



Theories of Media Influence and Their Impact on Women

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Introduction

The media, in all its forms visual, auditory, and written serves as an open platform for transmitting diverse ideological messages aimed at shaping a new society that is alien to the principles of religion, customs, and sound human nature. The influence of social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) on various segments of society, particularly women, cannot be overlooked.

In this research paper, I seek to draw attention to some media influence theories and how their methods are used to reshape the influence of the “new woman” according to the agendas of globalization and Westernization.

Keywords – influence, influence , overlooked.,

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Research Problem

The modern technological developments of the mid-1990s created a vast, interconnected world, facilitating the exchange of opinions and ideas. This era gave rise to material stimuli that carry the essence of Western civilizations, significantly affecting various segments of Arab societies. As a result, a new type of woman emerged one shaped by the media, disconnected from her religious principles, innate nature, and the customs and values of her society.

Research Objectives

This research aims to link media stimuli with perception and explore how these factors shape the behaviors and values of women. The paper focuses on the messages directed at women through social media, which aim to create a targeted female model in line with predefined and desired objectives. The media, in all its forms, harmonizes to shape this crafted model.

Importance of the Research

- Uncover the orientations of influence theories in communication media.
- Draw attention to the roles of the media in luring women with material temptations and sexual stimuli, diverting them from their vital and familial issues.
- Monitor the level of influence on women, which has produced disturbed behavioral characteristics within Arab societies, leading women to shift from being active agents to reactive entities, from influencers to the influenced and alienated.

The question that arises is: Do media indeed have a similar influence on everyone, or does their impact vary? How did this approach determine the strength of the influence, and can the effect on the recipient be measured and observed?

I would like to point out here that the concept of a "trend" is a subtle attempt to measure and observe collective influence, as comments on a particular event are, in themselves, a measurement of society's orientation, perspective, and opinion.

b. The Limited Influence Theory

The pioneer of this theory is Paul Lazarsfeld. This theory is based on the idea that media influence is limited when the processes of education and learning are involved, as these processes will be the focal point of individual differences in influence. This theory also emphasizes that similar social groups, being characterized by similar attributes, respond similarly. Therefore, social groups that are close in financial status and social conditions exhibit similar responses (Hegab, 2004).

c. The Long-Term Influence Theory (Cultivation Theory)

This theory was formulated by George Gerbner and his colleagues. It attempts to reconsider the concept of influence, moving away from the notions of immediacy and directness. Influence, in this sense, may be temporary and may not last long. Hence, this theory focuses on the cultivation of values and behavioral models, considering the media as a source of knowledge that interacts with individuals to shape long-term attitudes. An astute observer of this theory can see its success in the group that is the subject of cultivation and formation children or those who lack other knowledge sources or alternatives through which they can analyze the content and messages of the media with critical tools rooted in religious principles.

The Second Section: How Does Influence Occur?

Key Methods of Influencing:

a. Influence through Repetition

Media outlets focus on delivering similar messages and intensify the repetition process through advertisements, cinema, and other mediums regarding specific topics or figures. This repeated exposure causes the mind to become accustomed to these messages until they become familiar and acceptable.

b. Alignment of Media Institutions in Shaping Direction

Media institutions agree on a unified strategy to create influence through mutual alignment among their organizations, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of the influence process.

The Third Section: The Effects of Influence on Women

1. Focus on External Appearance and Body Image

Social media platforms broadcast repetitive and varied messages concerning body image and the ideal, flawless appearance. These messages have successfully shaped women's cognitive plans, focusing their thoughts on comparing themselves to what is portrayed on social media.

This intentional focus on image and appearance has shifted women's priorities, making physical concerns take precedence over moral and behavioral aspects and the appreciation of scientific and religious role models. Consequently, self-esteem is increasingly tied to satisfaction with one's appearance.

Thus, body image is linked to self-esteem. A person lives as an integrated unit, with self-perception and self-evaluation being connected to body image assessment, whether positive or negative (Eid Jalala, A., & Al-Anzi, A. S. (2020)). Negative evaluations can lead to stress, anxiety, and a lack of self-confidence among women.

2. Social Comparisons

Women's emulation of celebrities, models, and entertainers, combined with extensive browsing of social media, affects their self-esteem and desire to conform to collective tastes. Women's focus has shifted to mimicking these celebrities, leading to a reported 31% increase in cosmetic surgery due to the desire to appear better on social media profiles, **(Faisal, 2019)**.

3. Media Influence and Feminist Terminology

One notable observation from open media reflection and global communication revolution is the emergence of new terms seeking a place in the minds of Muslim women. A term represents a concept, and concepts are linked to perception. If women accept these new terms without filtering or analysis, they may find themselves adopting ideas that contradict their identity and religious principles. Terms such as patriarchy, gender, gender-based discrimination, sexual violence, harassment, and women's empowerment are foreign and recurring, with media attempting to embed their intended meanings and concepts from feminist movements that contradict religious texts. This conceptual sorting has serious implications for women's behavior and attitudes and future family dynamics.

4. Media Exploitation of Women's Bodies

Media influence attempts to reshape stereotypical physical concepts about women. Media that promotes women's bodies as marketing tools and focuses on sexual arousal and suggestiveness as a means of persuasion sends a message that women's importance revolves around their bodies rather than their intellect and thoughts. Many young women are drawn to such roles.

These stereotypical advertisements focus on sex, money, and beauty, emphasizing fleeting material values while dismissing eternal spiritual values. This reveals the calculated advertising strategy that goes beyond promoting products and strives to penetrate cognitive, value-based, and cultural systems of nations, **(Emmara, 2015)**.

The Fourth Section: The Identity of the Muslim Woman Amidst Theories of Influence

It is clear from the previous discussion that the religious and cultural identity of Muslim women has been surrounded by numerous ideological messages, which have triggered many controversial conflicts among them. These messages, infused with globalized terms, have led women to repeat phrases such as modernity, isolation, openness, and freedom. Meanwhile, media, influenced by modernist currents, have crafted concepts and terms according to their intended goals.

Since a significant number of women do not analyze media messages through other knowledge mediums, such as interpretations, Hadith, and jurisprudence, media thus shapes their knowledge, ideas, and behaviors, penetrating their identity and values. This is a matter of significant concern.

A. Definition of Cultural and Religious Identity

The term "cultural and religious identity" consists of various components. To understand this concept accurately, we need to define its constituent parts.

In language, identity refers to self, origin, belonging, and reference. It derives from the term "is," which denotes the essence or true nature of something.

In terminology, identity is defined as the absolute reality encompassing truths; it is a stable attribute or essence that does not change, is not influenced, and does not allow other identities to replace or oppose it. Identity remains intact as long as the self is present and alive. These characteristics distinguish nations from one another and express their personality, civilization, and existence, **(Al-Sahmarani, 2002)**.

Cultural identity, therefore, encompasses the original, noble, and intrinsic principles that emerge from individuals or peoples. These principles represent the personal, spiritual, and material aspects of humanity, interacting to affirm the identity or character of an individual, community, or nation, such that every individual feels a sense of belonging to a specific community that distinguishes them from other societies, **(Zaghw, 2010)**.

The media system's role involves planting intellectual and doctrinal seeds that contradict and oppose the constants of religious identity in Muslim women, aiming to produce a generation devoid of uniqueness—alienated, detached, and disconnected from their religion and culture. This partial dissolution is currently targeted as it represents the beginning of cultural, religious, and civilizational eradication.

The Fifth Section: The Role of Muslim Women and Institutions in Responding to Media Aggression on Identity

Muslim women must awaken from their complacency and reclaim their pioneering, advocacy, and awareness roles to protect themselves, their families, their communities, and an entire generation at risk of distortion and alienation. They should not remain mere instruments for international agendas and agreements. Instead, they should take pride in their identity, self, existence, and religious reference, as these alone ensure their integrity and salvation. Women should not be deceived by false messages of liberation and freedoms. On this front, women must diligently uphold their religious values through learning and teaching and protect their families from the dangers of globalization and Westernization.

- The role of national associations and educational institutions is crucial in preserving and reinforcing religious and national values and ensuring the proper upbringing of future generations.
- Coordination among responsible entities is essential to restore and unify the roles of educational institutions, mosques, clubs, and associations in shielding women and generations from the negative impacts of media and globalization.
- Women should consolidate efforts to build their cultural model based on religious and national constants.

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