THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN THE LIVES OF SOME AMERICAN MUSLIM CHILDREN, 2010–2019

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Introduction

Many Muslim children in America are growing up within the realm of two worlds, their parents’ country of origin and their place of birth or residence, America. They acquaint themselves with their parental culture in their home and when they visit their parents’ home country. For example, a US-born child of Bangladeshi heritage would learn about his ethnic culture from family and extended family living in Bangladesh or America. At the same time, the child would become familiar with his American surroundings from his Day Care Centre, then from his school, teachers, and American friends. He is also growing up in a digital age, finding the use of internet, social media, Snapchat, etc., useful and entertaining. Being a digital child can help him negotiate his hybrid cultures. This chapter explores the role of digital media in the lives of some Muslim American children, 18 in 2010 and 4 in 2016–2019. Within the framework of social constructivism (Charmaz, 2006), the research question informing this chapter is whether digital media is helping some young Muslims in the negotiation of their identity/identities and assisting them in their communication skills.

Earlier research on Muslim children growing up in America has found that many are living in extremely challenging times (Garrod & Kilkenny, 2014). The challenges are multi-layered, with Kabir (2014, 2017) finding that many second-generation Muslim youth face tremendous challenges in both cultures – cultural restrictions in their family environment and Islamophobia (fear of Muslims) within wider society. Most of their parents are first-generation immigrants who arrived in the US under either the skilled or humanitarian categories. Initially, many first-generation immigrants experience culture shock (Ahmed, 2013; Kibria, 2011; Mir, 2014). In this new cultural environment, many Muslim parents living in a diaspora become overprotective of their children (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006, pp. 14, 84–5).

Brubaker (2006) observed that a diaspora is an immigrant population that lives as a minority and envisions a real and imagined homeland (Anderson, 1983) by maintaining a collective memory and myth about their birthplace. But Muslim youth are able to manoeuvre between both their ethnic/religious culture and mainstream American culture by using their bicultural skills (Bhabha, 2004). That is, they retain their ethnic culture (language and traditional culture) and Islamic culture (religion) while also adopting American culture (English language, music, and sports).
Islamophobia

Following the Twin Towers attacks by the Al Qaeda Muslim terrorists in New York on 11 September 2001, Islamophobia became more evident in American society, manifesting in the physical and verbal abuse of people with a Muslim appearance, particularly women wearing a *hijab* (headscarf); and including resistance from the wider society to Muslim initiatives such as new mosques, and racial profiling at airports (Bayoumi, 2015; Kabir, 2018; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Following the election of the Trump administration in 2016, Islamophobia has become exacerbated. Early in his term of office, the President ordered a ban on immigration from some Muslim countries (Thrush, 2017), increasing the anxiety of many Muslims in America. This has helped create conditions where young American Muslims may feel excluded from broader American society, potentially increasing their risk of disaffection. According to the United States Pew Survey report (July 2017), 48% of Muslims reported that they experienced at least one incident of discrimination in the past 12 months. The Council of American-Islamic Relations (Bharath & Gazzar, 2018) report found that President Trump’s ‘anti-Muslim rhetoric’ has been a contributor to the increased hate crimes against Muslims. Negative Islamophobic influences have impacted upon the lives of the research participants, for example Samiha (16 years) said:

> I had an experience in a park where my friend and I were walking. I didn’t wear the *hijab* but my friend did at the time. And we were waiting for the slide when two girls said, “why don’t you fix your faces?” They then followed us when we left, pulled my hair and my friend’s scarf off.

*(Interview, New York, 2016)*

Another participant, Suraiya (16 years), said:

> I am a hijabi and I had a headphone in my ear listening to music when I was in an elevator. Within a crowd in the elevator, one man asked me to press the button on the elevator for him. I did not hear at first hand . . . what he said. He repeated, and I finally did what he asked. Then within the ride, he started yelling at me. He said I am a retard. That if I don’t understand the language I should go back to my country. “You and your people not the type to be here”. There were seven other people in the elevator and no one said anything. It all happened so fast, yet the moment felt so long.

*(Interview, New York, 2019)*

Research (Iner & Esposito, 2019; Kabir, 2019) indicates that experience of Islamophobia can be very challenging for young people and may occasionally lead to the radicalisation of young Muslims. In such circumstances, one or more of the “seven other people in the elevator” might helpfully have intervened and Suraiya may have felt less exposed.

Research Methodology

This chapter draws upon interviews with 22 young people. Eighteen interviews were conducted in 2010 in Massachusetts and New York, with a further four between 2016 and 2019 in Michigan, New York, and Virginia. The participants were 15 to 18 years old. The participants attended public and Islamic schools (Table 54.1). Under the United States immigration law, a child refers to anyone who is under the age of 21. This research uses a qualitative method, namely in-depth interviews, which were recorded either digitally or by note-taking. The first project (Kabir, 2014) focussed on young American Muslims’ identity and sense of belonging.
Table 54.1 Participants, with pseudonyms, from Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, and Virginia, USA, aged 15–18 years. Interviews conducted in 2010* and 2016–2019^.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Pseudonym &amp; gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Identity, as stated by participant</th>
<th>Use of digital media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3*</td>
<td>Aida Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>US-born of Indian origin</td>
<td>Just Muslim American</td>
<td>I did a computer job in the wider community during the summer break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4*</td>
<td>Muzna Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Overseas-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>I am proud to say that I am from Pakistan</td>
<td>I have computer class that’s Excel. I watch some religious programmes, I also listen to songs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>Fahima Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>US-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>Pakistani Muslim American</td>
<td>Computer games are more of a boy thing. I use computer for my emails and chat with my friends. I hang around with my Desi community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6*</td>
<td>Nargis Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Overseas-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>I am a Pakistani American</td>
<td>We watch new movies on the internet. My older sister has a laptop from school. We have a house computer so we just use that to watch cricket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>Hanif Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>US-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>100% American</td>
<td>I watch sports through internet. My favourite team is New York Giants. I never went to the stadium to watch the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>Yasmeen Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>US-born of Pakistani and American origin</td>
<td>Muslim American</td>
<td>I read Quran through the internet. I like to read the translation in English and read the actual word in Arabic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9*</td>
<td>Sultana Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>US-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>I sometimes play computer games with my brothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10*</td>
<td>Farzana Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Overseas-born of Bangladeshi origin</td>
<td>I am a pure Bengali</td>
<td>I listen to Bengali songs through computer. I like songs of the Renaissance band. I hear it through YouTube.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11*</td>
<td>Lokman Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Overseas-born of Pakistani origin</td>
<td>Pakistani American</td>
<td>I have Computer Science as a school subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12*</td>
<td>Nusrat Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>US-born of Palestinian origin</td>
<td>Muslim Palestinian</td>
<td>No computer. Father does not allow it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13*</td>
<td>Fatima Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>US-born of Egyptian origin</td>
<td>Arab American</td>
<td>I have the Google phone. I play games that come with it. Google phone, it’s expensive, it’s like $300. My dad got it for my birthday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
This data is used as a background and counterpoint to the more recent interviews, which were conducted from 2016 to 2019 as part of a project investigating the possible association of digital media with the radicalisation of young American Muslims. The researcher collected four interviews (one digitally recorded and three by note-taking).

This chapter employs grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Its goal is to gain a better understanding of participants’ identity formation and negotiation as American Muslims, as supported by or manifested in their use of digital media. The analysis applies a constructivist method.
of interpretation (Charmaz, 2006) and emphasises the participants’ capacity to create meaning in their lives and social contexts. All recorded interviews were transcribed and the transcriptions and the contemporaneous notes were coded and analysed.

**Muslim Children’s Identity and Their Use of Digital Media**

The 22 participants identified themselves as having a single identity, a dual identity, or multiple identities. As Kabir (2012, 2014) argues, identity represents a process and is in a constant state of flux: negotiable, contextual, situational, and circumstantial. Emotion plays an important role in the formation of a person’s identity, reflecting dynamics of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This section examines how participants constructed their identity/identities and how digital media plays a vital part in that construction. It also reflects upon how some Muslim American children negotiate their identity, moving between being an American child and a Muslim child while being part of a cultural/ethnic diaspora (see Table 54.1).

The first 18 interviews, consisting of 7 males and 11 females, were conducted in 2010. All 18 interviewees used digital media except two 15-year-old female participants, Nusrat and Afrosa, whose parents did not allow them to do so. A common theme across the participants at that time was their familiarity with digital media, including the use of emails, internet chatting, entertainment (music, movies, and sports), and access to cultural and Islamic websites. Two 16-year-old male participants, Mateen and Faisal, and one 16-year-old female participant, Aida, did part-time computer-related jobs.

The most recent interviews consisted of one male and three female participants, and they were immersed in social media, discussing their use of Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. The four interviewees, Samiha, Nasreen, Mahmud, and Suraiya, kept abreast of current news via the internet.

**The Role of Digital Media in Young Migrants’ Diasporic Lives**

Hossain and Veenstra (2017, pp. 6–7) argue that digital media allow diasporic peoples to maintain their family and friendship ties. Young migrants learn how to use emails and social networks to feel closer to their family members in their parents’ country of origin and this helps them to use their native language with their fellow country folk, strengthening their sense of identity. Immigrants use communication technologies for a range of different purposes including mitigating the trauma of separation and handling life in their new communities. These technologies can also aid in the adaptation process of integrating within their host society (Fortunati, Pertierra, & Vincent, 2012, p. 10).

Alba and Nee (2005) have argued that second-generation migrants are unlikely to engage with their parents’ country of origin with the same intensity and frequency as their parents. Green and Kabir (2012) observed, for example, that information and communication technologies (ICTs) assist second-generation Australian migrant children to negotiate their cultural difference by engaging with the majority culture, establishing friendships with their mainstream Australian counterparts, and also exercising their rights as global citizens by expressing opinions on political activity at home and abroad. Yet Green and Kabir (2012, pp. 96–7) also found that a few conservative immigrant parents imposed restrictions relating to ICTs because they feared digital media would lead to cultural erosion (see also Table 54.1).

**Digital Media in American Muslim Children’s Lives, 2010**

In 2010, two of the 18 participants said they were not allowed to use computers. In some families, the decision not to have a computer may indicate a religious or cultural concern about
external influences (Green & Kabir, 2012, p. 94). The remaining 16 participants said they generally used digital media for entertainment, online games, music (hip hop, etc.), movies, sport (football, cricket), email, and internet chat. Although these may seem like ephemeral pastimes, important themes emerged from the interviews.

**Integration within the Muslim Community**

Fahima (female, 16 years, Pakistani heritage) identified as Pakistani Muslim American (Table 54.1). She thought that computer games were “more of a boy thing”, so she focused her computer use on emails and chatting with her friends. Fahima said, “I have friends from any culture. But I hang around with people from different backgrounds. It’s like a whole, a desi [South Asian diasporic] community”. Sometimes she had differences of opinion and arguments with her friends, but she resolved them through internet chatting. Fahima commented:

> You know how Bengalis and Pakis (Pakistanis) don’t get along, right? Yeah, history influences people but I have Bengali friends. When some Bengali girls find out that I’m Paki, right? They started saying things about me. I don’t say anything back to them. I was like, “you think of me that way”, but after they got to know me they wanted to become my friend. I said “you shouldn’t judge a person by if they come from a certain country, and I don’t like it when somebody says something bad about my country”.

(Interview, New York, 2010)

Before the partition of India in 1947, there was one Bengal that included East and West Bengal. With the partition of India, East Bengal became East Pakistan (1947–1971) and, from 1971, East Pakistan became an independent country, Bangladesh. Throughout this time, West Bengal remained part of India. People from these two regions are called Bengalis because they speak the same language, Bangla/Bengali. However, for Fahima, her use of Bengali referred to Bangladeshis because of the previous political conflict between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (now Pakistan). Fahima’s views reflect upon the old enmities that exist in South Asian diasporic communities. Apart from political issues, there are cultural differences between Bangladeshis and Pakistani Muslims including language and dress. So sometimes diasporic communities bring their cultural differences with them to their host country, and it can impact on their children. In her interview, however, Fahima demonstrates her willingness to forge “a whole, a desi community” (interview, New York, 2010).

This perspective is further reinforced in Fahima’s construction of her faith. There are two major denominations of Islam, Sunni and Shia Islam. Globally, Sunni Muslims form a majority (about 85%) and Shia Muslims a minority (about 15%) (Nasr, 2002). But there can be tensions between these two communities and ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), for example, has waged “a genocidal anti-Shia campaign conducted under the guise of resurrecting the caliphate” (Gerges, 2017, p. 24). Fahima commented:

> Sunni, Shias yeah, it’s like Bengalis and Pakistanis, they don’t get along. But I don’t have a problem because we’re all Muslim, we all pray to one God. We all believe in one thing. It’s like fighting with your own self.

(Interview, New York, 2010)

Digital media proved useful for Fahima to negotiate her desi Pakistani Muslim identity. Through emails and chatting she has negotiated differences with her friends from diverse backgrounds, building a sense of what they have in common as they make their way within American society.
Teens Mateen and Faisal were sufficiently digitally skilled to have part-time computer repair jobs. Mateen (male, 16 years, Sudanese heritage) attended an Islamic school and identified himself as Sudanese American Muslim. He had already performed Umrah Hajj (a pilgrimage to Mecca that can be performed anytime in the year except the Hajj period) and through his part-time job Mateen assisted young people to navigate digital media. Mateen stated:

I worked with children, mostly Americans and Hispanic community, who have disabilities or come from low-income families. I would help them find jobs [by navigating the internet] in the summer to pretty much get them out of trouble. I felt like that was the job that suited me perfectly, because I gave back to the community in a certain way by helping those young adults.

(Interview, Massachusetts, 2010)

In ‘othering’ Americans and the Hispanic community, Mateen implicitly identifies himself as ‘not-them’, yet his American pride in having given ‘back to the community’ identifies Mateen’s perception that he and the young people he worked with are all part of the same broader community within the USA. Mateen is grateful to digital media because his technical skills allow him to help the broader community.

Faisal (male, 16 years, Lebanese heritage), like Mateen, attended an Islamic school, but he identified as ‘just Muslim’. He considered listening to music as haram (forbidden in Islam) and only listened to nasheeds (devotional Islamic songs). However, Faisal did not restrict himself only to his Muslim community: “I have a small business that I run. I manage IT, computers, phones, computer management, and software unlocking. I advertise online. I’ve recently finished building a website”. Faisal also helped his school with IT. “It’s a [religious] requirement to do certain volunteer work in the community. I’ve worked as an aide to the school in terms of technological help as well as advertising” (interview, Massachusetts, 2010). Faisal’s voluntary work with local non-Muslim community organisations helping the poor and homeless gave him an insight into the many different groups and communities disadvantaged within American society. This led Faisal to believe that Muslim Americans are not always particularly marginalised.

Digital Media in American Muslim Children’s Lives, 2016–2019

By 2016, participants’ focus on digital media had become more diversified, reflecting the rise in social networking and app use. In the 2016–2019 interview cohort, all four participants mentioned their use of Facebook and Twitter, and two specifically discussed Islamophobia (see also Table 54.1). These four participants attended public schools.

Samiha (female, 16 years, Bangladeshi heritage) said that she offered prayers, but in a way that integrated her religious identity within her school context: “I try to pray three times out of the five mandatory prayers. I try to pray Asr, Maghrib and Isha. I miss the rest of it because of school and other activities” (interview, New York, 2016). Samiha identified as Muslim American and became especially passionate when discussing her concern about how ISIL was exploiting USA foreign policy as a strategy for recruiting disaffected young American Muslims. She referred to an August 2016 media story about five-year-old Syrian boy Omran Daqneesh from the war zone in Aleppo, Syria (see CNN, 2016). Samiha commented:

Most young Muslims noticed that America is going into war with many Islamic countries and, between these wars, these young American Muslims notice the violence that is occurring, e.g., a bomb blast in Syria killed a family and left a little boy [Omran Daqneesh] alive
with long-lasting mental and physical injuries. Now these young Muslims are questioning what was the fault of [the] innocent Syrian child [to provoke this attack]?  

*(Interview, New York, 2016)*

Samiha went on to share her views on how to counter ISIL’s narratives of radicalisation through digital media by, “circulating the aftermath of the choices of these ISIL fighters and so-called jihadi brides in news and digital media so these people [audiences] can understand the reality of this matter, which is violence and hatred” (interview, New York, 2016). Having rejected ISIL’s purported religious identity, Samiha suggested that young American Muslims could be protected against radicalisation by “posting on digital media, e.g. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, we can make aware to other people of the horrendous outcomes of the militants and what happens to the ISIL fighters, as well as their violent actions” (interview, New York, 2016). In this way, Samiha identifies digital media as enabling users to challenge dominant narratives (USA foreign policy) and the potential radicalisation of audiences.

### Projecting a Public Image

In her 2018 interview, Nasreen (female, 16 years, Bangladeshi heritage) identified herself as being Muslim American Bangladeshi. Nasreen said, “I am connected with my cousins in Bangladesh through Snapchat. You take pictures and send it to your friends – texting with the picture but picture disappears” (interview, Virginia, 2018). Nasreen’s Muslim identity was revealed when she spoke of her digital media activities with her friends:

> I wear hijab and I use Instagram for my photographs. My other hijabi friends are very much into fashion. They use [follow] bloggers and Instagram. They gain support through positive feedback or may get discouraged with negative feedback. But it should not affect them because, Islamically, it is important for individuals to find peace within oneself. Once they find peace in themselves and have a strong bond with God, so negative comments would not affect them.  

*(Interview, Virginia, 2018)*

Nasreen noted as a negative that digital media is often powered by gossip, and that people make assumptions about others rather than hearing from the person themselves. Although she hoped faith would help young people feel strong enough to be unaffected, Nasreen said, “it can hurt another person if their [other people’s] comments are consistently rude. For example, if they post something without the other person’s permission” (interview, Virginia, 2018). Nasreen also noted the role of digital media in challenging popular stereotypes, however, “Muslim girls are usually misunderstood as shy, quiet, composed women. But through the digital media they can express themselves as outgoing despite what society says about them” (interview, Virginia, 2018).

Nasreen went on to discuss how digital media has provided a platform for different social and political movements such as the Women’s March (responding to President Trump’s inauguration and now an annual and global movement #WomensWave), Black Lives Matter, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender matters, and gun control. These media create an outlet for ideas to be spread. She also discussed how digital media can mobilise a community, for example after the horrendous rape and murder of 17-year-old Muslim girl Nabra Hassanen in July 2017. About 5,000 mourners attended Nabra’s funeral (Barakat, 2017). Nasreen said, “The community came together... There is a website called ‘GoFundMe’ so that people can donate for Nabra” (interview, Virginia, 2018).
An Outlet for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding

Echchaibi (2013) observes that American Muslims have created a range of alternative digital media sites such as the blog site AltMuslims, which was developed immediately after 9/11 to counter anti-Muslim sentiment. The site offers Muslims an opportunity to discuss cultural issues and connect with non-Muslims. Muslimah Media Watch allows feminist Muslims to critique the representation of Muslim women in popular culture and advocate for more diverse voices in discussions of Islam in America and beyond. It addresses the topics of misogyny, sexism, patriarchy, Islamophobia, and racism (Echchaibi, 2013, pp. 129–30).

In 2016 some American Muslims in Fremont, California, started a #MeetAMuslim Campaign with a sign, “I am a Muslim, Ask Me Anything”. They also opened up a Facebook account, “Meet A Muslim”, to dispel misconceptions about the faith (www.facebook.com/MeetAMuslim Community), and the campaign has since spread throughout America.

The last 2016–2019 interviewee, Mahmud (male, 18 years, Yemeni heritage), did not specifically mention his ethnic or civic identity but said that he was a Sunni Muslim. His views on digital media reflected his Muslim American identity, however, while his interests demonstrate his engagement in the local community politics of his area, as represented on Facebook:

The other day I was on Facebook, so it’s a lot of non-Muslims in this group, so it’s like to revitalise the city. And someone commented about infidels [non-believers]. There’s some debates politically happening right now, the Muslim voting block on the council has a view on one thing and then coincidentally the non-Muslims voting block have a view on another thing. It’s not a religious issue, it’s more of a city management issue. But that’s how the coalitions have been split [constructed, it] is the Muslims and then the non-Muslims. So that amplifies this whole [. . .] division. From time to time you’ll hear someone spewed out something, “Oh, this is Sharia law”, or, “I’m an infidel”, and they don’t really understand. It’s like, “No, you’re not an infidel”. I spoke to someone and he knows I’m Muslim and he knows I’m Yemeni and I asked him, “Why aren’t you running for office?” because he’s involved in politics and he says, “Because I’m an infidel”. And although I’m sure he meant it [as] a joke it’s kind of concerning that this is how some people [are] thinking.

(Interview, Michigan, 2017)

These comments reveal Mahmud’s view that the ongoing anti-Muslim rhetoric that Muslims want to introduce Sharia law is not helpful or accurate; nor is the perception of some non-Muslims that they could not be elected as representatives of a predominantly Muslim area because they are ‘infidels’.

Islamophobia and Its Consequences

Lean (2017, p. 105) offers a range of examples to demonstrate that digital media can serve as a platform for Islamophobia. This can be counterproductive when it comes to supporting the social integration of Muslims in the USA, and the development of integrated American Muslim identities. Lean (2017, p. 64) noted that some bloggers such as Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, identified by Islamic community leaders as anti-Islam, publish around 300 blog posts every month by simply re-blogging or copying chunks of previously written news stories with new titles and new images to portray Islam in a negative light. Phrases such as “jihad mass murder”, “jihad suicide bombing” and “jihad martyrdom” frequently appear on Robert Spencer’s blog Jihad Watch. Teen interviewee Nasreen said that the “media such as CNN, Fox News often
stereotype Muslims as terrorists. Teenagers are easily susceptible and influenced by what they hear” (interview, Virginia, 2018). Although young Muslims like Nasreen might try to counter negative perceptions, she finds that, “It is tough to have decent conversation through the digital media. Things may be taken out of context” (interview, Virginia, 2018).

Mahmud noted how Islamophobia can help create the conditions for the radicalisation of American Muslim children:

If I’m a 13-year-old boy who lives in a suburb that’s predominantly white but I live there because my dad’s a wealthy doctor or whatever the case may be, and I’m the only person of colour there or the only Muslim person there and they mock me and tease me, and Trump says this [Muslim ban], and then I discover an ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] website. I may have an interest now because the government hates me, my friends hate me, this group of people [ISIL] send message through their Twitter accounts, saying, “Hey, we’re willing to help you”, the children may fall into ISIL trap.

(Interview, Michigan, 2017)

Perhaps partly in response to President Trump’s Muslim ban (Thrush, 2017) and a perceived permission to be more openly Islamophobic, the Council on Islamic-American Relations identified a significant increase in the number of anti-Muslim hate groups in America during 2017 (Bharath & Gazzar, 2018). Thirteen states in the USA also introduced anti-Sharia bills, with Texas and Arkansas going as far as enacting legislation. In addition to this negative fear-mongering, there were anti-Muslim hate rallies in 28 cities on 10 June 2017, indicating that Islamophobia was on the rise (Beirich & Buchanan, 2018).

Arguably, digital media is implicated in these dynamics. Ott argues (2017, p. 64) that Trump’s use of Twitter in particular and digital media in general constitutes a “politics of debasement”, stating that his “simple, impulsive, and uncivil Tweets do more than merely reflect sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia; they spread those ideologies like social cancer”. Kharakh and Primack (2016) argue that these divisive ideologies resonate with white supremacist rhetoric.

This is the digital environment in which young American Muslims are being socialised, constructing personal identities and assuming their role as the next generation of American Muslim citizens.

Conclusion

This research shows young American Muslims using digital media to negotiate community relations and explore differences, developing friendships through emails and internet chatting as Fatima did in 2010; with Mateen and Faisal using digital media to assist the wider non-Muslim community. Samiha, Nasreen, and Mahmud continued these practices in 2016–2019. Throughout the past decade, digital media have helped participants negotiate their identity/identities through their communication skills and through connecting with family and friends locally, nationally, and globally.

With the growing popularity of Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, the more recent participants had adopted apps and specialised digital platforms, for example Nasreen mentioned the fun of Instagram. But three participants, Samiha, Nasreen, and Mahmud (2016–2019), were also wary of the power of digital media in alienating their peers and providing possible opportunities for ISIL and others to radicalise vulnerable youngsters. Some Muslim Americans try to effect social cohesion with initiatives such as the #MeetAMuslim campaign.
References


