"Could this comic book really end Islamophobia?": Initial press coverage of Ms. Marvel #1 as commodity activism

Jacob Boucher
Western Washington University

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Commodity activism is selling a product in order to support a cause, whether political or social. This is also known as cause-related marketing, the process of tying a brand with a certain social cause via donations or support as a dramatic way to build brand reputation.

Ms. Marvel is a distinct break from the portrayal of Muslim women and female superheroes. Ms. Marvel is a young, powerful Muslim woman with a practical costume. Typically superheroines have revealing outfits and serve supporting roles in male-led comics, while women who practice Islam are stereotypically portrayed as oppressed in mainstream media.

News Coverage

The Slighted Superheroine!
- New York Times brought up a “Quest for Diversity in comics”, and how superheroines are typically white men.
- Washington Post talked about how superheroines are typically scantily-clad and typically targeted towards males.
- Even Fox News interviewed one comic book store owner who said representation in comics is a must.

The Marvel Solution
Ms. Marvel was covered as a product that would fight stereotypes.
- The Guardian stated that Ms. Marvel could act as a counter to Islamophobia in show business, while an article by the Mic was titled “Could This Comic be the end of Islamophobia?”
- “Marvel’s work is a watershed moment in breaking down fear and ignorance... With the use [of] comics let us hope that a real dialogue of civilizations is starting between the west and Muslims.” - From the Daily Beast (a subsidiary of Newsweek)

The Marvel Gaffe
- This trivializes the real effects of Islamophobia, which is a cultural system put in place over years that won’t be dismantled because of a single comic book.
- By promoting this product as the cure to Islamophobia, it excludes other, non-product ways to work against it.

Late Edition
Marvel Backpedals!
- Marvel says Ms. Marvel creation was “very organic, there was no agenda” removing themselves from any political outcomes.
- Marvel says Ms. Marvel is “Pakistani-American but just like every other teenage girl”
- Marvel assures readers that Ms. Marvel is Muslim, but not really Muslim, so they shouldn’t feel uncomfortable.
- Marvel limits the politics of Ms. Marvel’s religion to appeal to a larger audience.

Conclusion
Ms. Marvel #1 went to a 7th printing, a feat only repeated by 15 other comics.

Marvel limited the potential social and political outcomes that could’ve come with Ms. Marvel #1, but still profited off of the commodity activism rhetoric surrounding it.