

Women as Reflected in Egyptian TV Commercials

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Abstract

In the Arab countries, many studies have tackled the image of women in different media platforms, like in drama, movies, literature, and in theatre; however, very few studies have focused on the image of women in advertisements whether in electronic or in print media. In Egypt, representation of women in TV commercials has received little attention. Since advertising is considered a mirror for the society, and a platform that reflects real life, it is essential, therefore, to study the image of women in Egyptian TV commercials. In light of the Feminist Theory which is concerned with females and their suppression, this study aims at examining the representation of women in Egyptian TV commercials. The study employs the qualitative research methods of qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews to examine, on 386 Egyptian TV commercials, how the Egyptian women were portrayed in terms of contexts (e.g. rural or urban), occupations, ages, physical appearances, life styles, social roles, social values, and social stratifications. In addition, some technical features of the advert like the type of appeal(s) used, and the visual technique were explored. Results have shown that Egyptian women have not been fairly represented in the advertisements.

Keywords: Stereotyping, Women, Feminist Theory, TV Commercials, Egyptian Advertisements

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Introduction

Mass media and its effects are effective and veritable instrument for communication and spread of data. The mass media – print and electronic apply significant impact in present day social orders. The electronic, especially, the TV is one medium of the mass media with extensive impacts. The components of sight, sound, and action make TV an influential medium of mass media. This influence pertains to the way that TV unlike other mass media joins the components of picture, content, and sound. As a result of the influence of pictures and sound, it has the capacity to duplicate reality as well as to convince its viewers since its contents are seen. Hence, it is considered a viable method for advertising or what is delegated TV commercials, particularly in developing nations because of the high rates of illiteracy.

Advertising does not live in a vacuum but rather is a basic component of societal and social frameworks in which they exist. The formation of advertising has fortified together pictures of people and items and has appropriated and changed a huge scope of images and thoughts. Acting as a "twisted mirror", advertising additionally shows and mirrors certain social propensities, for example, mentalities, practices and qualities, strengthening certain ways of life and theories of the group that help in promoting the product/service or idea.

Aim and Significance of the Study

The ways that audiences comprehend and make sense of the social world around them are greatly influenced and shaped by the media representations (Lavie-Dinur & Karniel, 2013). In deed it is clear to highlight that in the context of the TV advertisements, females are always framed in stereotypical mode. They are mostly represented as housewives; they depend on men, as sex object, subordinate roles, and more likely to be set in the domestic sphere (Chuku et al. 2014, Debbagh 2012).

Working within the framework of feminist theories, this study employs analysis discourse to examine the cultural values, symbols and messages conveyed in a population census of advertisements presented in Egyptian TV of year 2016, in which women featured prominently in order to explore the women's representation in Egyptian TV commercials; and see how femininity is represented through modes of sexual deference, sensuality, mothering, housewifery, cleanliness, compassion, females' attachment to nature, nurturing and family, responsibilities and patriarchy in advertisements.

Theoretical Framework

The Feminist Theory:

Ideas of importance to women can be found in classical social theory (in Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel), but the issue of gender as a variable in the analyses of social phenomena came into its own with the advent of the contemporary women's movement (Farganis, 2014).

Feminism draws on the work of early sociological and psychological theorists, most particularly Marx, Engels, and Freud.

The Marxist feminists, (as Clare Burton and Nancy Hartsock), argues that it is not the biological differences that determine the status of women, but the economic system of ownership and private property. Those women of the bourgeois or working class are more likely to be hired than men to serve the capitalist system, because they are hired cheaper than the male counterparts. The liberal feminists (as Sylvia Hewlett and Cynthia Fuchs Epstein), however, believe that sexism is the fundamental determinant that causes inequality between men and women. It is the biological differences that force women to play the emotional, sexual, and household servant role, and that in turn leads to have a depressed, dependent, and mindless bodies. Moving to the radical feminists (as Mary Daly and Catherine Mackinnon) who argue that the social institutions are the main tools for the oppression of women and domination of men. It is the patriarchy system that teaches the men how to dominate, and women how to subdue themselves (Farganis, 2014).

There are a broad range of feminist theories with different perspectives that creates tension among them. Therefore, it is preferred to use plurals theories and a focus on the theorizing process. Linda Gordon (1979, p. 107) in Osmond and Throne (2009) proposed a definition to start with. Gordon (1979) wrote, feminist theory is "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it." Her definition ties three themes together which are: a focus on women and their own experiences; highlighting that in certain social situations women are suppressed or subordinated; and assurance that this unfair subordination will put to an end. These themes have produced a fourth crucial theme which is the attention to gender and relations of gender as basic to all aspects of social life, including not only women but also that of men (Osmond & Thorne 2009).

The Feminist theory is related with females' disparity and subordination (Trier-Bieniek, 2015). It is a wide term that depicts the utilization of feminist ideas and thoughts to a scope of specialties and fields. Fields as assorted as biology, anthropology, geography, economics, history, literary criticism, sociology, education, theology, and the philosophy of science all have related feminist hypotheses and have been inspected by feminist scholars (SenGupta, Seigart, & Brisolara, 2014).

All feminist theories have been involved in different ways and through different means with setting up the 'subject-position' of females. To state that a female is a human is to unravel her from the hazardous connection to objectification, partiality and social norms and it is, in particular, to set up her on an equivalent balance with "men" and all that this subject-position gives (Rich, 2006). American critical feminist researchers contend that an analytical viewpoint in sexism will show not just that females in the media are sub-par compared to men, but also the constrained and disparaging representation of females are basically connected to the functioning of the capitalist system. In addition, the images and portrayals approach endeavored to answer the inquiries: what sorts of representations of females are there in the media and what do they uncover about females' position in the culture; whose portrayals are they and whom do they benefit; what are the results of those representations; and, how do these representations come to have meaning? (Baran, Davis, Striby, 2014).

This theory is used for the purpose this research to find out the way women are depicted in the Egyptian TV commercials, thus uncover whether they are subordinated, marginalized, oppressed and other assumptions underlay by the theory.

Review of Literature

On reviewing the literature of the topic under examination, it has been found that many studies were done in the point under research, however, most of these studies were not conducted on the Arab media. Only limited number of studies were done on that area. Few studies examining the image of females in advertisements have been conducted in Egypt; however, many studies have tackled such issue on the international level. Studies have included countries such as the USA, France, Spain, China, Pakistan, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, India, etc.

Most of the studies have analyzed specific months in the year (maximum three months), and none has analyzed long periods. At the same time, some studies have replicated previous ones to compare and see whether the image has changed overtime or still the same.

In a meta-analysis of advertising content studies, it was indicated by Ahernethy and Franke (1996) as quoted in Al-Olayan and Karande (2000) that the studies that explore the image of females in the advertisements involving the United States dominates the literature, in which 40 out of 59 studies analyzed dealt with United States media not others. In reviewing the literature, they noted that "much less is known about advertising information in other countries. For example, no study has examined the advertising information in any African nation, any part of the Middle East other than Saudi Arabia, or any of the 'economies in transition' associated with the former USSR."

It has also been found that the images of women constructed by the media change over time as they depend on the specificities of each particular country (Dabbagh, 2012).

Among the studies aimed at exploring the image of women in TV commercials is the one by Chakiry (2014) who conducted a study in Morocco to compare the image of women in American and Moroccan TV advertisements. The study was intended to examine the themes and contexts in which the woman appeared through a comparison of different products' advertisements in different decades. The products' advertisements that were analyzed are: *Tide*, *Mr. Proper*, and *Lesieur*. In these advertisements, the researcher analyzed the image of women and examined whether the image has changed over time or not in relation to theme and the context. Another set of advertisements were analyzed to see the association of women to body and sexuality. The analyzed products' advertisements were: *Dove*, *Sunsilk*, *BB Garnier Cream*, and *Veet*. This study provided a sort of comparison not just across cultures but also across time in which the researcher compared the image of females in recent and old advertisements as well. The study was based on a small sample and lacked supportive research methodology like intensive interviews or quantitative content analysis. Also Ullah and Khan (2014) conducted a study on a sample of Pakistani television advertisements featuring women which were qualitatively analyzed. The researchers found that women were generally portrayed as sex objects. They were just objects of desire, leisure, sex, rather than people with affection. In this study, the researchers chose the sample from four private Pakistani TV channels and one public channel. They selected photographs and verbal messages on which they apply the critical discourse analysis (qualitative method). This study was limited to identifying

the physical features of women used in TV commercials, who was actually decorative models. The study did not focus on women's roles in the advertisements. The study also employed only qualitative method for examining image of women on a limited number of photographs and verbal messages. While other studies employed quantitative analysis like the study by Furnham, Babitzkow, & Ugucioni (2000), which was carried out on gender stereotyping in TV advertisements in French and Danish television. The study employed the quantitative method of content analysis, in which 165 French TV advertisements, and 151 Danish TV advertisements were analyzed based on an established coding categories. The sample was chosen from the periods of October 1995 in France and November 1995 in Denmark. The statistical analyses were carried out separately and then compared to each other. Results have shown that in French advertisements there were more stereotypical representation for gender than in Danish TV advertisements. This study is very significant in which it is based on two separate studies that were carried out on their own, and then their results were compared. The researchers employed the quantitative method of content analysis which contributed to reliable results based on statistical evidence; However, the timeframe from which the sample was selected is too small as it was only one month in one year. Also Furnham, Pallangyo, & Gunter (2001) examined the representation of men and women in a sample of Zimbabwean TV commercials, the sample analyzed included 110 advertisements to figure out the gender of the central figure, age, mode of presentation, product types, credibility basis, location, role, location, reward type, argument, background, and end comment. The sample examined was taken from a 38-day period in November-December 1999 from the sole commercial television channel in Zimbabwe (ZBC) and other 92 advertisements were taken from three advertising agencies in Zimbabwe. The study mainly aims at determining whether men and women were portrayed differently in advertisements. Results have shown that in all of the coding categories, there are significant gender differences, with exception in the favored gender of the central figure. Men were appeared as specialists, laborers or experts, and also definitive and proficient about functional explanations behind purchasing an item. Females, on the other hand, were portrayed as the customers of items, the main decision maker of consuming products buying processes, and as involving parts characterized essentially in connection to other individuals (e.g., spouse. mother), and being more concerned about the social centrality of buying a product or a service. This study employed the same coding categories used in the previous study. It is also apparent from the sample that the timeframe from which the sample is selected is too small to reveal consistent stereotypical image in depiction. A study focusing on the Arab countries was conducted by Kalliny, Dagher, Minor, & De Los Santos (2008) to compare the cultural differences through the depiction of women in TV advertisements. The study compared 721 TV commercials from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates against each other, and also compared them to United States of America. From 12 hours of programming, TV commercials were videotaped from each country. The variables used were: gender use, advertising purpose, gender modesty, information content, the use of comparative appeal, and price information. Results showed no significant difference regarding the depiction of women whether in the Arab countries or the USA; however, they tend to be more conservative in their dress in the Arab countries than in USA. The researchers in this study chose the sample from channels that are broadcasted nationwide to make sure it reaches as much as possible from the public; however, they missed an important aspect which is the advertising sponsor. The chosen Lebanese channel (LBC) has a Saudi Arabian

advertising sponsor, thus, the advertisements are all Saudi Arabian and not Lebanese. Therefore, the sample from the Lebanese's channel is not valid or reliable because it does not represent the Lebanese culture. Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley (1988) replicated a study conducted in 1972 in USA. Content analysis was done on 1480 TV commercial to determine the manner in women were portrayed in TV advertisements to examine whether a change has undergone or not. Results have shown that women found to be portrayed in a wider range of occupations and appeared in a setting outside home than in 1972. Other aspects remain the same as the product type, the voice-over, and age categories. This study examined a big sample, however, the timeframe was too small (from October 6, 1986 to October 24, 1986), which a very short period.

While the above studies focused on the representations of women through the analysis of TV advertisements, other studies focused on the image of women in print advertisements.

One of these studies done by Al-Olayan, & Karande (2000) intended to compare the portrayal of men and women, the use of comparative advertising, the extent of information content, and other variables in print advertisements in USA and the Arab world. The researchers content analyzed 1064 from Egyptian, Lebanese, and United Arab Emirates, as well as Pan-Arabic general interest, family, and women's magazines, together with 540 advertisements from three US general, family, and women interest's magazines. Results revealed that in Arabic advertisements, people are less depicted than in US advertisements. Women Arabic advertisements are always associated to the products that relate to their presence; such as, cosmetics, beauty products, or household products. The models in the advertisements always wear long dresses covering their bodies. Although the number of advertisements analyzed is big, the period which the study covers is too short (three-month time period). Another study conducted by Alozie (2005) in Nigeria aimed to configure the portrayal of the African women in advertising of Nigerian print media from 1998 through 2000 in which women played dominant roles through means of rhetorical analysis. The researchers analyzed the available sample included in five newspapers which constituted 93 advertisements. Results showed that the Nigerian mass media advertisements used to promote household products without resorting to the use of gender and sex stereotypes, while in other business-oriented advertisements, females were presented in professional setting with some stereotypical hints.

Research Questions:

This paper intends to answer the following question:

- How are women represented in Egyptian TV commercials?
- How does the representation of women in Egypt differ in subcultures (rural vs. urban)?
- Does the representation of females in TV commercials in Egypt reflect a true image of the Egyptian women?
- What are the social roles of the females as appearing in the TV commercials?
- What are the occupations of females as appearing in the TV commercials?
- What are the social values of females as appearing in the TV commercials?
- What are the appeals that are mostly used in the commercials?

- What are the visual techniques that are mostly used in the commercials?

Study Population:

The study population is the Egyptian TV commercials of year 2016 of both governmental and private channels, which feature adult females prominently which are 386 ads, while advertisements of public service or charities are excluded. This study analyzes a census population of the TV commercials that meet the determined criteria.

Research Methodology:

Qualitative research methods are articulated on a philosophical view point that can be considered as “interpretivist” which is interested about how the social world around us is interpreted, experiences, depicted, or created. Some of the qualitative methods explore these elements in different contexts such as language, text, social implications, or processes. Others focus on the whole components of complex social world in which we exist (Mason, 2002).

This study employs two qualitative research methods, which are qualitative content analysis and intensive interviews. To start with the qualitative content analysis, it is one of various research techniques used to analyze content information. This Content information may be in verbal, print, or electronic shape and may have been gotten from account reactions, open-finished study questions, interviews, center gatherings, perceptions, or print media, for example, articles, books, or manuals. Qualitative content analysis goes past only checking words to inspecting dialect intensively with the end goal of arranging a lot of content into an effective number of classifications that speak to comparable implications. These classifications can speak to either express similarity or surmised correspondence. The objective of content analysis is "to give information and comprehension of the wonder under investigation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)."

In the methodology, qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the image in which Egyptian females were portrayed.

The second method of research used by the researcher is the intensive interviews or in-depth interviews. It can be defined as a one-to-one interview in which the interviewer goes to the interviewee's (respondent) place or the interviewer invites the respondent to a field service location or research office. It can be either structured interview in which standard questions are asked in a preset order, or unstructured interview in which general questions are asked that make interviewers free to determine what further questions to ask to obtain the required information (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). In this research, the researcher conducted unstructured interviews with scholars and experts in the field of advertising in Egypt to get an overview about the image of women in advertising and whether the frames in which women are portrayed in TV advertising are equal to reality and reflect the real society or not. The interviewees included university professors in the fields of advertising, marketing, journalism, broadcasting, and feminist studies; and advertising experts.

Results and Discussion

In this part, the most significant results are presented. On analyzing 386 Egyptian TV commercial of the year 2016 in both governmental and private channels, it has been found that Egyptian women in advertisements are abused and misrepresented.

1. Gender Domination

Women are greatly objectified; they are set as decorative objects/models in the background, or surrounding the man silently which underestimate the actual role of women in the Egyptian society.



Figure 1: Tiger Chips ad



Figure 2: Dabur Vatika Gel ad

The above shots of ads show how the ladies are set behind men just for decoration. The main character in the ad is the man while the women are just in the background standing or dancing silently.

Moreover, they are positioned as subordinates to men in which men are always superior to women. This reflects the concept of patriarchal society that still predominant in the Egyptian society despite the fact that Egypt has gone tremendous transformations in women's right and they took a proper presentation in the constitution, the Egyptian parliament, and the society at large.



Figure 3: Fern Margraine ad

The above shot of ad shows how men are sitting at the table waiting for the ladies to serve the food. The men are sitting down while the women are standing which reinforce the concept of patriarchal society.

Women are displayed as withdrawn from active participation in the social scene and therefore dependent on others. This contradicts the actual Egyptian women in real life, because the provide for is not limited to men as in Egypt 32% of Egyptian families are fended for by females. And according to the latest labor force statistics, females occupies 23.2% of the labor force in the formal sector and 70% in the informal sector (Wikipedia, n.d). Thus, the portrayal of women dependency on the man is not true. That is why the Egyptian women advertising need to emphasize more on changing the misconception related to women withdrawal from active participation in the social scene.



Figure 4: Nestle fruit yoghurt ad



Figure 5: La Nouva Vista Compound ad

The shots above show how the ladies are inactive and isolating themselves from the active life.

Females appear to be presented in domestic contexts. Most of the ads present the female in the position of a housewife. According to Tarek Nour (2017), one of the pioneers in the field of advertising in Egypt, these portrayals are derived from our Egyptian culture. It is embedded in our traditions that women always exist domestically as housewives while the man is the one who works.

But it can never be disregarded that recently, Egyptian women are taking active part in the development of the society. The ads ignore that females in Egypt are now taking over several high positions. For example, there are three female ministers, 89 females in the Egyptian parliament, and others in the judiciary, mayors, sheikhs and Ma'Zoun (the one who formulates marriage contracts for Muslims).

In addition, most of the voiceover of the ads were presented by men which reinforce the subordination of females. This actually coincides with previous studies who indicated that the male voiceover is used more than female's voiceover (Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Whipple and Courtney 1980; Gilly, 1988; Furnham and Voli, 1989; Lovdal, 1998; Mwangi, 1996). This consistency between Egypt and other countries in the use of the male voiceovers indicates that advertisers seem to believe that male voice is more credible, authoritative, and convincible than the females'.

Among the social values associated with the female are that they care about their family. The mother who always seeks to please her husband and kids. This is a true

reflection as mothers in the Egyptian society are emotionally involved with their family members and consider it as the most important priority in their life.

Most of ads depict the Egyptian women in western outfit even the veiled ones. I totally agree that the image of Egyptian women in most of the TV ads reflect the western outlook of Egyptian females. This is true as most of the females regardless of their social stratification, they imitate the western cultures regarding their outfits.

Very few number of females in the ads were presented veiled, although the veiled females in Egypt is much more than unveiled especially in the popular areas in Egypt and the predominant rural areas.



Figure 6: Eva B-White facial scrub ad

The above shot shows how the ladies are all dressed in modern outfits even the veiled lady is dressed in modern as well.

Mostly females of the commercials were middle-age adults, with very few number appears old. This can be reasonable because middle-age adults are the actual market segment that is the active part of the household. El-Hadidi (2017) believe that the middle-aged adults are mostly the target market of the different products and services, because they are the ones who became independent from their parents', and thus they are decision-makers in their new homes.

2. *Subcultures*

The Egyptian subcultures such as those of upper Egypt, the rural areas, the Bedouins, and the Nubians were not reflected in the majority of the ads. This is a very important and crucial point that the Egyptian TV women ads should reflect the different subcultures that exist in the Egyptian community. Thus most of the contexts presented are urban whether domestic or out-of-door. Lydia Ghobrial (2017), an advertising expert, contends that the subcultures are rarely used in case of some detergents that are targeting those with lower income. A journalism professor, Prof. Nagwa Kamel (2017), is completely against the focus on subcultures which is the main cause of what happened and still happening in other countries such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, in which there is a focus on minorities that creates the division of the nations. They are all Egyptian and ads must talk to Egyptians all as one identity not different identities. The concentration on these minorities creates social division. Still in Egypt we do not have ethnicity. If we do that, we will create chaos. And that will be considered destructive media. These divisions may result due to the presentation of minorities as different identities, which cultivates hatred towards the majority, and the consequences may range from social unrest to civil wars and/or nations' division.

Most of families depicted in the ads were from middle/upper and upper social classes, while those of lower/labor social classes were ignored. This justifies why some French or English words were used with the Arabic ones. Moreover, as intended by Kamel (2017), the focus on the luxurious products for high standard lifestyles, while presenting the worker class only in the cause-related campaigns asking people to donate, generate in return emotions of frustration among these strata. The ads now create frustration among the lower/labor classes. For example, in the ads presented in Ramadan, most of the them are about residency compounds and villas or cause-related ads aiming at collecting donations, despite that not all Egyptians are millionaires nor are they beggars. Previously, there were ads for investment certificates, or detergents that suit and benefit different strata of the society. But nowadays ads bring about both class and social discrimination. It is very confusing, thus, if anyone views those ads asking people to donate and at the same time other ads featuring luxurious villas and compounds worth four million Egyptian Pounds and more. On the other hand, other university professors in the fields of broadcasting and advertising, Prof. Mona El-Hadidi (2017) and Prof. Safwat El-Alem (2107), contended the contrary; they believe that the field of advertising is a fancy world that aspire people, and make them try to reach that dreamy home, for example, in the future.



Figure 7: Dettol cleaner ad

The shot of ad above shows the social stratification that dominates the Egyptian TV commercials which is the middle/upper social class.

3. *Technical Features*

Humor appeal is the appeal that was mostly used in the ads. That can be presumed to the humorous nature of the Egyptian people. In addition, Kamel (2017) opinion articulates around the idea that the use of the humor appeal is something needed nowadays due to the bad economic situation that leave people in a state of depression. Also female celebrities were largely used in ads of different products and services. This is because the fact that Egyptian audience admire and like to imitate the famous celebrities. In general, celebrity endorsement is the most dominant visual technique used worldwide and in Egypt as well. For many people, celebrities whether athletes, actors, actresses, anchors...etc. are considered role models, thus using them in association to different products/services helps to a great extent in encouraging and influencing the buyer decision making process.



Figure 8: Vodafone ad



Figure 9: Dettol soap ad

The above ad shots present the how different celebrities are used, including actresses, athletes, anchors, and others. In figure 8, for example, the ad used a famous Egyptian actress ‘Laila Elwy’ along with a famous Egyptian actor ‘Ahmed El-Sakka’, while in figure 9, the ad features a famous TV presenter and actress as well. According to Ghobrial (2017), celebrities are used a lot although they are not connecting to the brand, but still it depends on the consumer and the brand. For building equity or awareness, they can be used. But with other objectives the marketer does not have to use them. Pepsi and Vodafone, for example, are using all celebrities in the world but because they are trying to build equity. They are trying to entertain the consumer. Other ads are done with new faces and zero celebrities and you find them very successful and their sales can reflect that.

Conclusion

The study analyzed a number of 386 TV commercials in which females featured mainly. Females are not fairly represented in the advertisements. It appears that females dominate the commercial sector; however, they were positioned superficially. Women are objectified, and presented for the desire of patriarchy.

Ghobrial (2017) contended that there is a stereotypical representation for women not just in TV ads but across the globe, because they are categorized; you have the housewife, the educated career women and the blonde hair head and you have a mix of all. And it probably depends on the genre like in humor you find some treats that come and can make fun of like gossiping, or petulant. So you exaggerate certain characteristics about the female just to make your message get across. And at the same time you can see in the ‘Melody’ channels campaigns, different stereotypes for women were presented. The one who is beautiful, gorgeous and objectified, and the smart one. It is not the consumer who wants the stereotypes, it is the creative task is to reach the audience without using stereotypes because when you find the insight, it should be universal. When you try to reach the people emotionally it should be

something that everybody can share; a man or a woman, Egyptian or not, so when we execute ideas we have to make sure it does not follow the stereotype pit.

It important to note that the issue of television representations of gender whether advertisements, drama, movies, or programs is crucial, partly due to the fact that TV viewing cultivates certain images regarding different groups of the society, and holding strong stereotypes regardless the fact that there might or not be a direct causal relationship.

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