

Journal



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Journal of Public Relations Research Middle East

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The Factors behind the Stereotyped Image of Arab Muslim Woman in Western Media: An Arab Academic Elite Perspective

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Abstract

Problem of the study:

From reviewing the previous studies, we find that the majority of these studies has reduced the way for improving the image or the factors of its distortion in one question raised at the end of each study. The focus was on the description of the image and the researches were characterized by repetition from this angle. The two questions (why and how) were almost absent from the studies of the image of the woman in the Western media, even though they were found scattered and in a superficial and theoretical form in few researches, and the researches of the image of the Arabs and Muslims in general in the Western media were characterized by the same thing. Because the absence of the causes of the image distortion is linked largely with the internal and political factors that the researchers preferred to avoid either for safety or the difficulty of monitoring them. Therefore, this study focused on examining the two dimensions of the reasons for the formation of the stereotyped image of the Muslim Arab woman in the Western media and the strategy for improving it with reviewing the first dimension (The description of the image) because it is an introduction for the study. Thus, the present study monitors and analyzes the factors of the formation of the stereotyped image of the Muslim Arab woman in the Western media, as well as the formulation of a future vision to improve this image.

Importance of the study:

The importance of the study comes from being the first study that examines the causes and factors of the formation of the stereotyped image of the Muslim Arab woman in the Western media from the reality of the vision of the Arab academic elite who had the conditions for the accommodation and living in the western countries for several years so that they can have the experience and the ability for the objective evaluation of the image and then the factors of its distortion.

The Theoretical Approach of the Study:

The study is based on the theory of the Symbolic Internationalism:

The writings of both G. H. Mead and Chales H. Cooley are considered from the most important writings that developed the basic determinants of the theory of the Symbolic Internationalism. Both writers were interested in the images that built by the individuals in their minds about the social life, and the processes by which people develop their ideas about themselves or the others. They considered these ideas as indicators for the social behavior.

If the focus was on addressing the perspective of the Symbolic Internationalism on the human communication in general and its relationship with building meanings in the minds of people and the impact of this building on communication again. The media has become the main means that provides these meanings and interpretations for people, especially people build their ideas about the truth while they have not actually seen it. However they relied on the media in shaping these ideas about the facts. So people build the meanings or the image about the social or material facts that they have not felt through following the media, therefore their self-behavior and attitudes are determined by these meanings and perceptions that the media contributed in assessing and shaping them. They are considered the main source, and almost it is the only one for many sectors of the public, of knowledge and information about facts, objects and people contained by the environment surrounding these sectors. The Western media plays a clear role in forming a certain image for the Muslim Arab woman and creating certain perceptions about people towards the Arab Muslim woman that may not be true or far from reality. Our study focuses on the variation between the reality and the image that the Western media portrays for the Muslim woman, what are the reasons for this variation and what are the factors that affect it? Are they political, economic or religious pressures and who are the beneficiaries from the existence of this variation between the reality and the image portrayed by the media for the Arab-Muslim woman?

Hypotheses of the Theory:

- 1) The growing role of the media so that it coordinates the roles, or takes the leading roles for spreading information or distributing knowledge.
- 2) For meaningful or non-meaningful reasons, the presentation of this information or knowledge, facts or images, does not agree in many cases with the true reality. The result is to spread false images or distorted facts about this reality.
- 3) Due to the growing role of the media and its sovereignty in the field of the presentation of facts and its dissemination, the individuals in the society rely on shaping the mental image of these distorted or biased facts, without exerting any additional efforts to compare these mental images with the true reality.
- 4) With the effect of accumulation in publishing and broadcasting over the time, these facts published by the media (about the Arab Muslim woman) turn out to

be social facts that individuals in the society agree about their symbols and preview them by the impact of the symbolic interaction.

5) Through the methods of the cultural analysis, these distorted facts or false images can be inferred, but they contribute, over the time and after the social agreement, in the processes of change in the society and its members are affected by them in the cultural and social structure.

Objectives of the Study:

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Monitoring, analyzing and explaining the features of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media.
- Monitoring, analyzing and explaining the religious factors that are responsible for shaping the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media.
- Monitoring, analyzing and explaining the political factors that are responsible for shaping the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media.
- Monitoring, analyzing and explaining the media factors that are responsible for shaping the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media.
- Knowing the sources of shaping the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media.
- Trying to explain the significance for determining a certain image of the Arab Muslim woman and neglecting other images in the Western media.
- Knowing the type of the media forms in which the Western media deals with the distorted image of the Arab Muslim woman.
- Identifying the ways by which the Western media deals with the distorted image of the Arab Muslim woman.
- Determining how to correct the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media by developing a strategy to do so.

Questions of the Study:

The study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the features of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?
- What are the religious factors that are responsible for the distortion of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?
- What are the political factors that are responsible for the distortion of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?

- What are the media factors that are responsible for the distortion of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?
- What are the sources for shaping the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?
- What is the significance for devoting specific images of the Arab Muslim woman and neglecting other images in the Western media?
- What is the kind of the media forms in which the Western media deals with the distorted image of the Arab Muslim woman?
- What are the methods of treatment used by the Western media in the presentation of this distorted image of the Arab Muslim woman?
- What is the strategy for correcting the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media?

Type of the Study:

This study belongs to the type of the descriptive studies that aim to identify, analyze and evaluate the characteristics of the image and the factors that cause its formation quantitatively and qualitatively in order to get the accurate and sufficient information about it.

Concepts of the Study:

The stereotype means the repeated thing in a manner that does not change, or the thing that agrees with a consistent or general pattern, and lacks the distinctive individual features. It is also the mental image which is jointly carried by the members of some group, and it represents a simplified opinion to the extent of the distorted overuse or an emotional situation (from a person, a presentation, an issue or an incident). Therefore, the stereotype is more specific in its significance on the mental fixed image which is characterized by stiffness and oversimplification. The stereotype is often considered a following stage from the stages of the formation of the mental images that a person has about the other persons, groups and things “*”. Thus, the term of the stereotype is considered more accurate significance, broader concept and much closer to the objectives of this study which does not seek to examine the absolute mental image that build on the transient impressions about the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media, but they study the factors of the formation of that repeated image about the Muslim woman over the centuries and generations.

The stereotype is characterized by the generalizations that are based on rumors or the opinions that are not based on scientific experimental evidences, and therefore it is built on illusions, inaccurate information, or self-imaginings that were formed in human or the group through the past experience and expertise and through receiving from the means of communication and media. The nature of the stereotype - on this basis – is that it is full of self-feelings and filled with the personal emotions which are difficult to be changed or easily refuted “**”.

The stereotype of peoples and nations about the others is a complex process that many factors overlap in its formulation. This process also takes the time that may extend to many generations. Therefore, it is necessary to identify how the stereotypes are formed in the individual and group mind, and try to explore the factors that affect them and the means that help the individual and the group to form the stereotypes in their minds.

Method of the Study:

The study is based on the method of the social survey on a sample of the Arab academic elite.

Tools of the Study:

- 1) The standardized interviews using a survey form and the non-standardized interviews.
- 2) The simple observation and the observation with participation.

Population of the Study:

This study was conducted on a sample of the Arab academic elite who lives in Riyadh and work in the following universities: King Saud University, Imam Mohammed Bin Saud University and Princess Noura University. The academic elite are considered an excellent one in our Arab societies because of its important role in raising awareness and correcting concepts. They are also considered active audience in the process of perception and absorption of knowledge and information. They are with a high degree of education and culture and they are interested in contributing to the formulation and elaboration of the determinants and measures to improve the Arab image. ⁽⁴²⁾

Sample Size and the Way of Its Selection:

The size of the sample consisted of 100 members according to the studies of the elite. It was taken into account that the sample stayed an enough period in the Western countries to be able to evaluate the image of woman in the Western media. It was also taken into account that they belong to a number of Arab universities, and the diversity of the academic degree of the sample of the study (lecturer, assistant professor and professor).

The study was applied on the following universities: King Saud University, Imam Mohammed Bin Saud University and Princess Noura University. These universities were selected because the researcher works now at King Saud University in Riyadh and the teaching staff members are from different Arab countries and it was difficult to reach them. This helped the application of the questionnaire on the teaching staff members who are from six different Arab nationalities; Egyptian, Saudi, Syrian, Palestinian, Sudanese and Iraqi. The number of universities, that the study sample belongs to, reached ----- universities.

Type of Sample:

A random and available sample was taken from the teaching staff members at the following universities: King Saud University, Imam Mohammed Bin Saud

University and Princess Noura University. One hundred forms were distributed on the male and female respondents in the three universities, but there were 18 questionnaires that were excluded because they did not achieve the degree of reliability required, and therefore the sample becomes 82 male and female respondents

Results of the Study:

1. The Realistic Image of the Woman and its Approaching from Her Reality:

And how realistic is that image and its approaching from the reality of the Arab Muslim woman, 53.6% of the sample of the elite answered that the portrayed image of the Arab Muslim woman reflected a reality that was close to the reality of the Arab Muslim woman. And 46.3% of the sample of the elite also answered that the portrayed image was false and it was not related to the reality of the Arab Muslim woman.

2. The Features of the Negative Image Portrayed by the Western Media for the Arab Muslim Woman From the Vision of the Academic Elite

The study showed that she was a woman whose hijab was imposed on her and this was the first place by 12.7%, then that she was a weak woman who is subject to a religion that oppresses and suppresses her, and this was in the second place by 12.3%. It is noted here that the religion is the main cause of the negative features of the image of woman. And then in the third place, that she was a woman slaved by men with a percentage of 11.9%. In the fourth place of the features of that image and equally came both that she does not have any legal rights and a woman who is prohibited from practicing her political rights, and both occupied the fourth place by 11.5% for each. In the fifth place and by 11.1% was that her only function was marriage and having children. The negative features follow and the feature about her work is only in the kitchen and housework, and this occupied the sixth place by 10.3%. And then the seventh place by 9.5% was that she is an ignorant and backward woman. Finally, the eighth place was that she is a woman who is a victim of a parental and male religion that hates women with a percentage of (9.1%).

3. Sources of the Formation of the Image of the Arab Muslim Woman in the Western Media:

The study showed that the sources of the formation of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media were as follows:

The movies occupied the first place by (15.4%) as a source for the formation of the image, and the websites came second with a percentage of 15.2%, followed by the television programs in the third place by

12.8%. The newspaper articles and the news were equal and came in the fourth place with one percentage reached 10.3%, while the published photographs occupied the fifth place by (10.1%). The caricature drawings and books as sources to form the image of the Arab Muslim woman and occupied the sixth place by (9.7%) each, and then the series came to occupy the seventh place by (6.1%)

4. The Extent of the Presentation of the Western Media for An Alternative Perception for the Image of the Arab Muslim Woman

(53.7%) answered that there is an alternative perception for this image, while (46.3%) negated the existence of such a perception.

5. The Features of the Alternative Perception for the Image of the Arab Muslim Woman As Presented by The Western Media

The perception that the woman is equal to men in everything came as the first alternative images presented by the Western media from the viewpoint of the study sample by (26.4%), followed by the woman liberated from the restrictions of customs and traditions by (19.1%). The woman who rebelled against her husband and society occupied the third place as an alternative image for the Arab Muslim woman with a percentage of (17.6%), while the image of the woman who took off the hijab or she is only satisfied with a simplistic form of it occupied the fourth place by (14.7%). Then the financially independent woman reached (13.2%) and occupied the fifth place. Finally, the woman who travelled without her husband's permission occupied the sixth and last place by 8.8%.

6. About Whether the Alternative Perception of the Image of the Arab Muslim Woman Is Presented in the Western Media.

(58.5%) of the elite sample thought that it is directly presented in the media, while (41.6%) thought that it is not directly presented in the media, but it is hinted in the seminars, conferences, various forums and also in books.

7. The Authority That Is Responsible for the Formation of the Image of the Arab Muslim Woman in the Western Media

The elite gave the Arab cinema and the negative image that it portrayed for the Arab Muslim woman the first place with a percentage of (19.3%) as an authority that is responsible for the formation of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media. The second responsible authority was the silence of the Arab woman about everything that

happens around her reality by (17.8%). The third place was for the Arab regimes that limit the progress of woman with a percentage of (17%). In the fourth place and with an equal percentage that reached (16.3%) were both of the field of the Arab media which hinders the progress of the media woman because she is faced by males inside the field and the Arab Muslim communities abroad and the negative behaviors that they do towards the woman in the name of Islam. The elite presented, through another category, some authorities which they considered responsible for the formation of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media, and these authorities are as follows:

- 1- The Western media which does not show the true image of the Muslim woman who believes that Islam is the only religion which guarantees her rights.
- 2- The Jewish businessmen who control a lot of the Western media.
- 3- The Jewish media institutions.
- 4- The programs of the Arab women that present the deprivation of the Arab woman from their right in the society.
- 5- The reality of the Muslim woman is not ideal and it is burdened with racism and the biased culture that hates women.
- 6- Some Arab women imitate the Western woman especially in her negativities.

8. The Factors of Formation of This Image of the Arab Muslim Woman in the Western Media.

The religious factors occupied the first place by 39% as one of the factors that forms the image of the woman, then the political factors came in the second place with a percentage of 31.7% and the media factors were in the third place by 29.3%.

9. About the Nature of the Religious Reasons That is Behind the Formation of the Image of Woman in the Western Media, the Elite Presented the Following Reasons:

The cause of the misunderstanding of Islam about the polygamy occupied the first place by 12.6%, followed by the lack of information about the Muslim woman and sometimes its inaccuracy that came in the second place by 12.2%. There are three reasons that came in the third place with an equal percentage that reached 11.3%, and they are: (1) the misunderstanding of the Islamic teachings and traditions about divorce, (2) the misunderstanding of Islam about the woman's inheritance, and (3) the absence of the contemporary balanced female model in the

international scene that represents the character of the Muslim woman in her thought and culture.

Then the reason that is related to the hostility of the West towards Islam that occupied the fourth place by 10.4 as a reason for the distortion of the image of the Arab Muslim woman in the Western media. The irresponsible behavior that is done by some of the Muslim women abroad occupied the fifth place by 9.5%. In the sixth place and with a percentage of 8.1%, the woman, in some Arab districts, is sometimes deprived from her inheritance. Also the differences among the doctrines that are related to clothing, marriage, work, and also about the handshake between men and woman that occupied the seventh place by 7.6%. Then the woman, in some Arab societies, is deprived from the responsibility in the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice, and that came with a percentage of 5.4%.

