

Marketing to American Muslims: The Largest Untapped Consumer Niche

By [Lateef Mauricio](#)



The American Muslim Consumer

The Muslim population of the United States represents a niche consumer group that is largely untapped, proven to be loyal to brands, generally well educated, and best of all for marketers, it represents annual disposable income of at least \$107 billion according to a new [study](#) by Dinar Standard ([JWT](#) estimated disposable spending at about \$170 billion in 2007).

Communications directed at these consumers doesn't necessarily mean Arabic headlines and Hijab-clad women on every ad. At the very least, the consideration of basic sensitivity factors would ensure better response from Muslim American consumers. The market is garnering more attention as of late, with advertising giant Ogilvy recently rolling out its new Islamic branding consultancy [Ogilvy Noor](#) and the annual [American Muslim Consumers](#) conference garnering increasing attention every year. Pew just published a [report](#) that should help allay some brands' PR concerns by finding that there are "no signs of growth in alienation or support for extremism" among Muslim Americans. Let's get into it a bit...

Unique Communications Factors: An Example

There are many unique factors that could go into a brand's American Muslim-targeted communications campaigns, here's an example:

Modesty. The concept of modesty encompasses every facet of life in Muslim households, with varying levels of intensity from household to household. After all, to Muslims, Islam is not just a religion, but a "way of life," and religious materials as well as cultural norms have a lot to say about maintaining modesty and humility.

1. Modesty of Appearance can be as strict as full body coverage from neck to toe (and head to toe in smaller populations) to as liberal as allowing exposure of the legs below the knees. These rules apply to women just as well as men, in fact, even for men a revealed chest is likely to be viewed as immodest [see: [aura](#)]. For example, ads that reveal too much of the body (whether clothes are form-shaping or skin is bare) will definitely reduce Muslim American brand sentiment.
2. Modesty of Actions is an important trait in Muslim households. Violations of modesty can be a cause for ostracism in the more strict households; nevertheless, even in the more liberal, assimilated Muslim American households, immodest behavior is easily detected and shunned. Most important behaviors to watch include the consumption of alcohol, pre-marital relationships (platonic or not)

Citation Information:

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Brand Loyalty

The American Muslim consumer market has proven to be quite loyal to brands with 70% of Muslim American respondents to [JWT's 2007 study](#) claiming that “brands play an important role in their purchasing decisions, compared to 55% for the average American.” The flip side of this brand loyalty of course is the boycotting of brands, something that Muslims worldwide have done more notably with Coca Cola (several times) and [Nike](#) for varying reasons.

Brand Neglect

When it comes to food products though, it's the lack of information provided by brands that deters many Muslim consumers from buying their products. For example, most of the products on our supermarket shelves don't disclose the sources of ingredients like [monoglycerides](#) (which can come from vegetable or animal sources) and gelatin, which is always sourced from animals but the difference between pig-based or non-pig-based gelatin could mean that less strict Muslim Americans are still potential customers. This lack of information gives rise to misinformation as consumers attempt to educate themselves, the longer this misinformation continues the more difficult it becomes to rectify the information. Many Muslim households have learned to read the [Kosher symbols](#) found on many food packages to decipher the product's content...but this can only help so much – at the end of the day Kosher isn't Halal so Kosher Gelatin might be okay for less strict Muslims (because they know it's not sourced from pigs), but those that eat strictly Halal won't settle for less than Halal.

Homogeneous Religion, Disparate Ethnicities

Muslim Americans are also easy to accommodate in terms of language. While 1st and 2nd generation immigrants are likely to speak the mother tongue in their American homes, English is highly likely to be spoken outside the home so English is the natural language for communications to Muslim Americans, who may be homogeneous in terms of religion, but quite disparate in terms of ethnicity. This brings up an important note in the Muslim American market – diversity. Just as well as Muslim Americans are able to identify with the global Muslim population in terms of religion, they are likely to have largely varying sets of cultural norms and ethnic traditions. Major cultural differences across Muslim American households to consider when developing communications campaigns include varying perceptions of colors, music, and gender-mixing.

How niche can you go!

Once we start diving in to any niche market our passion for high ROI communications campaigns drives us to fragment the market even further, calling for more research and understanding at more granular levels. In fact, because consumer profiles can vary so much in Muslim American markets, one can easily come up with primary sub-niches based on country of origin or level of religious adherence – but right now, this is a [red herring](#) until brands start marketing to American Muslims at the population level.

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