INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF WESTERN MEDIA ON BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION AMONG YOUNG ARAB FEMALES

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Abstract— This study attempts to examine the connection between western media use and body image perception. This study assumes that the more images of the "western thin and appealing ideal body" a woman is exposed to through the western media, the more her perception of her body image is affected, going against cultural norms. A cross-sectional survey was conducted amongst 384 upper middle class educated female students in Egyptian private universities, using a consumer intercept data collection method. Quantitative data analysis software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18) was used to analyze the collected data. The results of this study reveal that the participants are exposed to substantial amounts of western media (commercials, movies, TV shows, magazines, books, music clips, social media, etc.), which has influenced their body image perception. The media is recognized as sources females turn to for information about their physical appearance. Exposure to the western media caused internalization of the thin ideal and body dissatisfaction in the Egyptian context. This study contributes to the debate on cultural determinism of perception of body image and body dissatisfaction in women concepts, which are on the rise in non-Western societies, such as the Arab region.

Index Terms— Body Image, Consumer Behavior, Mass Media, Media Influence
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I. INTRODUCTION

Western media is spreading to other nations worldwide [1]. Prior research stated that western values and outlooks are becoming dominant across much of the world due to the export of Hollywood films, TV shows, international commercials for products and services, and global news [2]. Therefore, there is concern that overseas countries, many developing, will have their own cultural values and traditions eroded and changed with western perspectives [1]. This phenomenon leaves room for researching the impact of western media on societal attitudes and behaviors towards various subject matters [3], [4].

The rapid invasion of western media leads to media imperialism - a process in which foreign culture (western culture) invades other countries through the broadcasting of media messages [3]. This phenomenon is prevalent in the Middle Eastern context [5], especially in the Egyptian Society [6]. Egypt struggles between two worlds: it has a strong nationalistic identity, which coexists with an overabundance of foreign media, allowing different cultures and social backgrounds to surface [5], [6]. Globalized media showing American and British TV shows, programs, music videos, and movies, leads Egyptians seeking out mediated messages and images that are not home-grown [7], [8].

Nowadays, rapid broadcasting of the ideal western body image has spread across the developing world [9]. The influence of western media and its imperialism, especially on the issue of physical appearance, is prevalent and empirical [1]. In developing countries, young females are also concerned with their bodies and body image discrepancy [2]. A wide range of studies has realized strong causal relationships to confirm its influence [9]. However, more cross-cultural research is needed [10], [11].

The media's depiction of female images exemplifies a standard to which women are expected to aspire [9]. Studies suggest that the comparison process is triggered automatically for women as soon as media's attractive female ideals appear [12]. However, this beauty standard is to a certain extent unrealistic and unattainable [13]. This study will examine females' perceptions of their own body image and self-image as they relate to the western media. This study is intended to show how young women in Egypt are affected by the western media's presentation of the ideal female body and the effects that ensue. According to the prior studies, there is a lack of data to show the relationship between body image perception and body dissatisfaction among Arab females [1], [10]. Thus, this research aids to add this association to the literature and fill in this academic gap.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Western ideals of thin and attractive females are widespread [9]. It seems that these ideal images are everywhere in the mass media from TV to magazines to billboards [4]. However, these images do not exist in reality - they are depictions of women that most of society cannot attain [13].

Prior studies concluded that media images of thin and attractive ideals negatively affect women's attitudes

and body satisfaction [13]. Media exposure usually causes women to feel more discontent with their body shape, developing distorted body perceptions [14]. When exposed to the media's female ideals, women begin feeling: "unhappy, shameful, guilty, depressed, and stressed, which in turn decreased their confidence in their perception of their body image. They believe themselves to be bigger, fatter, and wider than they really are" [15]. This unfavorable view of their bodies leads to decreased self-esteem [16]. Distorted body perceptions are beginning to be current and widespread with developing nations undergoing rapid social transition, including participation in a global market economy and heavy media exposure [3], [10], such as those nations in the Middle East [1].

Previously in the Arab world, thinness has been regarded as socially-undesirable [7]. Curvy and round women were preferred because it symbolized richness, fertility, and womanhood (the ideal shape for Arabic women were larger than women in western cultures) [17]. However, with the rapid westernization development and economic and socio-cultural modernization, it resulted in a clash of cultures [1]. Studies indicate that a clash between the local culture and the adopted culture causes body image disturbances among individuals [3], [10].

Research examined body image among different Arab cultures [17]. They studied university students from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, Kuwait and Algeria. They discovered that the Arab students began to develop preference towards thinness. Their research supported that the media's exposure to Westernized society can lead to the internalization of Western attitudes, concerning body shape. Additional research also showed the link between Western media and the Arabs' perception of body image [1], especially in the Egyptian context [18].

Research stated that awareness of a thin western ideal body image is becoming more accessible to non-western cultures through various media vehicles, such as television, movies, magazines, commercials, music, social media, and direct travel accessibility [19]. As this broadcasting of media messages occurs, western cultural values and attitudes spread to non-western a culture, which often results in an acceptance of some aspects of westernization [4].

It is recognized that the traditional values of Egyptian society appreciate women's fertility, idealizing motherhood [7]. Research conducted in Egypt has implied that the perceptions of body image distortion (valuing unrealistic and unattainable female images) are emerging in the Egyptian culture, with similar rates to those in western society [18]. This change in perception is based on: "the easy accessibility of western values to the Egyptian public through the media and the readiness to assimilate them" [7]. Thus, transcultural research will continue to be of value – "not perhaps with the objective of eliciting differences, but more to substantiate the impact of the social milieu and the power of the media on the development of abnormalities of behavior" [7]. This study intends to show how young women in Egypt are affected by western media's view of the ideal female body and the effects that ensue.

The objective of this study is to determine if young women's exposure to western media images of the thin and appealing ideal affects body image perception. Research identified that one of the strongest transmitters of the pressure to look like the western ideal may well be the globalized mass media [1], [4], [17]. This study hypothesized that: the more images of the "thin and appealing ideal" body a woman is exposed to through the western media; the more her perception of her body image is affected.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

This study pursues to fill the gap in the literature and examine the association between women's perceived body image and exposure to Western media in the Arab world, especially in Egypt. The quantitative research approach is applied in this study. This research is carried out using a non-experimental correlational design. Administered questionnaires are employed to collect data. The following paragraphs describe the subjects and how they were chosen, followed by a description of the instrumentation used. Further, the chosen procedures, data analysis and collection will be explained.

A. Population and Sampling

This study takes place in the Egyptian Context due to its leading and progressive role in television and media development in the Arab world, supplying numerous productions to the region [8]. Egypt was the first Arab country to launch and own a satellite, NileSat. Today, 520 TV channels (Egyptian and non-Egyptian) are broadcast on its satellites, including 100 encrypted channels, an overabundance of foreign western media, allowing different cultures, sbackgrounds, images, and mediated messages that are not homegrown to surface [6], [7], [8].

In recent years, several studies have concluded that females have a higher tendency for conforming to weight ideals that they see in the media [21]. This has been seen to be particularly prevalent amongst young female adults [22]. Thus, this study focuses on college female students specifically. Prior studies discovered that problems related to body image appear to be most pronounced in this population segment [21]. The phrase "normative discontent" was first used to describe the pervasive negative feelings that young females experience toward their bodies [23].

Studies have indicated that upper middle class educated Egyptians are those most influenced by western culture [6], [18]. Furthermore, they are most

likely to have the financial, technological and educational capabilities to consume global television [24], [25]. Thus, the western media's portrayal of thinness as a standard of female attractiveness can play a determining role in women's contentious relationship with their bodies by pressuring them to lose weight and be thin [6], [18].

The selected participants in this study are upper middle class educated students in private universities. Egyptian students at these types of universities are usually exposed to additional western influences. These private universities follow North American or European curriculum. They also provide twinning, joint degrees, franchising, and mobility arrangements between universities across western nations [26]. Thus, western exposure is relatively high [6], [18].

The consumers intercept data collection method is used to reach the respondents and to ensure the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time in order to test the hypotheses. The researchers stopped students randomly on different university campuses. The respondents who agree to participate in the study were given an administered questionnaire on the spot.

B. Instrument

This study assed media influence and perceived body image, using different scales from prior studies. The scales used were modified according to the nature of this research topic. The media influence scale examined how advertisements, magazines, movies, and television may influence people's thoughts and feelings about their physical appearance. The scale, adjusted by Quinn and Lewis (2005), contained 10 statements that evaluate the messages participants receive from the media regarding their body. Participants are required to respond using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. The statements in the scale include: I like to read magazines that feature thin icons; I like to watch shows on T.V. that feature thin celebrities and models; when I see a picture of a female model or actress, I pay attention to her body shape; I like to watch entertainment shows featuring thin celebrities; I like to browse in malls and pay attention to the latest fashions and beauty products; if I could afford it, I would like to go to fashion shows; I like to watch award shows on T.V. and admire the beauty of famous female stars; I like to watch exercise/fitness videos and shows on T.V. featuring well toned women; I like to watch movies with famous actresses; and I like to watch videos on MTV with popular music stars.

To recognize the respondents' perceptions of ideal body image and how it compares with their current body image, the study used silhouettes scale developed [27]. Illustrations of female body shapes ranging from very thin to grossly obese were shown. The respondents were asked to circle only one female silhouette that looks most like them now (current), and underline only one female silhouette that they wanted to look like (ideal).

The Body Image State Scales (BISS) was also used for this study to assess the specific features and descriptions related to the participants' body image [28]. The BISS consists of six statements related to the physical appearance a person at the particular moment in time. The scale is a 9-point, Likert-type scale, assessing the dissatisfaction/satisfaction with: body shape and size; overall physical appearance; weight; feelings of physical attractiveness; current feelings about your looks relative to how they usually feels; and evaluation of their looks relative to how the average person looks.

C. Method of Data Collection

Before the actual distribution of questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted to ensure the content and structure of the survey was efficient and suitable for distribution. The pilot test was conducted on 30 students. Once they finished answering the questions, they were asked if they had any issues of difficulty while completing the questionnaire. Their comments were taken into consideration and based on these comments the questionnaire was adjusted.

The data collection was conducted during the summer of 2016. The questionnaires were handed out on various campuses to students who wished to take part in the research, all of whom were over 18. The participants were given a brief overview of the nature and aims of the research. The participants took on average 10 minutes to complete the survey. The researcher was present near by the students during the completion of the questionnaire to answer any questions any of the participants may have had. The finished questionnaires were collected and put into a folder to ensure anonymity.

Before any student answered the questionnaire, an informed consent was sought before each student's participation in the research. The written consent form made clear to participants that they have the right to remain or withdraw from the research process; they were not forced to answer a question in a particular way; and that information shared will be treated confidentially.

D. Data Analysis

This study uses the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18 software to analyze the collected data. The researchers applied the descriptive statistics on the demographic data of respondents in order to provide a summary of the sample. The reliability analysis helps to calculate the Cronbach's alpha to ensure the reliability of the measurement scales. Finally, Pearson bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to identify the relationships between the variables.

IV. RESULTS

600 questionnaires were distributed among female college students at different private universities, out of which 384 were complete and usable for analysis (64% response rate). The first analysis conducted was the descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics was conducted to summarize the description of the respondents' personal information (Socio-demographic characteristics). Table 1 clarifies the participants' traits in this study.

Table 1: Respondents' Socio-demographic characteristics

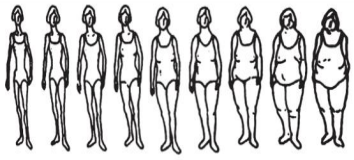
Age		Academic Year		Field of Study		City of Residence	
18 years old	8%	Year 1	22%	Business	57%	Cairo	51%
19 years old	29%	Year 2	16%	Engineering	31%	Alexandria	40%
20 years old	53%	Year 3	19%	Medicine	4%	Other	9%
21 years old	7%	Year 4	43%	Other	8%		
Above 21	3%						

Descriptive statistics was also conducted on the seven introductory questions in the survey. The first question asked whether people preferred western media products to local media products. The majority (77%) indicated that they preferred western media products. Only 23% indicated that they preferred local media products. When asked about the frequency of viewing western media (commercials, movies, TV shows, magazines, books, music clips, social media, etc.), 63.5% of the participants stated daily, 25.3% stated weekly, and 10.9% stated monthly.

The respondents were asked about their perception of their current body image. 25.2% stated that they were overweight, 37.7% stated that they were average, and 36.9% stated that they were thin. Then, the researcher asked if the participants did any dietary programs before to reduce their weight. All the participants had tried special diets to lose a couple of kilos. When participants were asked about the type of influence that affected their views on the ideal body image/self image, the majority, 48%, stated the western media, 22% stated friends, 15% stated local Arab media, 10% stated family, and 5% stated classmates. The researcher then asked what type of female body images that the western media presented and promoted. The respondents were asked to select more than one option. Correspondingly, the most selected features successively were: thinness (100%); athletic body (84%); flat stomachs (73%); full-size chest (68%), tall height (57%); curvy (48%); tanned skin (32%). The next question asked whether these features were realistic? 55.2% believed they were not realistic and 44.8% stated they were realistic.

With the use of Stunkard et al. (1983) figure rating scale, the descriptive statistics was used to analyze the participants' perceptions of their body image and body image satisfaction. In the analysis, body size satisfaction variable was created for each participant by subtracting the number of the figure selected as the ideal body size from the number of the figure selected as the self-body size. The researcher created three categories (dummy variables) to group the participants' responses related to body size satisfaction: smaller than preferred (self − ideal < 1), satisfied (self = ideal), and larger than preferred (self − ideal >/= 1). Based on the analysis, 122% participants were satisfied with their body image and the remaining 262% were not. From those who were dissatisfied, 26% believed that they were smaller than the preferred ideal body size and 136 believed that they were larger than the preferred ideal body size. Table 2 illustrates the results.

Table 2: Perception of Body Image

Factors of Assessment		Stunkard *et al.* (1983) 9 Point Figure Rating Scale								
***Note:** 1 signifies very thin and 9 signifies obese*		 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9								
Perceived Self Body Size	N	26	43	68	145	75	21	3	3	0
	%	6.7	11.2	17.7	37.8	19.5	5.5	0.78	0.78	
Perceived Ideal Body Size	N	5	51	328	1	0	0	0	0	0
	%	1.3	13.3	85.4	0.26	0	0	0	0	0

Before examining the association between the participants' perceived body image and exposure to western media, the researcher assessed the scale reliability, through focusing on the reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha is used to measure of internal consistency for the statements in the Likert scale (how closely related a set of items are as a group). In this study, all the scales measuring the variables were reliable with a Cronbach's alpha above 0.70 (BISS = 0.83 and media influence scale = 0.89). Further, the whole questionnaire had an internal consistency of 0.923, signifying that all questions were correlated to one another.

This study assumed that: the more images of the "thin and appealing ideal" body a woman is exposed to through the western media; the more her perception of her body image is affected. This hypothesis was tested with Pearson Correlation. The correlation analysis provides a single number that describes the degree of relationship between two variables, indicating the direction, strength and significance of the variables. Accordingly, this study indicated that the influence of western media was significantly correlated with body image perception, leading to a drive for thinness. This analysis result illustrated a significant, strong, and positive correlation between the two variables,

Pearson Correlation = 0.62**, p<. 05.

Before performing further analysis, the researcher examined whether their multiple regression assumptions were met (certain statistical tests so as to check if the data contained inaccuracies (data leading the multiple regressions analysis to have errors or over/under-estimations of significance). The variables were normally distributed. Several outliers occurred in the data. All the variables suggested a lack of multicollinearity; there was no high collinearity between the variables, which could impact the regression model. Furthermore, there was also no systematic pattern to the residuals (a specified wavy or more points on one side than the other), the deviations did not suggest violation of the assumptions (data was correct).

The multiple regression first evaluated the model significance as a whole (the interrelationship among the set of variables). The researcher examined the ANOVA (Analysis Of Variance), which tested whether the overall regression model was a good fit for the data. The results showed that the media influence predicted the dependent variable (perceived body image). The variables were significant with an ANOVA value a probability of 0.000. In addition, the researcher examined the adjusted R-squared value (coefficient of determination), which expressed how much of the variance in the dependent variable was explained by the model. In this study, the analysis showed that the adjusted R-squared value was 0.546. This means that the media influence explained 55% of the variance in the perceived body image. This is considered a respectable result in social science research.

V. RESEARCH DISCUSSION

The result of this study showed that the upper middle class educated students in private universities are open to substantial amount of western media (commercials, movies, TV shows, magazines, books, music clips, social media, etc.). The participants in this study indicate their preference towards western culture and their imitation to what they see. The media influenced their body image perception. The media is recognized as sources females turn to for information about their physical appearance. Thin models and celebrities are apparently the standard in current media. This study shows that the more images of the "thin and appealing ideal" body a woman is exposed to through the western media; the more her perception of her body image is affected. Thus, body dissatisfaction has been connected to media consumption. The western media exposure caused internalization of the thin ideal and body dissatisfaction in the Egyptian context.

Results from the scale of silhouettes illustrated that there was a great concern among participants with body shape and a desire to be thin. This preference for a western 'thin' body image is evident amongst the normal weight of the females in this study. This outcome is supported by prior studies indicating body image preference among other Arab women in the Middle East region [1], [3], [7], [10], [18].

Prior studies indicated that in the past, non-western societies, particularly African and Middle Eastern females were thought to be relatively free from body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and fixations with weight [28]. Nowadays, the Arab region embraces extensive economic and socio-cultural modernization, resulting in a western influence on Arabic lifestyles [18]. This acceptance of a thin body figure, due to westernization, was initially demonstrated in Ford et al. research [17]: Arab students showed a strong preference for thinness as a result of exposure to westernized/globalized thereby causing internalization of western attitudes concerning body shape.

VI. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Research on body image in non-western societies has been growing in popularity. Many studies have been carried out to find the relationship between body image perception and body weight status in developed countries, but there is limited data on this issue in developing counties, especially in the Middle East [3]. Exposure to the thin western ideal body image is becoming more accessible to non-western cultures through global media. Prior studies have declared that westernized media leads to the internalization of western viewpoints concerning body image [9]. Accordingly, the goal of this study was to investigate the impact of western media on body image perception among young Arab females. The results in this study showed that exposure to global mass media impact upper middle class educated Egyptian females perception of body image. As this dissemination of the "thin ideal body image" occurs, western cultural standards spread, which resulted in an adoption of some aspects of westernization physical appearance and attraction. The outcome of this study can be thought of as a reflection of the rapid socioeconomic changes that have occurred in Egypt [29].

This research contributed academically in providing empirical conclusions regarding the Egyptian context. The findings from this research confirm what researchers of media images and body image have claimed and/ or debated - that there is a connection between media and body image perception. In developing countries, such as Egypt, western media is a powerful source for not only conceptualizing an ideal body image, but also a critical source for normalization, self-evaluation, and social comparison. This study also contributed academically by validating the use of prior scales in an international

context. This study showed that existing scales (Body Image State Scale, media influence scale, and figure rating scale) are valid when examined in the Egyptian context. This research faced several limitations faced. First, this research took place only in Cairo and Alexandria, neglecting other cities in Egypt. Future research could conduct the investigation in other cities. Second, the sample consisted of undergraduate female students from private universities, resulting in a fairly homogeneous sample that may be more aware of western media. This population segment was useful for this particular study. However, the topic is certainly not limited to students or females. For future research, a significantly younger or older sample may prove useful in gathering information related to media and body image perception. Future research can also use a larger, mixed sex sample. The third limitation in this study was related to the sampling method. This study used a consumer intercept data collection method, convenience sampling, in order to reach the respondents. Therefore, the results at the end were not truly representative. Future research should use probability sampling in order to gain generalized results. The final limitation is that this study is purely quantitative. Qualitative research may be adopted in future research in order to gain rich and deep meanings and descriptions of people's perceptions, experiences, expectations, motives, attitudes, and behaviors regarding the research topic.

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