Unheard voices as "counter narratives": Digital storytelling as a way of empowering Muslim women

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ABSTRACT
The paper investigates the use of digital storytelling as a means of empowering Muslim women. It examines how digital stories are used as "counter narratives" by Muslim women to refute dominant "public narratives" and resist stereotypes and taken-for-granted assumptions. "Narrating" or "storytelling" is a powerful mode that can be used in the struggle of changing stereotypes. Currently, in the digital era where we live, stories are narrated digitally. The study draws on "narrative theory" and "multimodal discourse analysis" (MDA). Narrative theory analyzes the "narratives" evoked in the digital stories under analysis, while MDA examines both verbal and non-verbal elements used to support the narratives evoked by the storytellers. The paper analyzes five TED talks by Muslim women posted on YouTube between the year 2015 and 2017. The analysis is conducted on three stages. First, narratives that sustain patterns of "domination and marginalization" are examined, then both non-verbal and verbal elements are investigated. Based on the analysis, the study finds that digital stories construct a new "narrative" through the use of various verbal and non-verbal strategies to counter dominant "public narratives". As such the study demonstrates that digital media paved the way for "unheard voices" of Muslim women to gain legitimacy and currency. It shows that digital stories are used as a powerful tool for empowering Muslim women in refuting misconceptions and establishing a new "narrative" of their own that challenges the stereotypes and creates a better future where diversity and acceptance can prevail.

Keywords: Counter narratives; digital storytelling; empowering Muslim women; multimodal discourse analysis; public narratives

INTRODUCTION

"Struggle and contradictions characterize our modern world and Western societies" (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 63). The attacks of the 9/11 had far-reaching consequences on the entire world. Since then, the status of Muslims has gained much attention from scholars in various fields as well as in the media (Ryan, 2011; Selod, 2015). Most of Islamophobic writers, journalists, politicians, and social activists treated the tragedy of 9/11 as a pretext to launch attacks against Muslims and to flash derogatory remarks against the religion of Islam. Many scholars have started to use the term "racialization of Muslim identity" to refer to the process of depriving Muslims from their social membership and perceiving them as "violent and oppressive to women" (Jamal & Naber, 2008; Selod, 2015).

According to the reports issued by Amnesty International and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Muslims in the West, are subjected to prejudice, especially women who are usually framed as oppressed victims of a "patriarchal Islamic society" (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Hass, 2020; Razack,

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2008; Ryan, 2011; Soltani, 2016; Vroon, 2014). The mainstream media representation of Muslim women has always been biased. Women who wear Hijab are usually represented as "oppressed, exotic, and threatening" (Saad, 2015; Watt, 2012). Furthermore, Muslim women are usually depicted as "objects" not as active "actors" who view their religion as empowering (Bartels, 2005; Vroon, 2014).

The emergence of the "meta- narrative" of "War on Terror" after 9/11 attacks increased discrimination against Muslims and encouraged citizens "to verbally accost Muslim women about how their cultural values are a threat to American values" (Selod, 2015, p. 87). Responding to the situation, Muslim women started to refute such negative perceptions through using non-traditional media channels to speak up their minds and build their own "narrative". This is because they did not have access to traditional media channels. They resort to TED platform as an alternative to mainstream media platforms. This is attested to by the five videos under analysis in the present study. As highlighted by Rasulo (2015), TED "has created a new environment and a new technological information paradigm with enormous communicative potential for the spreading of ideas" (p. 265). Moreover, as stated on TED website, TED is a "non-profit and nonpartisan" foundation that aims at spreading ideas. The foundation strongly believes in the power of ideas. As such, TED became the goal for those who aim to deliver an inspirational talk. Muslim women narrated their digital stories to refute "public narratives" that "sustain widespread patterns of domination and marginalization" (Baker, 2006, p. 470). "Public narratives" refer to stories that are circulated among a certain group of people or a certain institution (Somers, 1992, 1997; Somers & Gibson, 1994). For instance, "public narratives" that depict Muslim women who wear Hijab as "oppressed" are refuted by the storytellers in the analyzed digital stories. Hijab is seen by the storytellers as a declaration of their identity as "Muslim women".

"Narrating" or "storytelling" is a powerful mode that can be used in the struggle of changing stereotypes. The importance of storytelling cannot be underestimated as stories play an important role in our life. Storytelling is the "backbone of human communication" (Psomosa & Kordakib, 2015, p. 82). Carey (2007) states that "human brain has a natural affinity for narrative construction"; therefore, people remember facts more often if they hear them in a story (as cited in Rudnicki, 2009, p. 2). As pointed out by Fu and Stremmel (1998), "Stories are often catalysts for conversations, new understandings, and change". Moreover, they "prompt us to reflect and understand different standpoints in the contexts of life…Thus, in telling and listening to stories, we find meaning in our lives" (p. 5). Along similar lines, Somers (1992) argues that people make sense of social world and constitute their social identity

through narratives. As such, stories or "narratives" help us in understanding ourselves as well as the world where we live.

Because of the importance of storytelling, it continued to exist through the ages up till our digital era, but it became digitalized just like everything else. Digital storytelling "…combines the art of telling stories with a mixture of digital media, including text, pictures, recorded audio narration, music and video" (Robin, 2016, p. 17). These elements are combined to produce a story that deals with a certain topic (i.e., narrative) from the viewpoint of the narrator. Similarly, Choo et al. (2020) indicate that digital storytelling "…incorporates technology which consists of various multimedia modes such as graphics, audio, texts, videos, and animations" (p. 1). As defined by Top Hat (2022), digital storytelling refers to the practice of any individual using digital tools to tell his/her 'story' (i.e., personal narrative). As such, digital storytelling includes a variety of digital narratives that can be shared over the internet on YouTube or podcast as well as other online platforms. A good example of these digital stories that are posted on online platforms is TED talks which are selected for analysis in the present study.

When compared to oral stories, which are circulated by word of mouth, digital stories are more powerful since they can travel across borders. Digital stories can be uploaded online, posted on social media websites, and thus can travel across geographical boundaries. Due to their importance, digital stories are examined from various perspectives. One perspective which gained great attention is the pedagogical aspect. Digital story telling is seen as a vital tool that helps students to overcome educational difficulties (Psomosa & Kordakib, 2015). Another aspect tackled by researchers is the use of digital storytelling in teaching and learning as it addresses the multiple intelligence of students and help them to achieve better results (Choo et al., 2020). Furthermore, the practice of designing digital stories and using them as a tool for sharing intercultural experiences is also another aspect that is investigated in the previous studies. For instance, Rudnicki (2009) focuses on helping students to develop more "effective and meaningful" digital stories that would engage a wider audience. In a similar vein, Dell-Jones (2018) highlights the use of digital storytelling as a tool for helping students to explore their own cultural background or intercultural experiences. He indicates that personal narratives promote or support reflexivity of critical multicultural concepts or practices.

The review of literature shows that most of the studies conducted on digital storytelling focus on the pedagogical aspect or the use of digital storytelling to enhance students' skills in learning the language. However, none of the previous studies deals with the use of digital storytelling by Muslim women to refute

stereotypes and create "counter narratives" or apply multimodal discourse analysis on such stories to investigate their impact in empowering Muslim women. As such, this area of research is understudied. It is crucial to weed out bullying and stereotyping with all their different registrations: Muslim women, refugees, or black people, hence, the need for the present study. In fact, every person has the right to be treated fairly without being subjected to any sort of prejudice or discrimination because of his/her skin color, religious beliefs, gender, or ethnical background. The paper argues that examining digital stories by Muslim women is vital as they address several stereotypes and misconceptions and empower Muslim women by enabling them to reframe their identity and tell their own "narratives" via non-traditional media channels. Thus, the present study can help students in tackling bias in mainstream media.

Given the fact that previous studies do not tackle the use of digital storytelling as a means of

METHOD
Research design
The study applies an eclectic approach that draws on "narrative theory" and "multimodal discourse analysis" (MDA). This eclectic framework is selected because digital stories evoke "public narratives" that should be investigated by applying the "narrative theory" as it paves the way for "a deeper exploration of social phenomena" (Johnson, 2017, p. 46). Furthermore, MDA is selected to examine both verbal and non-verbal elements used to support the narratives evoked by the storytellers.

Somers (1992) believes that "it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities" (p. 600). According to this view, narratives are the stories that we live by and those that affect our behaviour. Somers and Gibson (1994) consider "narrative" as an "inescapable" mode through which people communicate, not an "optional" one. Moreover, the present study draws on Fisher's narrative paradigm (1984, 1985, 1987, 1997) which analyses how effective a certain narrative is. Fisher (1985) believes that humans communicate in the form of stories and thus "we are all storytellers" (p. 86). One of the merits of Fisher's paradigm is that it makes it possible to understand the reasons for opposing or supporting a certain narrative by highlighting the features that motivate us to believe in a certain narrative or oppose it (Fisher, 1997, p. 315). In the present study, narrativity is used to highlight the widespread "public narratives" evoked in the digital stories under analysis and the "personal narratives" of the storytellers that represent "counter narratives".

empowering Muslim women, the present study addresses this gap by investigating digital stories used by Muslim women and their impact as "counter narratives" that create a new "master narrative". "Counter-narratives" are concerned with the social and political as well as the personal; they resist or counter official texts and taken-for-granted assumptions" (McCarty et al., 2006). On the other hand, "master" or "meta- narratives" are narratives "in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history" such as the narrative of "War on terror" (Somers & Gibson, 1994, p. 61). As such, the study addresses two research questions:
1. What are the "narratives" evoked by Muslim women in their digital stories?
2. How do digital stories by Muslim women refute "dominant narratives" and empower Muslim women and what are the strategies used to achieve this?

Besides narrativity, MDA is used in order to explore the multimodal resources used in the digital stories under analysis. It analyzes both the non-verbal and verbal levels of the digital stories. MDA is based on the idea that communication occurs across more than a single mode and is therefore inherently multimodal (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001, 2006). MDA "extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound" (O'Halloran, 2011, p.120). Along similar lines, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) define "multimodality" as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event" (p. 20). O'Halloran (2011) argues that MDA involves a shift from the study of language alone to the study of the integration of language with other resources (p. 121). Such "resources" are referred to as "semiotic resources", "modes" and "modalities" and involve "language, image, music, and gesture, which integrate across sensory modalities (visual, auditory, and tactile) in multimodal texts, discourses, and events" (O'Halloran, 2011, p.121). As such, the multimodal approach stresses the fact that meaning is not only communicated by language but also by many other modes such as images, gesture, posture, gaze, and color. In MDA, "these modes possess equal meaning-making potential" (Borodo, 2015, p. 23).

Somers and Gibson (1994) state that there are four types of "narratives": "ontological" (i.e., personal), "public", "conceptual" and "meta-narratives". "Ontological narratives" are "personal stories that we tell ourselves about our place in the world" (p. 61). "Public narratives" refer to stories that are circulated among a certain group of people or a certain institution. "Conceptual narratives" refer to scholars' definition in any field of science. "Meta-narratives" or "master narratives" are "narratives in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in

history" such as "war on terror" which is promoted across geographical boundaries and has an impact on the entire world (p. 61). It is important to note that the analyzed digital stories have "public narratives" that are refuted by "personal narratives" which act as "counter narratives" of Muslim women.

Robin (2016) outlined three types of digital stories: "1) personal narratives - stories that contain accounts of significant incidents in one's life; 2) historical documentaries – stories that examine dramatic events that help us understand the past, and 3) stories that inform or instruct the viewer on a particular concept or practice" (p. 18). Rudnicki (2009), on the other hand, mentioned four types of digital stories which are "historical documentaries, personal narratives, fictional stories, and abstract concepts, among others" (p. vii). It is important to note that the analyzed digital stories (i.e., TED talks) include personal, public as well as historical narratives. Thus, the typology of narratives and digital stories are significant as they reflect the types of narratives used by the storytellers in the present study.

Data collection

The data of the study consists of five digital stories posted on YouTube between the year 2015 and 2017. The researcher selected this period to highlight the dominant "public narratives" about Muslim women post 9/11 as these attacks are considered a turning point in history. Commenting on 9/11 attacks, Armstrong (2001) says, "this crime seemed to endorse all the negative Western notions of Islam as a fanatical faith that encourages murder and terror" (p. 12). The five digital stories are TED talks by five Muslim women who narrate their own "personal narratives" as well as other "public narratives" and "historical narratives". The five digital stories tackle stereotypes propagated on Muslims and Muslim women and refute them. According to the definition mentioned earlier, TED Talks are considered digital stories as speakers use the stage to tell their 'story' and they employ a variety of digital tools then share it on YouTube. Here are the five digital stories:

Table 1
The five digital stories and number of views of each digital story in February 2022

No.	Name of Presenter	Video Title	Date of posting	Number of views
1.	Noor Tagouri	Calling on the 10. 000	May, 2015	289. 862
2.	Alaa Murabit	What Islam really says about women	July, 2015	3. 630. 881
3.	Dalia Mogahed	What it's like to be a Muslim in America?	March, 2016	4. 718. 086
4.	Amal Kassir	The Muslim on the airplane	December, 2016	4. 917. 878
5.	Samah Safi Bayazid	The flight that changed my life	August, 2017	769. 704

This table shows the titles of the digital stories, the story tellers, the date of posting and the number of the views of each one. According to the list of top websites ranking by Similar Web (2021), YouTube is the second most visited website in 2021. TED talks are influential videos from experts in various fields (TED, 2021). It is important to note that the slogan of TED Talks is "ideas worth spreading". As such, the fact that Muslim women managed to tell their digital stories on TED platform shows how powerful they became as TED platform enabled them to reach a wider audience on the stage and on YouTube away from the traditional media channels. This proves that the shift from mass media to digital media has paved the way for "the increased production and dissemination of cultural output outside of industrial channels" and gave space to decentralized channels that challenge "traditional knowledge authorities and hierarchies" (as cited in Johnson, 2017, p. 17). The number of views is significant as it aligns with the views of Johnson (2017) who maintains that the "advent of digital media represents an opportunity to harness the power of popular culture– previously controlled by mass media industrial channels" (Johnson, 2017, p. 18).

Before analyzing the digital stories, it is important to introduce the storytellers. To begin with, Tagouri is an award-winning journalist, storyteller, and producer who has more than one million followers on social media. She is considered one of the new "media's most influential voices". She is known for her innovative style for storytelling that emphasizes marginalized communities (Imdb, 2022).

As stated by Murabit (2020), Murabit is an award-winning global security strategist, women's rights advocate, and medical doctor. Her work has influenced the lives of billions. Currently, she is the Director of Health at the Gates Foundation.

Mogahed is the Director of Research at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. She is former executive director of the Gallup center for Muslim Studies. In 2009, President Obama appointed her to the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Her 2016 TED talk was named one of the top TED talks that year (Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2022).

Kassir is a storyteller, an activist, and a poet. She has travelled to ten countries to deliver speeches. She initiates community and humanitarian initiatives

for Syria. She also gives speeches on Islamophobia, and "empowering the voice of the marginalized through writing and speaking" (Bookamuslim, 2022, para. 1).

According to Fiction Wikisort (2022), Bayazid is an award winning and a film maker who lives in Washington DC. She studied filmmaking and screen writing at New York Film Academy. She is an advocate who aims to empower Muslim women in the West.

Data analysis
The analysis of the digital stories is conducted in three stages. The first stage of the thematic analysis addresses the narratives alluded to by the digital storytellers, explains each narrative in detail, then demonstrates how it is refuted by Muslim women.

The second stage deals with multimodal discourse analysis and is conducted at both non-verbal and verbal levels. The non-verbal level of the digital stories under analysis examines images, symbols, colors, facial expressions, and videos used. It shows how all these non-verbal elements contribute to refuting dominant "public narratives" and empowering Muslim women.

As for the verbal level, it involves the investigation of the verbal mode of the digital stories and demonstrates how lexical items, pronouns, and sentence types are all used to support "counter narratives" of Muslim women.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Narratives in Digital storytelling
In this section, narratives in the analyzed digital stories are examined. The selected digital stories under analysis deal with four "public narratives" based on the narratives evoked by the five speakers in their digital stories. These four narratives are: "Reframing Muslim Women's identity", "Claiming back the roles of Muslim women in the society", "Islamophobia", and "Hijab as Signifier" (i.e., head cover).

Reframing Muslim Women's identity
Digital stories under analysis tell a "public narrative" of "Reframing Muslim women identity". They can be considered "counter narratives" to dominant "public narratives" or stereotypes that are circulated and propagated by the media. To give an example, in her video, Mogahed (2016) starts by asking the audience a question: "*What do you think when you look at me?*" She offers the answer by introducing the dominant "public narratives" about Muslim women that might describe a Muslim woman as "*A woman of faith?*" "*An expert?*" "*A sister*" "*oppressed*", "*brainwashed*", "*a terrorist*" or "*an airport security line delay*". To refute these narratives, Mogahed (2016) narrates her own narrative by saying "*let me tell you who I am*", then she introduces herself as "*a*

mom", "*a coffee lover*" "*an introvert*" "*a wannabe fitness fanatic*" and "*a practicing, spiritual Muslim*". Her answer represents her own "personal narratives" regarding her identity. These "personal narratives" are "counter narratives" that empower Muslim women enable them to confront stereotypes and reframe their identity.

Similarly, Tagouri (2015) starts by stating the dominant "public narratives" of being "*the elephant in the room*" as she is "*an Arab woman who is a Hijabi*". These narratives show how she is perceived by the society where she lives. She narrates her own "ontological narrative" and shares her dream of becoming a reporter on the commercial television market. Because she is "*a Hijabi Muslim woman*", it is challenging for her to achieve her dream as there had never been a woman who wore the Hijab who is a reporter on the commercial television market. She believes that the diversity of the society is not reflected in the media. Therefore, she asks why we (i.e., Muslim women) as "*story tellers*" allow the "narrative" to be told "*by people who do not understand the culture and the background of the people whose stories they are telling*". Tagouri (2015) managed to get her dream job as a reporter on the commercial television market. With this achievement, she is representing "*Hijabi Muslim women*" and is narrating their "counter narratives". As such, she calls for Muslim women to have a voice to tell their own "narratives" to the entire world.

Claiming Back the Roles of Muslim Women in the Society
The narrative of "*Muslim women leadership*", "*women rights*" as well as "*gender equality*" are evoked by Murabit (2015) in her digital story. She narrates herself as a person who works "*to amplify the voices of women*". As indicated by Baker (2006), "names and titles are particularly powerful means of framing" (p. 123). As such, Murabit (2015) frames herself to be a supporter of Muslim women rights as naming indicates the "narrative location" of its author (Baker, 2006). Murabit (2015) explains that she was able to change the narrative by providing an alternative one that promoted "*women rights*". When dealing with the narrative of "*Muslim women leadership*", Murabit (2015) gives the example of Khadija (the wife of Prophet Muhammad), may Allah be pleased with her, as the history shows her as powerful businesswoman and a supportive wife. Concerning Gender equality, Murabit (2015) argues that Muslim women are treated equally as men. She narrates her narrative and confirms that she was treated the same as her brothers at home and the "*same was expected from her*". She also states that she was never taught that "*God judged differently based on gender*". These narratives counter the dominant public narratives of "*Muslim women being oppressed*". It is important to note that the "*women leadership*", "*women rights*", and "*gender equality*"

that are usually constructed by the western media as "Western principles" are proven by Murabit's narrative to be basic principles in Islam.

Islamophobia Narrative

Another recurring "historical narrative" in the analyzed digital stories is that of 9/11 attacks. As previously mentioned, these attacks are considered a turning point in history. Armstrong (2001) states that 9/11 attacks proved that Islamic world and the West have failed and if they aim to bridge the gap in the 21st Century, Western people "must learn to understand the Muslims with whom they share the planet." (p. 15). The narrative of "*9/11 attacks*" is evoked by Kassir (2016) and Mogahed (2016). Mogahed narrates her "ontological narrative" on that day and what she was doing at that time. She points out that in a blink of an eye, she found out that the "public narratives" changed her from being "*a citizen*" to be "*a suspect*". The temporal aspect of this narrative is highly significant as it is evoked fifteen years after the incident took place. This proves that at certain times "certain narratives cannot be heard, as there is no 'space' for them within currently accepted social and political discourse" (Johnson, 2017, p. 41).

The use of significant "historical narratives" is another way employed by the narrators of digital stories to show how powerful they became and to gain empathy. A narrative that recurs in the digital stories under analysis is the narrative of "*Diaa & Yosr*". This narrative is tackled by Bayzid (2017), Kassir (2016) as well as Mogahed (2016). The three digital story tellers use this narrative to show how dominant "public narrative" of bigotry can be lethal. As narrated by Mogahed (2016), "*Diaa and Yousr were a young married couple living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and they were murdered by their neighbor Craig Hicks in their apartment*". This narrative is linked to the narrative of "*Islamophobia*" which is described by Bayazid (2017) as an illness. She believes that the media should be blamed for "*feeding the narrative and igniting islamophobia*". The media has been giving these narratives of "*fear*" and "*Islamophobia*" currency and legitimacy. As outlined by Baker (2006), narrativity "normalizes the accounts it projects" so that they would seem "self-evident, benign, uncontestable and non-controversial" (p. 11).

Hijab as Signifier

Dominant "public narratives" on "*Hijab*" usually assign certain attributes to women who wear it such as being "*oppressed*", "*brain washed*", "*rag head*", "*airport security line delay*", and "*random search*", among others. As highlighted by Selod (2015), Hijab is usually viewed by western people as a symbol of "submission and degradation of Muslim women and aggression, patriarchy, and barbarism of Muslim men" (p. 86). This is the result of the widespread misconceptions about Islam in the West and the

"public narratives" about Islam and Muslims. Tagouri (2015) confronts these dominant narratives on "*Hijab*" by stating that this scarf on her head does not mean that she is "*submissive*" or "*oppressed*", but it "*empowers*" her in *"demystifying the stigma that surrounds Muslim women"*. Hijab is a declaration of her identity as a Muslim woman, and she takes pride in being a Muslim. This refutes one of the most dominant narratives that Muslim women encounter in the West. Similarly, in her digital story, Kassir (2016) argues that the way we name others reflects our own declaration, courage, and fear. For instance, not every Hijabi woman is a "*raghead*" who needs to be liberated and not every white person is a "*racist cracker*", and not everyone with black skin is a "*fatherless nigger*". Therefore, she states that Muslim women should have the power to own their narratives as authentic narratives should be taken from the experience of the storyteller not any other person.

To sum up, the analysis of the narratives in digital stories revealed that the various narratives evoked by the five storytellers establish "counter narratives" that refute the "narrative hegemony" about Muslim women. As such, these digital stories create new authentic and reliable "master narratives" narrated by Muslim women themselves. This shows that digital storytelling empowered Muslim women as they are given the chance to own their narrative through giving a speech on such a reputable platform as TED that has a large audience all over the world. These digital stories enabled Muslim women to reframe their own identity as these videos are posted on YouTube platform and are watched by great number of viewers all over the world. As such Muslim women could narrate their narrative and speak up their mind to the entire world.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The digital stories under analysis utilize several elements across various modalities to deliver the message and present the "new narrative" of empowering Muslim women. This is achieved by both non-verbal mode and verbal mode. In the following section, examples are given of the strategies used at each level.

Non-Verbal Mode

Digital stories under analysis use images, symbols, colors, facial expressions, and videos skillfully to support their narratives and prove their point of view. It is usually said that "a picture is worth thousand words"; however, it is important to note that visual images "are never innocent or neutral reflections of reality" as they "re-present" for us an interpretation of the world (Midalia, 1999, p. 131). As such the images used by the digital storytellers are significant in promoting or countering a certain narrative.

Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), images are analyzed according to their representational, interactional, and compositional

meaning. Representational meaning deals with the represented participants, the processes depicted as well as the attributes of the participants. The interpersonal meaning investigates the relationship between the visual, the producer and the viewer. In this regard the presence or the absence of facial expression should be investigated. The gaze is also an important factor to be considered. Whether represented participants look to each other or to the viewers is also significant. Compositional meaning relates to the layout and the interplay between the visual and the verbal elements as well as visual salience such as size, color, or visual framing.

Images, symbols, and colors
In her video, Tagouri (2015) utilizes various photos while telling her "personal narrative". When she tells the audience about her dream job, she uses the following photo:

Figure 1
An example of the photo used by Tagouri (2015) when talking about her dream job

The represented participant in this photo is the girl who is wearing the Hijab. She appears in the center of the photo to indicate that this character is important. The photo has no frame to invite the audience into the picture. As highlighted by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), "The presence or absence of framing devices … disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense" (p. 177). In fact, all the photos used by the five storytellers have no frame to achieve the same purpose. As for the symbols used in the photo, the microphone is used as a symbol of Noor's dream to be a news reporter. Moreover, the TV set alludes to her favorite TV show by Oprah Winfrey whose image appears on the screen. The attire worn by the represented participant reflects the identity of Muslim women as the character is wearing Hijab. She is also holding a sword to allude to the challenges she is encountering to achieve her dream. The narrative of "empowering Muslim women" is also evoked by the red cape that resembles the cape of Superman and is therefore a symbol of power. Another photo used by Tagouri (2015) in her video, is the following one:

Figure 2
Example of a photo used by Tagouri (2015) while telling her "Personal narrative"

This photo is used by Noor whose Arabic name means "Light" in English. She says that in order to pursue her dream, she started an online campaign titled "*Let Noor Shine!*" to encourage more people to support her. She used the photo in figure 2 to support her "ontological narrative". In this photo there are three represented participants. The two characters who appear on both sides are less important than the one in the center as the latter represents Noor (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The girl in the center of the photo wears Hijab as she represents Noor. The photo has no frame to invite the reader to the image. Moreover, the colors in the photo are significant as yellow connotes happiness (Guijarro & Pinar, 2008). Yellow also refers to light as it resembles the light of the sun and thus, has many positive connotations. All these elements refute the "public narratives" of Muslim women being oppressed. Based on the semiotic analysis of the photo, "Noor" is depicted in this photo in the middle as the most important character who is not only shining with light, but also giving light to other participants around her. As such Muslim women are depicted as powerful actors whose positive effect goes to other members in the society.

Kassir (2016) used the following photo to evoke the narrative of "hatred and bigotry".

Figure 3
An example of one of the photos used by Kassir (2016) in her digital story

Figure 3 alludes to the "identity crisis" of Muslim women. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, "the elephant in the room" refers to "an obvious major problem or issue that people avoid discussing or acknowledging". This analogy is evoked in two digital stories by Kassir (2016) and Tagouri (2015). In her digital story, Kassir (2016) used the photo of the elephant to refer to her feelings as a Muslim woman who is wearing Hijab. The elephant is depicted in the center of the image to show how important it is. Size is one aspect of salience to be considered in this photo. According to this feature, the larger the represented participant, the greater the importance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Also, the photo has no frame to invite the audience and gain their empathy.

As previously mentioned, the narrative of Diaa and Yousr recurs in the analyzed digital stories more than once. It is tackled by BaYazid (2017) and Kassir (2016) . The photo of figure 4 is used by Kassir (2016) when narrating their "ontological narrative". The photo depicts one of their happiest moments as it is their wedding photo. She states that they were murdered shortly after their wedding even before they could see their wedding photos.

The photo of figure 5 is used by BaYazid (2017) when narrating their story. This photo is captured on the day of their graduations and shows how happy and optimistic they were. The choice of both photos is significant as they capture the beginning of a new stage of their life, after their graduation and as a newly married couple. The implicit message delivered by both photos is that the murderer took their lives and deprived them of pursuing their dreams.

Other examples of employing photos in digital storytelling are figures 6 and 7 used by Murabit (2015) in her digital story. Figure 6 is used when she was narrating her "ontological narrative" and saying that she went to the "*Murabit School of International Affairs*". Figure 7 is used to exemplify the importance of negotiating or as Murabit (2015) puts it "*the importance of being at the table*". In these two photos, white is used to present the message as clear as possible against the plain black background.

Figure 4
The photo of Diaa and Yousr in their wedding

Figure 5
The photo of Diaa, Yousr and Razan

DIA, 23; YUSOR, 21; RAZAN, 19

Figure 6
A photo used by Murabit (2015) in her digital story

Figure 7
A photo used by Murabit (2015) in her digital story

When tackling the narrative of "*fear and bigotry*" against Muslim women, BaYazid (2017) used the photo in figure 8. She argues that bridges of peace and understanding should be built between the East and the West. The photo has the symbol of peace that has the shape of "N" and "D" to refer to "Nuclear Disarmament". The symbol has a caption that says "building Bridges takes two" to allude to the fact that both sides, Muslims and non-Muslims, ought to shoulder the responsibility of building bridges of mutual understanding. This same message is evoked by the two arrows in figure 9 as they refer to the duty of both sides to listen to one another.

Figure 8
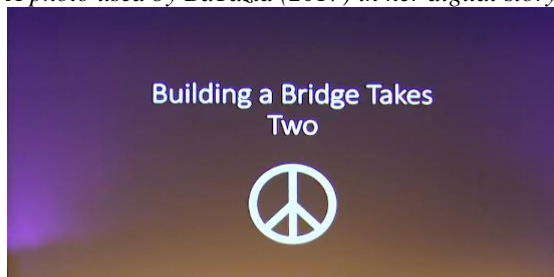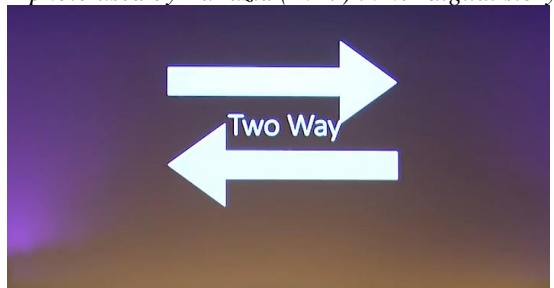*A photo used by BaYazid (2017) in her digital story*

Figure 9
A photo used by BaYazid (2017) in her digital story

Facial expressions and emojis

Facial expressions are also employed by Tagouri (2015) to support the narrative of "*Reframing Muslim women identity*" as displayed in the figures 10 and 11.

Both figure 10 and 11 are used by Tagouri (2015) in her digital story. When narrating her "personal narrative", she said that she stands as one and she displayed figure 10 in which she is depicted with sad facial expressions. The colors of the background in this photo evoke sadness and darkness. The represented participant is in the center of the photo to show how important she is. However, in figure 11, the facial expressions of the represented participant show that she is happy and optimistic as she found support by her surrounding people. Yellow is used in the background to indicate hope and happiness. In both photos the represented participant is a girl who wears Hijab to evoke the narrative of "*Hijab as signifier*" and to counter the narratives of Hijab as being a form of "oppression".

Figure 10
A picture used by Tagouri (2015) when she is saying "I stand as one"


Figure 11
A picture used by Tagouri (2015) when she is saying "But I come as 10.000"

Emojis are also used by BaYazid (2017) in her digital story as displayed in figure 12. This photo is used when she evokes the narrative of the communication between the East and the West. She believes that terrorists succeeded in feeding hatred between the East and the West as well as widening the gap between both sides. The red face indicates anger of both sides (i.e., the East & the West) and the Hijabi girl in the middle is the represented participant. She symbolizes Muslim women who experience prejudice, hatred, and bigotry because of spreading the narrative of "*fear and Islamophobia*".

Figure 12
A photo of emojis used by BaYazid (2017) in her digital story
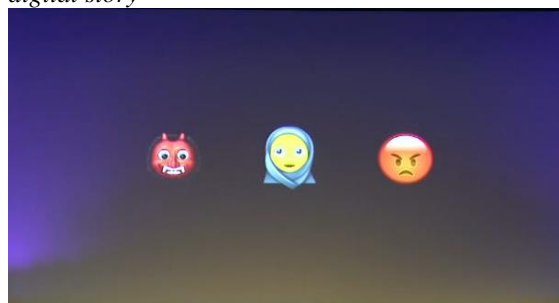
The above discussion shows that photos, symbols colors, and facial expressions are used by the digital storytellers to evoke the narratives of "*Reframing Muslim women identity*", "Claiming back the roles of Muslim women in the society", "*Islamophobia*" and "*Hijab as signifier*". All the photos used are significant as they support the narratives of the storyteller. The analysis shows that all the photos, symbols, emojis and facial expressions are used to reflect the narratives alluded to. This attests to the fact that photos are used to provide an interpretation of the world not as a mirror of its events (Midalia , 1999).

Using videos

In addition to using photos, symbols, colors, and facial expressions, some digital storytellers used videos when they are giving their TED talks to support their narratives. A good example of this is the video used by BaYazid (2017). Being a filmmaker

and social media influencer, BaYazid (2017) decided to participate in propagating Muslim women "counter narratives" that refute "public narratives" by creating videos. In her digital story, she used a video titled "Just Like You". The video depicts four different women who start their day in the early morning; one of them is having her breakfast, the second one prepares the lunchbox for her kid, the third one feeds her kitty and the fourth one makes a phone call. The four women get dressed at the end to get out of the house and they all wear their head scarves. It is important to note that the video has no dialogue at all as the message is encoded through the actions and the facial expressions of the represented participants in the video. This ensures that the narrative of the video will travel across geographical borders and will be accessible to the entire world regardless of the language barriers. Another point that is worthy to note is the sentence that appears on the screen at the end of the video which says, "Just Like You". This alludes to the fact that Muslim women who wear Hijab are just like any other women. They lead a normal life and have the same hopes and aspirations as any other women. Furthermore, the caption of the video states that it is dedicated to all unapologetic Muslim women who are proud of themselves as "*it is imperative that we own our narrative and share our reality with the world*".

To counter the narrative of "islamophobia" BaYazid (2017) used the video of "Islamophobin Commercial" in her digital story. As indicated by CAIR International, this commercial is "a satirical public awareness campaign to challenge growing Islamophobia in America". The video uses humor as it employs "constitutive intertextuality". As defined by Aboelezz (2012), "constitutive intertextuality" occurs when a text adopts or borrows from the discourse conventions of a certain genre, style, or register. The video adopts the same discourse conventions of television commercials that advertise products and display a firsthand experience of people who used the product and liked it. "Islamophobin" is a gum that relieves chronic Islamophobia! Here is a photo of the product:

Figure 13
A photo of Islamophobin gum
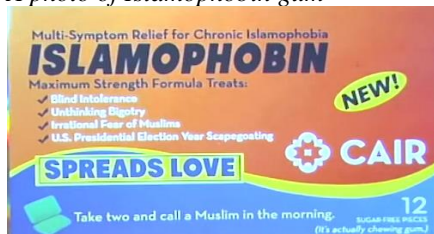
According to what is mentioned BaYazid (2017) in her digital story, the video got over 10 million views on social media platforms shortly after launching the campaign. As such, the power of

"counter narratives" by Muslim women cannot be underestimated.

Verbal Mode
In addition to using non-verbal element to refute "public narratives" and establish new narratives owned by Muslim women, verbal mode is also utilized by digital story tellers to support their narratives. As outlined by Johnson (2017), "personal narratives" rely on certain "linguistic formulations, structures, and vocabularies of motive" so that they would be intelligible (p. 22). Just as writers, digital storytellers address their audience by making statements, asking questions, or motivating them to do a certain action (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In the digital stories under analysis, several techniques are used to evoke various narratives such as using value-laden vocabulary items, certain names, pronouns, different sentence types, rhetorical questions, pronouns, and statistics.

Lexical Items
To begin with, the choice of lexical items evokes the narratives alluded to by the digital storytellers. For example, when invoking the narrative of "Islamophobia", BaYazid (2017) used vocabulary items that denote disappointment and sorrow as she says, "*I was walking with the jet bridge with my head down feeling so broken*". Another example is what Mogahed (2016) said in her digital story "*this is how Islamophobia affects me and my family*". Along similar lines, the narrative of "fear" is also evoked by using vocabulary items such as "*fear, bigotry, terrorists, hatred, surveillance, Jihad, tumor in the body of America and malignant*". The narrative of "*reframing Muslim women identity*" is also evoked several times by using vocabulary items such as "*determined; the voice that explains my religion; scarf on my head empowers me; I work to amplify the voices of women; as a young Muslim woman; I am very proud of my faith; it gives me the strength and conviction to do my work every day*". Moreover, the narrative of Hijab as a source of pride that empowers Muslim women is also evoked by Mogahed (2016). She says, that wearing Hijab was "*at that time a feminist declaration of independence from the pressure I felt as a 17-year-old, to conform to a perfect and unattainable standard of beauty*". Similarly, Tagouri (2015) evokes the same narrative of Hijab as a source of empowerment as she says, "*this scarf on my head does not mean that I am submissive, or that I'm being oppressed, in fact, it empowers me in demystifying the stigma that surrounds Muslim women*". As such, the vocabulary items used by the story tellers promote the narrative of "*reframing Muslim women identity*" and establish a new "master narrative" that counters "narrative hegemony" where women who wear Hijab are perceived as "*submissive, oppressed, brainwashed, rag head, terrorists and so forth*". Also, the narrative

of "Rights of women" is also evoked using various vocabulary items such as "*The rights of women, fight for the rights of women, human rights, etc.*".

Naming

Besides using value-laden vocabulary items, naming is used to make various claims about "political and social legitimacy and to deny a rival claim" (Baker, 2006, p. 123). This is tackled by Kassir (2016) in her digital story as she says that the way we name ourselves and others "*speaks volumes about us; the values we believe in; our fear and our courage*". To illustrate, she gives examples of naming everyone who wears Hijab as a "*raghead*" or everyone with white skin as "*a racist cracker*", or everyone with black skin as "*a fatherless nigger*". This is highly significant when it comes to the news coverage about Syrian refugees. They are named "*migrants*" in the news coverage because "*deporting migrants*" sounds more acceptable than "*deporting refugees*". According to the UN definition of refugees, they are people who were forced to leave their own country because of political turmoil or persecution, so they do not have a choice in this regard. However, "migrants" are people who voluntarily leave their country to pursue economic gains. As such naming "*Syrian refugees*" as "*migrants*" deprives them of their political legitimacy.

Pronouns

Pronouns are employed skillfully in the analyzed digital stories as a tool of "inclusion" and "exclusion". As indicated by Fairclough (1989) writers tend to create a kind of contrast between 'us' and 'them' and this also applies to digital storytellers. The pronoun "we" is used to refer to the shared identity of Muslims and to establish solidarity within the "in-group". Here are some examples; "*we were not just mourners, but we were suspects as well; we became a community of vulnerable spirits and bundles of passion, and we thrived on a global scale; we're a vital organ; I want you to know that we stand by you*". The pronoun "we" is also used to show how powerful Muslim women emerged. Consider the following examples: "*we were able to provide an alternative narrative which promoted the rights of women, we weren't holding hands or a medium, we were part of decision making, we were information sharing, we were crucial*". The possessive pronoun "*our*" is used to establish shared identity between Muslims and non-Muslim Americans and to stress that the USA is the country of both groups. Here are some examples: "*those people who attacked our country, how does consuming fear 24 hours a day affect the health of our democracy, the health of our free thought? the toxic air of fear is harming us all, it was about what kind of America we wanted to leave for our kids*".

On the other hand, the use of the pronoun 'they' stresses differentiation and enhances the discourse of 'othering'. For example, "*I want you to know that not all Americans believe what these buffoons are saying, when are we going to get rid of them?*" This substantiates Baker's (2006) view regarding the "positioning of participants" in narratives. She believes that participants can be repositioned through the linguistic management of time, space, deixis, dialect, register, and different means of self and other identification (i.e. here/there, they/us) (p. 132).

Furthermore, pronouns are used to show how powerful Muslim women became. The pronoun "I" is used more than once in the analyzed data to show how assertive the storytellers are. Consider the following examples: "*I wanted and needed for that change to be permanent; I focused on the economic and political empowerment of women; I used verses from the Quran and sayings of the Prophet, Hadiths, his sayings; I am the voice that explains my religion; I impulsively put on the hijab, determined to deal with my identity crisis*".

Sentence Types

Sentence types used by the storytellers are also considered a significant aspect to be investigated. The storytellers used rhetorical questions to create a kind of dialogue with their audience and encourage them to think about the ideas they are discussing. As pointed out by Areni (2003), rhetorical questions are used to grab the attention of the audience and motivate them to think about the idea offered by the storyteller. Consider the following examples: "*What will you choose? What will you choose at this time of fear and bigotry? Will you play it safe? Or will you join those who say we are better than that? And why, if we are equal in the eyes of God, are we not equal in the eyes of men?*". Moreover, the imperative is also used by Mogahed (2016) when she says, "*Let me tell you who I am*". Using the imperative shows how powerful the speaker is and subscribes to the narrative of "reframing Muslim women identity".

Using Statistics

At the verbal level, the use of statistics is also employed in the digital stories under analysis to show how objective the storytellers are. When citing statistics, the storytellers adopt a scientific approach to prove that what is said is mere facts that are known to everyone. Here are some examples; "*90% of ISIS victims are Muslims, all Muslim leaders around the world are against ISIS; and the latest hit list issued by ISIS had many Muslims leaders among them; One study found that 80 percent of news coverage about Islam and Muslims is negative; Studies show that Americans say that most don't know a Muslim; Studies show that during breaking news coverage, the first story is the one that sticks, even if it isn't true; one study showed that when subjects were exposed to news stories that were negative about Muslims, they became more accepting of military attacks on Muslim countries many people have never met a Muslim*

woman and even if they did many have misconceptions about us".

To sum up, the above discussion demonstrates that the verbal mode has contributed to refuting "public narratives" and creating "counter narratives" through the use of value-laden lexical items, names, pronouns, sentence types, rhetorical questions, pronouns, and statistics.

The analysis conducted in present study aligns with the findings of Johnson (2017) regarding post 9/11 narrative hegemony as well as Hass (2020) ideas regarding the "visibility" and "otherness" of Muslim women post 9/11. It also conforms with Ryan (2011) findings regarding the resistance of negative stereotypes and "stigmatization" of Muslim women. Just like Saad (2015) and Selod (2015), the present study sheds light on the online narratives of Muslim women and the racialization of Muslims in post 9/11 era. As such, the present study contributes to the literature on narrative resistance and "counter narratives" that resist the stereotypes of Muslim women and highlights the various non-verbal and verbal strategies used to support these "counter narratives.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present study has investigated dominant "public narratives" about Muslim women as well as "counter-narratives" circulated using digital storytelling. These "counter narratives" resist "dominant narratives" and create a new "master narrative" that empowers Muslim women and allows them to own their "narrative". In their digital stories, Muslim women employed various strategies that were examined using an eclectic framework that drew on narrative theory and MDA. Several strategies were used to gain empathy and support such as the use of photos, colors, symbols, videos as well as attire and facial expressions. MDA showed that digital storytellers employed both verbal and non-verbal modes to promote their "counter narratives". These "counter narratives" gained legitimacy and support as evident in the number of views of the videos on YouTube. As such, the present study has proved that the digital media paved the way for "unheard voices of Muslim women" to tell their own narratives. It showed how "counter-narratives" by Muslim women are circulated to resist the "narrative hegemony" and create a new "master narrative" where justice and tolerance can prevail. To achieve this aspired goal, the study calls for launching an international campaign for introducing the real narratives of Muslim women. The study recommends launching a digital storytelling center where Muslim women all over the world can share their own "narratives". As such digital storytelling is our hope for a just future where no prejudice or discrimination can be found!

Since digital storytelling is a powerful technological tool, it can be used in raising the awareness regarding key issues. Studies can be conducted on the strategies of persuasion used and the impact of such digital stories on people's perception. Moreover, future studies may deal with translation of digital stories from Arabic into English or vice versa as a means of intercultural communication.

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