Women And Youtube: An Examination Of Women's Presence And Attempts To Shape Their Role, A Critical Study

Dr. Saida Abbasse University of Batna 1, Faculty of Islamic Sciences (Algeria).
saida.abbasse@univ-batna.dz

Dr. Khadija Zerdoum University of Batna 1, Faculty of Islamic Sciences (Algeria).
Khadija.zerdoum@univ-batna.dz

Abstract:

Recently, our societies have witnessed a widespread and rapid increase in the use of social media platforms in all their forms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. YouTube, in particular, has become the second largest platform in the Arab region in terms of views. It has disseminated its content as a platform for entertainment, education, promotion and advertising. It also offers interactive features and search capabilities, with the site receiving 1.5 billion monthly visits according to 2020 statistics. YouTube's content caters to the needs and desires of its users, including women, who have found many of their goals and aspirations reflected in this content.

This research examines the reality of women's presence on YouTube as content creators and provides a critique of their presence using the foundations of literary criticism.

Keywords: YouTube, woman, delivery, Consumer, Culture

First: Methodological aspects

1. Research problem and questions:

With the technological advances in communication and media, which have transcended spatial and temporal boundaries and facilitated the exchange of information and cultures, significant changes have occurred in social relations and communication habits. This media explosion has affected women and their interaction with these platforms as one of the main recipients of their content. One of these platforms is YouTube, which, through its communicative dimension and its focus on the principles of communism, dissemination and

participation, has become a partner of various social institutions in raising women's awareness and understanding of the different issues they face in society.

The presence of women on YouTube channels has marked a qualitative leap in their presence in the virtual space, especially in terms of content creation. This leap oscillates between the negative aspect of trying to stereotype women's roles on the one hand and their physical presence on the other. On the positive side, it has been activated through the dissemination of real issues and the role of women in overcoming challenges. This is where the intervention comes in, as we try to critically observe the reality of women's presence on YouTube, relying on the questioning of feminist content in YouTube channels using the Frankfurt School approach. Through this intervention we will try to answer the main question of this research: What is the reality of women's presence on YouTube?

Subsidiary questions arise from this main question:

- What are the dimensions of consumer culture in feminist YouTube channels?

- What are the dimensions of objectification in feminist YouTube channels?

- What are the characteristics of the shaping of the role of Algerian women through feminist YouTube channels?

2- The importance of the study:

It lies in its focus on a new media platform that has gained wide popularity and significant use among Algerian women. This has led to various positive and negative outcomes and reflections on its psychological, social, cultural and family aspects. The study is considered essential because it addresses an important pillar of society, especially in light of the presence of hybrid trends that are infiltrating our society and causing shifts in women's roles and values. Furthermore, the importance of the study is evident as it falls within the realm of critical studies that aim to critique media content aimed at women, particularly in terms of culture and its attempt to commodify and dominate their lives, ultimately making them passive recipients through its construction.

The study aims to achieve several objectives, including:

- To uncover the mechanisms used by YouTube channels in the production of consumer culture.

- To identify the characteristics of the stereotyping of women's roles by YouTube channels.

- To reveal the dimensions of objectification of women in YouTube channels.

3. Study concepts:

A. Reality: It refers to the state or condition in which a particular thing is.

B. YouTube: It is a video streaming service that has seen a number of videos uploaded in a month that exceeds the number of videos produced by the largest US networks in 60 years. It is the third most used website and was created on 15 February 2005. One of its features is that viewers can watch and download any video they want. It also has the ability to combine audio and video and is available to everyone. It is easy for the general public to use and has the ability to edit and modify videos directly online. However, it has been criticised for its lack of ethical control over the content it publishes and its disregard for copyright.

C. Women: al-maraa (noun)

al-maraa. Plural: nisaa, niswa, niswan (not derived from its form). Imraa (woman) when indefinite, and al-maraa when definite.

al-maraa: The female of the human species.

(Source: [Al-Maany Dictionary](http://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/المرأة))

D. Role: Refers to the "expected actions a person takes to affirm a certain status" (Ben Jgouma, 2017, p.7).

Second: YouTube: Emergence and use. Technological developments, particularly in the field of media and communication, have contributed to the emergence of the so-called "new media" in its various forms and means. Among the most prominent of these means are social media networks, which have manifested themselves in a variety of ways. One of the most important of these platforms is YouTube, which allows users to upload and view video clips.

1. The emergence of YouTube: YouTube is known as "one of the largest online platforms that allows users to upload, view and share video clips for free"[1]. Once a user is registered on the site, they can upload these files to be viewed by millions of people around the world, and viewers can engage in a collective dialogue about the video by adding accompanying comments, as well as rating the video on a scale of one to five to indicate its perceived importance from the perspective of the site's users[2]. YouTube was founded in 2005 by former PayPal employees Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim. The site's first video, entitled "Me at the zoo", was uploaded by Jawed Karim on 23 April 2005. By 2006, the site was receiving 100 million views per day and 65,000 new video clips were being added every 24 hours. The site uses Adobe Flash technology for video playback and has recently added the ability to view videos in a widescreen player for a more cinematic viewing experience. YouTube has also expanded its support for Wi-Fi enabled devices such as the iPod Touch. The platform hosts over 500,000 monthly unique visitors, supports over 600 languages, and 700

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[1]- Maher Ouda Al-Chamalia, "The New Digital Media", cited above, p. 218.
[2]- Redha Abdelwahid Amin, "The Use of University Youth for the YouTube Website on the Internet", Proceedings of the International Conference: New Media: New Technology… for a New World, 7-9 April, University of the Kingdom, Bahrain, (2009), p. 520.

YouTube videos are shared on Twitter every minute[3]. The first report of 2015 issued by the Arab Social Media Influencers Summit on social media platforms in the Arab world showed that the subscription rate of YouTube for the Arab world reached 39%, and the number of those who prefer to use it daily reached 66%, while 5% consider it the best social media platform[4]. YouTube is available in 51 world languages, the most important being English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch, Korean, Polish and Japanese. The YouTube service is allowed in most countries of the world, except for some that have banned it, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Brazil, Pakistan and others. YouTube has become widely available and accessible to everyone and is no longer the exclusive domain of media institutions or private or public television channels, but every user has the freedom to exercise their media activity and publish what they like and want, given the services and features that this platform offers, which attract the attention and interest of users[5].

Features and characteristics of YouTube

2.1 Features and characteristics of YouTube:

A. The free service for uploading video clips on the YouTube platform, which facilitates, among other things, advertising, publicity and product promotion. "Storage of all the files needed by the viewer, including video files, interviews, seminars, films, plays and more"[6].

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[3]- Ahmed Younec Mohamed Hamouda, The Role of Social Media Networks in Developing the Participation of Palestinian Youth in Community Issues, Master's Thesis, (2013), pp. 74-75.

[4]- Hasroumia Louiza, Dridi Fatima, "The Quality of Parental Relationships with Children in Light of the Influence of Social Media Sites: YouTube as a Model, A Field Study in the City of Batna", Journal of the Researcher in the Humanities and Social Sciences, No. 33, March (2018), p. 119.

[5]- Warda Ben Omar, "The Impact of Social Media Networks on Political Mobilization in Arab Countries," Master's Thesis, University of Haj Lakhdar Batna, (2014), p. 64.

[6]- Abdelrazzak Mohammed Al-Dulaimi, New Media and Electronic Journalism, 1st ed. (Amman: Dar Wael for Publishing and Distribution, 2012), p. 195.

B. The ability to view video clips repeatedly according to the viewer's needs and preferences.
C. The ability to easily view specific videos on a particular topic and to easily interact and participate by giving opinions on the topic[7].
D. Ease of use and viewing.
E. The availability of translation capabilities for the content published on YouTube.
In essence, the YouTube platform provides a free media space that enables "citizen journalism" where users can interact and broadcast and share video content such as films, seminars and others with viewers.

The features of YouTube
A. The YouTube platform hosts a variety of programmes, video clips, music and user-generated content such as blogs and short videos.
B. Non-registered users can view videos on YouTube without having to register for an account. By simply visiting the site, you can view content across all channels.
C. Some content on YouTube may be age restricted or blocked, such as videos containing pornographic or violent material. These are marked as inappropriate for viewers under the age of 18.
D. YouTube makes it easy to categorise and tag videos with relevant keywords.
E. Any user can create a personal channel to publish and upload their own video content, music or content from other sources, such as cooking or podcast channels.
F. Users can subscribe to specific channels via their email, which will send them notifications when new content is uploaded, allowing them to keep up to date with the latest posts[8].
G. Compared to other social media platforms, YouTube is rich in technological features that engage the viewer, such as audio, video and text.
In summary, the key features highlighted include the diversity of content on the platform, accessibility to non-registered users, content moderation, categorisation tools, personalised channels, subscription features and the technological capabilities that differentiate YouTube from other social media platforms.
Positive and Negative Aspects of YouTube

1.3 Positive aspects of YouTube:
YouTube has many positive attributes that have enabled its widespread adoption and use by audiences and consumers. The most important of these are

A) Window to the world: Users find themselves on an open window to millions of people, exposing them to different ideas and cultures.

B) More open to others: This gives users the opportunity to meet those who are culturally, ideologically and even religiously different from them, enabling them to make friends and share knowledge.

[7]- Ali Khalil chafra, New Media and Social Media Networks, cited above, pp. 94-95.

[8]- Akram Abdelkader Abdallah Ferwana, "The Effectiveness of Using Electronic Video Sites in Acquiring Digital Image Design Skills among Female Students", Master's Thesis, University of Gaza, (2012), p. 47.

C) Platform for opinions and counter-opinions: This feature allows for the expression of opinions, easy editing and deleting of published content, as well as the freedom to add other content or share with viewers/subscribers. D) Reducing civilisational conflict: Social media platforms, including YouTube, have reinforced the phenomenon of cultural globalisation through a culture of shared communication among users of these sites, as well as clarifying the differences between the West and the Arabs, and between ideas and people of different groups and countries.

E) Strengthening family ties: Through family programmes, cultural competitions or social events[9].

F) Provides an opportunity to reconnect with old friends: By allowing users to search for and reconnect with old friends from school and work through broadcasts or invitations on the platform.

3.2 The drawbacks of YouTube: Various studies have raised ethical issues regarding the media content on YouTube, particularly the lack of control over the content it broadcasts, which poses a threat to the value system and intellectual and cultural privacy of many peoples. This is evident in the large number of sexual, suggestive and even pornographic films. In order to overcome such content, the platform blocks some of it for people who indicate their age as under 13. YouTube also publishes political propaganda films that contain prohibited material, such as the presence of respected public figures in positions unfavourable to them and their ruling regimes. In addition, the platform has raised issues of intellectual property rights, as it publishes clips from films it does not own the rights to, leading to legal problems with the companies that own them. Furthermore, the presence of violent films on the platform poses a risk to user behaviour[10]. Some drawbacks common to other social media platforms and electronic applications and websites can be mentioned, including:

a) Annoying advertising: This phenomenon emerged in 2010, with many advertisements promoting fast money.

b) Waste of time: Most users spend their time watching video clips with no sense of time passing[11].

c) Vulnerability to hacking: This can disrupt the broadcast of video clips, lectures and other programmes.

d) Blocking by certain countries: Some countries block YouTube because user-uploaded videos violate their laws or YouTube's terms of service, such as in Iran, where YouTube was blocked for showing footage of the suppression of protesters during the 2009 presidential election[12].

Third: The Frankfurt School: Origins and Concepts.

1. An overview of critical theory:

Critical theory emerged in the early 1930s and manifested itself in a number of areas.It criticised excessive scientific tendencies and also scientific-technological rationality as a form of domination that characterised advanced capitalism or, more broadly, advanced industrial societies in the 20th century. It also emerged to criticise dominant ideologies, to criticise fascist tyranny and to criticise anti-Semitism during the rise of Nazism to power (Hamdawi, 2015, p.128).It aims to establish a multi-source and multi-origin social theory. In other words, critical theory is a transcendence of Kantian theory, idealistic Hegelian theory and Marxist dialectics. It is a critique of reality and societies in order to bring about change and human emancipation, delving into the depths of social life rather than merely explaining it. It sees the individual as actively interacting with his or her society, and the dynamics of social change are driven by the individuals themselves. It emphasises their capacity and active power to bring about change (Mashaqbah, 2011, p.101).

She also sees the function of the media as helping those in power in society to establish their influence and work to support the existing situation. Its studies of popular culture have produced specific interpretations of the dissemination of media content that promotes the interests of dominant groups in society. The critical school emphasises that media content tends to have an unbalanced coverage of social relations, dominated by certain groups characterised by control and influence. This is evident in American media and communication studies, which serve dominant cultural outcomes. They are influenced by high-level businessmen as a form of bias. The critical school also emphasised the importance of analysing the symbolic meanings of media content that capitalist interests rely on to attract the attention of the working class (Al-Abdullah, 2010, p.198).

2. Foundation of the Frankfurt School:

The Institute for Social Research, also known as the Frankfurt School, was founded in 1923 at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. It brought together a group of intellectuals who were critical of the Communist Party. Initially, the institute was headed by Carl Grünberg, and in 1931 Max Horkheimer was appointed director, with Theodor Adorno as his assistant (Haou, 2010, p. 35). When the institute moved to the United States, there were changes, including the dismissal of Horkheimer and other Jewish founders. However, Horkheimer remained the most active of the branches that were subsequently opened in Geneva, London and Paris (Arman, Michel, 2005, p. 87). The Frankfurt School went through several phases: in the 1930s and 1940s, it focused on Nazism and anti-Semitism; in the 1950s, it dealt with the cultural industry; in the 1960s, it dealt with revolutionary liberation movements; in the 1970s and beyond, it explored epistemology, reevaluated many Marxist

perspectives, and developed its foundations anew, particularly through the work of the renewal thinker Habermas (http://www.alukah.net).

3. Frankfurt School concepts:

The Frankfurt School introduced a number of concepts and used them to promote its ideas. In the context of our study, we will mention the following:

A. The cultural industry: The culture industry aims to fulfil all the pre-determined needs of the viewers and creates the illusion that it satisfies their desires. Through media and culture, the state asserts its dominance by reinforcing false consciousness, suppressing critical and dissenting thoughts, and reducing individuals to one-dimensional beings (Al-Issaoui, 2016). In our study, the culture industry refers to attempts by content creators on platforms such as YouTube to prioritise form and aesthetics over utility, emphasising social conformity and entertainment over addressing real issues (superficiality of content).

B. Domination (Hegemony): The Frankfurt School focused on exposing the ways in which the capitalist system exercises domination. Hegemony refers to the control exercised by the powerful over the desires and actions of others.

C. Instrumental reason: This term has two meanings. First, it is an approach to viewing the world as a means to an end, and its elements as instruments to help us achieve our ends. Second, it is an approach to theoretical knowledge that sees it as a tool and means to an end. For example, philosophy can be seen as a tool that serves science, since science produces knowledge and philosophy helps solve problems that hinder scientific progress (Hamoudi, 2008). Instrumental reason in this context refers to the widespread phenomenon of over-consumption. Companies have relied on promoting their products through YouTube channels, with content creators emphasising personal shopping experiences. As a result, women have become trapped in the value of consumption.

D. Consumer culture: Commodification, a concept formulated by "Lucas", refers to the mental process that solidifies something into a thing-like entity, even though it is actually the product of a specific social relationship. According to "Marx", the fetishism of commodities involves implicit meanings. "Marx" explains that the distinction between commodities lies in their use value and exchange value. The former refers to how directly we experience the value of a particular commodity as something useful to us, while the latter refers to its price on the market, which is determined by the nature of capitalist economic relations, where real prices disappear (economic exploitation). Commodities, despite being human products, take on the illusory form of relations between things (Haou, 2010, pp. 101-102). In this study, commodification refers to the transformation of meanings, ideas and relationships into material objects.

E. One-dimensional man: Herbert Marcuse, a philosopher, argues that the media in advanced countries restrict the language of critical thought and dialogue in order to maintain prevailing conditions. He suggests that slogans of freedom and equality are merely a means of control by capitalism (Qurashi, 2020, p. 814). In this study, this concept is manifested in the attempts of YouTubers to promote and advertise products based on trends, while implying that they have a certain social status.

Second. Critique and accountability: The critical school aimed to question mass content, especially in relation to the cultural industry, based on the recognition that the media are social systems that support the goals and interests of dominant entities (financial and political). Considering the media as communication and information platforms, they can be studied and analysed in order to understand the presence of the public, relying on the pillars and basic concepts of the aforementioned critical school.

We live in a time of rapid change and innovation, especially in the technological and technical aspects of media. YouTube has managed to establish itself among these media platforms by relying on visual content. This has created post-democratic worlds and cultures. YouTube is also characterised by interactivity, which has fostered a sense of affinity between channel owners and the audience or users. As our study focuses on the presence and representation of women through YouTube channels, we have focused on certain aspects that have caught our attention through the analysis of meanings and symbolic messages.

A. Consumer culture, subjugation and domination: YouTube channels have become advertising tools that have infiltrated Algerian households, making women prisoners of what these channels promote. Through what content creators call "my purchases, my acquisitions, my new kitchen...", they use advertising to convey messages to users about the urgency of the product and their need for it, thereby capturing their interest and activating their consumer behaviour.

The consumer culture promoted by YouTube channels has contributed to the emergence of a divide and gap between the reality experienced by women, characterised by low purchasing power and low living standards, and the dominance of entertainment, consumerism and the symbolic attraction of the products advertised or owned by the channel owner. These products are often cosmetic and unnecessary for women. However, the content creators deliberately create an illusion of their importance in order to achieve a desire for appearance and show-off through the symbolic meaning and class identification associated with these purchases. As a result, these channels have become mechanisms of domination and subjugation of the audience in order to achieve economic goals on the one hand and ideological goals on the other. They use mechanisms of fascination and persuasion, with content creators using the latest filming techniques, various sound and music effects, and satisfying audience demands for following and interaction. In addition, they organise competitions in which the winners receive prizes, mostly consisting of cosmetic products and

kitchen utensils. It should be noted that the conditions of these competitions revolve around following, subscribing to and watching certain channels chosen by the content creators, which further reinforces the domination, subjugation and control over women's orientations and preferences.

B. Modelling and shaping women's roles: YouTube channels have confined women's roles to a narrow framework, far removed from their pioneering role in society. It has been observed that these channels rely heavily on daily routines, resulting in significantly similar content. This content is often accompanied by offensive language and unethical behaviour such as insults, slander, accusations, exposure of family secrets and violation of personal boundaries.These routines revolve around cooking, cleaning, table setting, skin care, hair care, clothing and make-up. They thus promote a single pattern (a one-dimensional model) of representation that focuses on women's bodies and establishes criteria for constructing an idealised image of women.

The model adopted by content producers has led to the creation of a single focus for defining the idealised identity of women. This is done by standardising tastes and social status, divorced from scientific, cultural and religious references and their role in generating beliefs and striving for excellence. Although these aesthetics are important in women's lives and help to maintain their femininity, the focus on them and the use of these methods has led women to reshape their perception of their bodies and themselves according to the capitalist values that have permeated our societies, replacing authentic values with consumerist values. This attempt by content creators to shape women's roles and limit them to physical and aesthetic concerns has led women to form new communication relationships. They now focus on fashion and modernity, and concentrate on improving their bodies and images through various techniques and tools such as filters and Snapchat, leading to an addiction to various media channels (YouTube, Instagram) that satisfy their needs in this area. This trend has led to a cultural and moral alienation of women, which has a negative impact on their role in the family and in society.

Pessimism: The new media, especially YouTube, have contributed to the erosion of values and the transformation of many concepts, establishing new social norms. Through explicit and implicit messages, content creators are moving away from authentic values in favour of consumerist values. The online space, including YouTube and its content, has become a reality imposed on women. It presents symbols, meanings and a reality that shows different aspects of their lives and concerns. Sometimes it reinforces the existing reality, sometimes it constructs a new and artificial world. This has a negative impact on women, who are seen as customers to be exploited by content creators to achieve profit-oriented, market-driven goals.

The inevitability of women's access to YouTube and exposure to its content highlights the impact of these editions, which make them prisoners of the materialistic products being promoted.

Women feel alienated if they do not own or keep up with these products.The dominance of virtual space diminishes the importance of social relationships and interactions, which are reduced to profit-oriented materialistic relationships. These relationships are defined by class distinctions that revolve around possessions that carry the values and culture of others in a global cultural context. This gives normative meanings to material products at the expense of women's humanity, essence and responsibility to the social contract in their environment and society.

Women have made themselves easy tools for showcasing their physical appearance, promoting various brands and promoting slogans that are far removed from the customs and authentic values of society. This is a direct challenge to the principles and ethics derived from our true religion. In this way, technology has facilitated the spread of a distorted discourse centred on the idealised woman defined by globalisation.

3. Findings

The research paper concluded with several significant findings, including

1. The dominance of profit motives on most YouTube channels and the promotion of consumer products, leading to the construction of a consumerist woman and citizen.

2. The reliance on entertainment and amusement, indifference and excitement, which contributes to the formation of a degraded audience, burdened with responsibility towards important national and societal issues, accompanied by a decline in public awareness.

3. The spread of the phenomenon of imitation and the tendency towards materialism, with a lack of religious and cultural immunity for women.

4. A tendency towards imported values, whether in terms of acquisition and consumption or in terms of customs and ideas, by distorting the reality of life and forcing women to adopt these values, detached from the social context in which they live, due to the dominance of the content of the channels on their perception.

These findings shed light on the negative impact of YouTube and similar platforms on women's attitudes, behaviour and values, and highlight the need for awareness and critical thinking to counter the influence of consumerism and distorted ideologies.