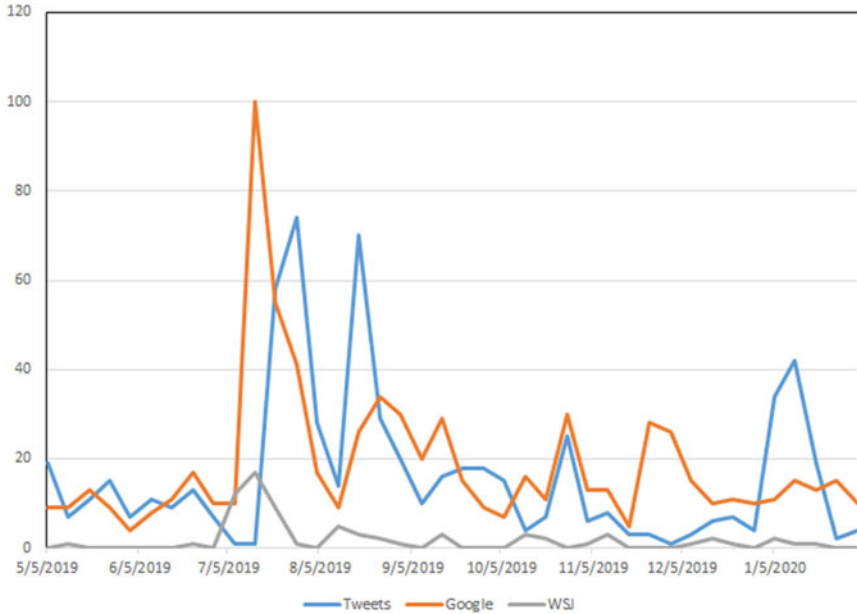


Figure 1. Google web searches, Tweets, and WSJ mentions for Ilhan Omar.

home” groups were tested across classifications as well. Due to the high number of cells with small or zero values, Fisher’s exact test was used with simulated p-values, which are based on 2,000 replicates.

To examine the relationship between the *WSJ* article volume and associated Tweet volume, the time series tool Cross-Correlation-Function (CCF) was used. The CCF considers the correlations between two variables at different shifts in time and can help to explore whether or not one variable drives another variable. This was used to explore the time relationship between *WSJ* article volume, Google trends volume, and Tweet volume. For more on the CCF, see Shumway and Stoffer.⁵³

Results

To explore how Tweet volume, *WSJ* volume, and Google Trends searches are correlated, the CCF was used on the weekly totals for each source respectively. Figure 2 shows the results of the time series analysis of the CCF plots for *WSJ* and Google Trends (Panel (a)), Tweets and Google Trends (Panel (b)) and *WSJ* and Tweets (Panel (c)). To read the plot, the horizontal axis is the time shift, the vertical axis is the correlation, the height of each bar corresponds to the correlation, the blue dashed horizontal lines show statistical significance,

⁵³ Robert H. Shumway and David S. Stoffer, *Time series analysis and its applications: with R examples* (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2017).

and the red vertical line is a reference to time zero. Any correlation bar that exceeds the blue dashed horizontal line is considered a statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 significance level. Notice on Panel (a) that there are two bars that exceed the blue horizontal lines, namely at lag (time shift) 1 and 2, indicating that the higher the number of *WSJ* articles, the higher the Google Trends searches for “Ilhan Omar” were for the next two weeks. Panel (b) shows that Tweets and Google Trends have three bars exceeding the blue horizontal lines, namely at lags 1, 2, and 5, and indicate that the higher the Google Trends searches, the higher the number was for Tweets associated with our keywords. Panel (c) shows the CCF for *WSJ* and Tweets, which shows that high *WSJ* article volume is significantly correlated with higher Tweet volume associated with our keywords. Furthermore, this Tweet correlation continues across time shifts of 1 and 2 weeks and 5 weeks. This gives evidence that once news coverage increases, there is an increase in associated Tweets for two or more weeks and a similar pattern in Google searches.

Table 1 shows the frequencies of attributes for Tweets by Terrorist and Women for “Welcome Home” and “Go Back” for countries, anti-Semitic, personal life, race, religion, political figures, tone, terror, and gender/sex. This provides a very interesting glimpse at the classification of Tweets for this topic. Notice that for the countries attribute, those who said “go back” mentioned Somalia much more than for the “welcome home” messages. It is odd that the “welcome home” Tweets mentioned Israel more than those who mentioned “go back.” On the anti-Semitic attribute, those who mentioned terrorist implied that Omar is anti-Semitic more often those who mentioned women. It should also be noticed that most Tweets did not appear to imply anti-Semitic statements. Similarly, the personal life dimension shows that most Tweets did not refer to Omar’s personal life. By far the most common political figure mentioned in the Tweets other than Omar is Donald Trump with Rashida Tlaib being second. For the terrorist Tweets, the tone was decidedly negative, women Tweets were overall negative but not nearly as strongly as the terrorist Tweets. Tweets containing women did not include terror as an attribute of Omar very much. Tweets mentioning terror did not seem to refer to gender/sex whereas those that mentioned women were more likely to mention women of color as well. The women and “go back” Tweets were more likely to include racist comments. In terms of religion, Islam was mentioned the most of any other religion across all groups.

Omar’s personal life was treated similarly across these platforms. Table 1 shows Tweets were compared across groups categorized by keywords “terrorist” and “women” as well as the *WSJ*, grouped by those that mentioned “go back” and “welcome home.” Since no articles came up from the *WSJ* keyword search for “welcome home,” there is only one column for *WSJ*. Then, Table 2 shows Chi-square tests for homogeneity across the Tweets containing keyword combinations. In the comparisons shown in Table 2, Tweets containing “go back” (denoted as GB) and “welcome home” (denoted as WH) were compared in the two categories of Twitter messages referring to both Omar and “terrorist” or “women.” Table 2 also shows the analysis of *WSJ* versus Twitter that contain “go back” (denoted overall GB), and the articles versus Tweets that contain

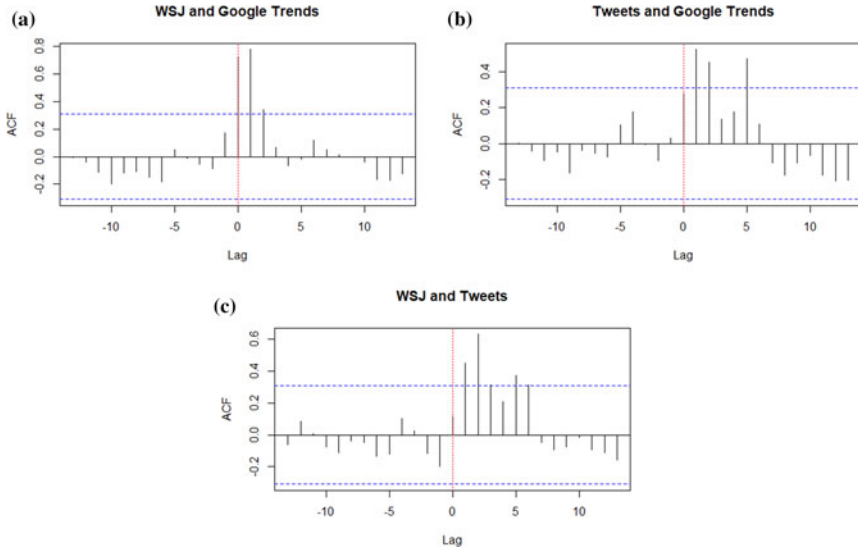


Figure 2. Cross-Correlation-Function plots for *WSJ* and Google Trends (a), Tweets and Google Trends (b), and *WSJ* and Tweets (c).

“terror” and “go back” (denoted Terror GB) and the articles and Tweets that contain “women” and “go back” (denoted W GB). Values in bold italics are statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level. Of particular interest is which attributes were not detected as statistically significant. Specifically, countries, anti-Semitic, personal life, race, and religion attributes were not significant if they mentioned “go back” regardless of whether they were part of the women or terrorist group of Tweets. Whereas for the “welcome home” group, only religion was not detected as statistically significant. This may demonstrate that for the “go back” group there is a more consistent agenda that associates Ilhan with these attributes. Also note that personal life does not appear to be different for the *WSJ* and overall go back as well as women go back. Also notice that the terrorist attribute in the *WSJ* and the women go back was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The first research question asks, “How are the ‘welcome home’ and ‘go back’ Tweets different in the cognitive and affective attributes connected to Omar?” Table 2 shows that there was no statistical difference between the “Go Back” in the terrorist attribute and “Go Back” as part of the progressive “women” attribute Tweets. This is true for the following cognitive attributes: countries, anti-Semitic, personal life, race, and religion. The lack of significance reveals a uniformity in the contents of messages that demonstrates compelling arguments linking together several of Omar’s attributes.

Table 1. Classification of Tweets by Terrorist and Women for “Welcome Home” and “Go Back” as well as WSJ “Go Back” articles. Counts of each classification presented.

Factor	Attributes	Terrorist		Women		WSJ
		Welcome Home	Go Back	Welcome Home	Go Back	Go Back
Countries	Somalia	1	50	1	23	1
	Iran	1	1	0	1	0
	Israel	15	3	16	3	1
	USA	30	31	10	44	15
	Other	4	7	7	5	1
	Multiple	15	57	6	6	41
	NA	60	106	50	99	8
Anti-Semitic	Omar	19	13	8	3	15
	Nature	0	5	0	2	4
	NA	107	239	82	212	47
Personal Life	Brother	5	19	1	5	0
	Husband	0	0	1	4	0
	Parent	1	5	0	0	0
	Sexual	0	0	1	0	0
	NA	121	233	87	206	66

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Factor	Attributes	Terrorist		Women		WSJ
		Welcome Home	Go Back	Welcome Home	Go Back	Go Back
Political Figures	Trump	10	24	24	48	0
	Sanders	0	1	1	1	0
	Ocasio-Cortez	3	9	0	0	0
	Obama	1	2	0	1	0
	Rashida Tlaib	13	5	12	3	1
	Other	8	0	16	55	62
	NA	91	216	37	106	3
Tone	Negative	113	249	49	141	11
	Neutral	9	7	28	56	51
	Positive	1	0	13	18	4
Terrorist	Terror	94	196	8	3	0
	NA	33	61	82	212	66
Gender/Sex	Derogatory	0	5	0	4	9
	Sexual	0	1	0	1	0
	Violence	0	5	8	23	0
	Group	0	0	15	46	1
	Color	2	0	19	30	19
	NA	126	245	48	111	37

Race	Black	1	0	1	5	1
	White	2	3	0	3	2
	Asian/ME	0	0	0	0	0
	Racist	6	11	7	35	26
	NA	118	242	67	172	37
Religion	Islam	17	37	10	23	3
	Christianity	1	1	0	1	4
	Judaism	2	0	3	0	8
	Hindu	0	0	0	0	0
	Multiple	1	0	7	2	9
	NA	107	218	90	189	42

Table 2. P-values associated with tests across Tweets classified as Terrorist vs. Women, Go Back vs. Go Back and Welcome Home vs. Welcome Home with comparison of the WSJ articles to total Go Back and Terror Go Back and Welcome Home Go Back. Significant differences are in bold italics. Fisher's exact test simulated p-values based on 2,000 replications are reported.

Category	Tweets			WSJ vs Tweet		
	Terrorist Vs. Women	GB vs GB	WH vs WH	Overall GB	Terror GB	W GB
Countries	0.0005	0.0545	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005
Anti-Semitic	0.0215	0.2069	0.0464	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005
Personal Life	0.0005	0.2204	0.0009	0.3558	0.0274	0.4898
Political Figures	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005
Tone	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005
Terrorist	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	1.0000
Gender/Sex	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005
Race	0.0005	0.4118	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005	0.0009
Religion	0.0179	0.0769	0.2494	0.0005	0.0005	0.0005

Somalia, the United States, and Israel are the nations with which Omar appears to be most associated in the Twitter messages. This compelling argument is related to Omar's stance on Israel and some comments she made, which included anti-Semitic tropes and for which she apologized. Here there are multiple compelling arguments that really connect various attributes with Omar.

First, Trump's mockery of Omar's homeland and his telling her to go home provide a compelling argument that ties Somalia to her. In the Tweets, Somalia appears near Omar 75 times, and 73 of these instances were in "go home" messages. The United States appears near her name 75 times in "go home" messages and 40 times in "welcome home" messages. A test for homogeneity (Fisher's Exact Test) shows that the Tweets between the "go back" and "welcome home" messages were not homogeneous (p-value = 0.000747) indicating a difference across the two groups. Despite the categories, the "welcome home" messages were often sarcastic and derisive of Omar.

Second, the context of the American-Israeli relationship serves as a compelling argument that ties together attributes and allows the transfer of the salience in a way that is more uniform. That she was referred to as anti-Semitic demonstrates that there is a compelling argument about her stance towards Israel that is emerging from this data. Golan and Wanta (2004) found that op-ed writers for the *New York Times* changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks

in that the sources of these columns were U.S. experts and politicians. The authors found that policy (Palestinian, Israeli, and American) was the only issue about which there was no variation regardless of whether or not the author was a guest writer or part of the staff (Golan & Wanta, 2004).⁵⁴ Their work demonstrates the degree to which Americans view foreign policy toward Israel similarly, a trend that Omar challenged as a Congresswoman. Thus, this context serves as a compelling argument about the degree to which Americans embrace foreign policy with regards to Israel and see Omar as a threat to this norm.

The second research question asks about the relationship between the *WSJ* coverage of Omar and Twitter messages. The *WSJ* coverage of Omar was more neutral in tone than the Twitter messages, which is demonstrative of professionalism and training of journalists. This finding is consistent with the examination by Alkazemi, Fahmy, and Wanta of Twitter messages posted by media professionals in comparison to those by the general public. Further, the Twitter messages were more likely to mention Omar in relation to Trump while the newspaper was more likely to mention multiple politicians. This is likely related to the length of messages on Twitter being limited to 240 characters as opposed to newspaper articles with longer word limits.

Further, the *WSJ* did not refer to Omar as a terrorist although a substantial part of our sample did. In particular, it is noteworthy to see that the term “terrorist” appeared in relation to “welcome home” 94 times and 196 times in “go back” Twitter messages. Although this is related to sampling, as the search terms employed searched for the term “terrorist,” here it is noteworthy to see the subversion of the “welcome home” message.

Finally, the time series analysis demonstrates that the *WSJ* articles per week led to an increase in Google searches and Twitter messages for up to 2 weeks. This suggests that there was an intermedia agenda setting effect, whereby the *WSJ* predicted the types of messages that appear on the internet. McCombs⁵⁵ noted that approximately 41% of all links online are explained by the top 10 newspapers. In this particular case, the *WSJ* is a conservative-leaning newspaper that may be setting the conservative agenda. Seeing that the majority of the Twitter content did not show Omar in a positive light, it is logical that the *WSJ* would have this agenda-setting effect.

Muslim women in Western democracies have been turned into an “allegory for undesirable cultural difference” that pose a threat to liberalism and democracy unless proven otherwise. Therefore they are under scrutiny and pressure to prove their loyalty to America and to renounce terrorism. While showing their commitment to their faith and tradition, Muslim women are also expected to prove their allegiance to the secular demands of American socio-political discourse. Ilhan Omar has been accused of establishing Shari‘a and perpetuating an Islamist agenda, which rides on anti-Islamic sentiment.

⁵⁴ Guy Golan and Wayne Wanta, “Guest columns add diversity to NY Times’ op-ed pages,” *Newspaper Research Journal* 25.2 (2004): 70–82.

⁵⁵ Maxwell McCombs, “A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future,” *Journalism studies* 6.4 (2005): 543–57.

However, such accusations are incorrect considering the legal system of the United States. According to the American Constitution, there is a separation between church and state. Thus, accusations of turning America into an Islamic state are unfounded and factually incorrect. As legal scholar Asifa Quraishi states “Shari‘a is not a book of statutes or judicial precedent imposed by a government, and it’s not a set of regulations adjudicated in court.”⁵⁶

The misunderstanding of Shari‘a in America has given rise to anti-Shari‘a legislation, which gained momentum after the 9/11 attacks. However Shari‘a has virtually no influence in the West because it is not a legally legislated body of law. However, conservative commentators and native informants continue to present Shari‘a as a threat to American liberal and Christian values. In doing so they cast suspicion on practicing Muslims like Ilhan Omar and accuse them of advancing extremist ideology in the United States Congress. This fuels anti-Muslim sentiments. Historically, such aspersions had been cast against American Muslim leaders who were leading and engaging in social justice and Civil Rights movements.⁵⁷

The participation of Muslim women in American politics has undermined the reductive understanding of Muslims in America. Ilhan Omar’s success in the two Congressional races indicates that Muslim women candidates are gaining momentum and being recognized by constituents with different backgrounds and experiences. Omar’s success could be attributed to shared political and social issues and interests with her constituents.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in response to the controversial and xenophobic attacks against her, Omar chose not to reciprocate and engage with these accusatory remarks. Instead, she focused on issues that her constituents faced and advanced her campaign promises of promoting social justice for all Americans. The increased participation of American Muslim women in American sociopolitical and legal discourse is reshaping American political discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examines a very narrow set of attributes of Ilhan Omar using big data to examine which attributes are more likely to be found in Twitter messages that mention her name and “women” or “terrorist.” Big data tools demonstrated an intermedia agenda setting effect on the part of the *WSJ*. Further, this study builds on existing research by Saldaña,⁵⁹ which demonstrated how the centrality of attributes make them compelling. By placing the narrow attributes of Ilhan Omar into sociological context, we explain the compelling argument that may tie certain cognitive attributes, like nations, to Ilhan Omar.

⁵⁶ Quraishi, “Five Myths.”

⁵⁷ Wajahat Ali and Matthew Duss, “Understanding Shari‘a Law: Conservative’s skewed interpretation needs debunking,” *Center for American Progress* (2011), https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wpcontent/uploads/issues/2011/03/pdf/sharia_law.pdf?_ga=2.5423859.1901033206.1604195877-69639948.1604195877.

⁵⁸ Bashri, “Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas.”

⁵⁹ Saldaña, “Attribute agenda setting,” 23–44.

Limitation and Future Research

Like all studies, ours is limited by an examination of only one social media platform and one newspaper. Future researchers should examine blogs, television, and other sources of conservative and liberal information online. Despite these limitations, this study contributes with its design in collecting two separate clusters of polarized Twitter messages to examine attributes of Ilhan Omar. This study also examines the political developments as an explanation of the compelling arguments that tie together various attributes.

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