

Moroccan TV Advertising in 2023: Towards a Gender-Transformative Agenda

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Abstract

This study examines the contemporary landscape of Moroccan TV advertising in 2023, specifically focusing on its evolutionary trajectory towards the adoption of a gender-transformative agenda. Against the backdrop of heightened societal consciousness regarding gender equality and the imperative of inclusive representation across various domains, including the realm of advertising, this article delves into the concerted efforts undertaken by the Moroccan advertising industry to challenge entrenched gender norms and cultivate a more transformative paradigm. Traditionally, advertising has been culpable of reinforcing and perpetuating gender stereotypes, constraining men and women within narrowly defined roles. However, catalyzed by social movements advocating for equality and inclusivity, advertisers find themselves compelled to reevaluate their approaches, embracing a more encompassing and diverse framework. Given this, this paper employs qualitative content analysis to scrutinize a curated corpus of five Moroccan advertisements, investigating how they challenge prevailing gender portrayals and deviate from perpetuating stereotypical representations. The analysis of the findings reveals the extent to which the selected advertisements actively engage in the transformative representation of gender by challenging rather than nurturing gender stereotypes. It unveils the way the selected advertisements demonstrate a deliberate departure from the stereotypical depiction of women in domestic roles or as passive objects, to portraying them in diverse and empowered positions. Similarly, men are depicted beyond conventional masculine stereotypes, showcasing a broader spectrum of roles and expectations. Accordingly, this study not only provides insights into the current state of Moroccan advertising with regard to gender transformative practices but also contributes to the broader discourse surrounding the role of advertising in promoting gender equality and instigating social change.

Keywords: *TV advertising, Morocco, gender stereotypes, content analysis, gender-transformative agenda*

Introduction

From its very outset in 1941, television advertising has gained global attention from several researchers and scholars, mainly due to its remarkable influence on people's behaviors and decisions (Wiman and Newman, 1989). TV advertising has been shown to have a powerful effect on consumers' attitudes and thoughts despite the nature of the product being advertised, as its consumption has become a part and parcel of their normative routine (Guitart and Stremersch, 2020; Gerbner, 1969). This influence tends to shape not only people's buying decisions but also every aspect of their daily lives and belief systems (Quinto et al. 2022). This is mainly due to the amalgamation of vivid visuals and sound effects, which significantly contributes to the cultivation of a more positive opinion about the product being advertised within which a variety of messages are usually embedded.

As part of its profitability aspect, television advertising integrates a variety of cultural elements into every advertised product. These cultural elements tend to create a sense of identity and familiarity for the audience, allowing them to emotionally relate to the product which solidifies their connections and hence, strengthens the effectiveness of the advertisement. Among the most common integrated cultural aspects are gender roles and stereotypes. Through advertising, a variety of gender-based messages are usually communicated in an attempt to reinforce and perpetuate the traditional cultural expectations of women and men. Several previous studies have demonstrated the extent to which advertising has been used as an effective medium through which patriarchal ideologies and stereotyped images of women and men are continuously transmitted and disseminated both implicitly and explicitly (Grau and Zotos, 2016).

Primarily, the advertising industry relies heavily on gender stereotypes to construct the idea behind a particular service or product (Akestam et al., 2021). In an attempt to attract more potential customers, advertisements are usually packed with a variety of stereotyped representations of women and men that further communicate the gendered aspect of every advertised product. In light of this, researchers have previously examined the extent to which most advertisers strongly believe that implementing stereotypical representations of gender tends to elicit an emotional response from their audience which automatically leads to more potential customers and hence, more purchases (Akestam et al., 2021, p. 65).

Most of these stereotypes target women who are usually depicted from a sexualized and objectified perspective even if the product being advertised does not relate specifically to women. However, it has been historically shown that sexualizing women is an effective persuasive tool used in the general media industry to capture heterosexual male viewers (Mulvey, 1975). This sexualization of women in the media appeals to men's desire for sexual pleasure and reinforces the notion that women exist primarily as objects of male desire (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Also, it has been suggested that these stereotypes reaffirm traditional gender roles, resulting in the normalization of sexism in society which often leads to the further marginalization of women and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures in society (Chahbane, 2023).

The domestication of women in advertising is another main stereotype that several studies have previously addressed (DRISSI KAÏTOUNI and Sbiti, 2022; Matthes et al., 2016). Depicting women within the private sphere while men in the public sphere has become the norm in the

advertising industry which significantly serves patriarchal cultures and societies. This reinforcement of the separate sphere doctrine tends to heavily reinforce traditional gender roles, thereby endorsing and legitimizing the objectification of women in our culture. It also limits the opportunities available to women in the public sphere, reinforcing the notion that they are inferior and subordinate to men. This narrow view of gender roles that advertisements significantly nurture tends to fortify different forms of male domination and female subordination.

In the study of gender portrayals in advertising, reviewing Goffman's gender advertisements (1979) is a necessity. His work was one of the earliest studies to apply a sociological perspective to gender portrayals in advertising. Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* was seminal in understanding how gender portrayals in advertising are shaped by the larger social context. He argued that advertising images not only reflect existing gender roles but also help to shape and reinforce them. Through the analysis of a corpus of advertisements, Goffman demonstrated that female subordination is the most reproduced representation of women that automatically reinforces other traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

This stereotypical representation of gender in advertisements has been interpreted in six main dimensions. The first one is "relative size" which Goffman explained as advertisements' tendency to depict men taller and larger than women which spontaneously signifies men's power and control over women. The second dimension is "the feminine touch" which can be detected whenever women are depicted tenderly, quietly, and sexually touching the opposite sex or holding objects. This representation of femininity tends to objectify and sexualize women for the male viewer who one more time holds more superiority when it comes to the act of looking. The third one is "function ranking" which reflects the uneven distribution of power among women and men when it comes to collaborative activities. In such situations, men are usually portrayed as having leading and primary roles while women are depicted in secondary and subordinate roles. The fourth dimension is "the family" in which family members are used in advertising to embody a typical traditional gendered family in which female figures are depicted in the private sphere while male figures are portrayed in the public sphere, reflecting a traditional gender-based division of labor, in which men are associated with external activities and women with domestic ones. The fifth one is "the ritualization of subordination" which describes the inferior positions, gestures, and poses that are imposed on women in advertisements in an attempt to perpetuate the hierarchical gender structure. The sixth and last dimension is named "licensed withdrawal" which signifies the way women are usually filmed in a passive state in the sense that their roles are placed in an advertisement only to be gazed at, unlike men who actually act, behave, and make a scene.

Within the Moroccan context, previous studies have actively revealed the extent to which the Moroccan advertising industry is entirely led and dominated by men, justifying the industry's stereotypical perspective of gender (Razkane, 2021). Drawing on semiotics and feminist screen-based theory, Razkane has displayed the way Moroccan programs including advertising are laden with misrepresentations, distortions, and stereotypes that seek to reproduce the traditional patriarchal notion of gender. He specifically emphasized the way these stereotypes tend to heavily enslave women by depicting them mostly as housewives, sex objects, and inferior individuals (Razkane, 2021, p. 209). In consistent with Razkane's analysis, another study has unveiled the degree to which Moroccan TV commercials have a perpetuating force when it

comes to gender stereotypes (Kaitouni and Sbiti, 2022). An analysis of over 20 Moroccan TV commercials has revealed the way women are more likely to be portrayed as passive, powerless, dependent, and nurturing, as opposed to men who are more likely to be depicted as independent, strong, active, providers, and dynamic.

Given this, this study aims to explore whether there is a transformative shift in the way gender is represented in Moroccan television advertising. It specifically examines whether the 2023 Moroccan advertising reinforces or challenges stereotypical gender representations. Accordingly, this study will delve deeper into the frequency of gender stereotyping in Moroccan advertising in 2023. It will look at any changes in the way gender is represented in Moroccan advertising comparing it with the way it has been represented throughout the past years as demonstrated by existing knowledge, and whether or not these changes are indicative of a transformative shift in the Moroccan advertising industry's gender perception. For these purposes, the study will employ qualitative content analysis which will enable the decoding and interpreting of the underlying meanings of the captured texts, symbols, and images used in the selected advertisements.

Methodology

To gain a comprehensive understanding of gender representations in Moroccan advertisements and explore the gender-based changes within the industry, this study employed qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis offers a qualitative approach that enables researchers to identify patterns and recurring themes within a dataset. It involves a careful examination of the textual, verbal, and visual elements present in the selected advertisements, aiming to identify how gender is framed, performed, and communicated both explicitly and implicitly.

The content analysis method was specifically chosen to ascertain whether Moroccan advertisements have implemented adjusted approaches to gender representation or if they still adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations that uphold the patriarchal system. By employing this method, we systematically analyze the implicit and explicit meanings of gender-related messages conveyed by each selected advertisement.

For this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select five Moroccan advertisements that are relevant to the topic under scrutiny. All the chosen advertisements prominently feature at least one human figure central to the message delivered, ensuring their significance within the Moroccan context. Furthermore, these ads were repeatedly aired on the country's most popular television channel, 2M, and were among the most streamed advertisements in 2023.

The corpus consists of five advertisements, namely two from Maroc Telecom (the leading telecommunication company in Morocco), two from MIO (a recent Moroccan detergent company known for challenging gendered tasks, particularly the domestication of women), and one from Bimo (the primary Moroccan biscuit company). Each advertisement will be analyzed individually, beginning with a general description of the ad, followed by a detailed and critical interpretation of its content, with specific emphasis on the signs and symbols employed to convey gender-related messages, both overtly and subtly.

Findings and Analysis

Ad #1: MIO

Since its release in 2019, Moroccan detergent company MIO has been at the forefront of producing gender-transformative advertisements that challenge entrenched gender roles and stereotypes, particularly those related to domestic responsibilities and the notion of separate spheres. The company's main slogan, "نتعاونو على الشقا" (Let's share the housework), immediately captures attention and generates strong interest by deviating from the usual representations seen in advertisements. This piques the curiosity of the audience and creates a desire for the product, ultimately driving potential consumers to support the company's message through purchasing its products. Thus, the persuasive power of the advertisement lies not only in the product itself but in the compelling message it conveys.

This advertisement reveals a great deal of effort invested by the advertising company in studying the targeted audience and tailoring the message to meet their expectations. It aligns with Burgoon's language expectancy theory, which posits that messages are constructed according to the producers' preferences, aiming to fulfill the audience's expectations by adhering to their standards and norms. In this case, the formulated message challenges the prevailing norms in Moroccan culture by advocating gender equality in household chores, which is not commonly accepted. Despite deviating from the cultural norms, this message garners an unexpectedly high number of positive responses, as it gives voice to the silenced groups who are unable to express their desires openly.

Unlike other cleaning product advertisements that primarily target women, the audience of this advertisement is diverse and inclusive, placing a special emphasis on men to break the stereotypical belief that household tasks are exclusively women's responsibilities. Throughout the advertisement, men of various ages are shown actively participating in housework, a sight rarely seen on Moroccan screens. The advertisement utilizes visual and auditory elements to reinforce its message. Alongside the visual symbolic representations, a male voice narrates the advertisement, expressing appreciation to women on behalf of Moroccan men. He expresses regret for not providing help to his female relatives in the past and declares that household chores will now be evenly divided, emphasizing that everyone has equal rights. This appeal to emotions aligns with Aristotle's mode of persuasion, as the company relies on evoking emotional responses to capture people's attention and interest.

Language and gender representation in this advertisement can be seen as an action alert, as they work in tandem to produce content that diverges from the norm and conveys a different message. Through their portrayal of language and gender, advertisers not only promote their products but also advocate for a new mindset that calls for gender equality. By challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes, the advertisement creates a platform for discussion and encourages society to reevaluate long-held norms and expectations.

Ad #2: MIO

An impactful advertisement not only acknowledges its audience but also recognizes the challenges they face. Cleaning product companies typically target and specifically address women, reinforcing the belief that women primarily belong to the private sphere and are responsible for domestic tasks, while excluding men. However, this advertisement by MIO

takes a different approach by addressing the exclusion of men and promoting awareness of women's right to gender equality.

Instead of traditional narratives, this advertisement employs thought-provoking social experiments. Through an implied social experiment, several men are presented with hand images and asked to interpret them. All the images depict hard-working hands. Each man interprets the images differently, but only one person correctly identifies the hand as belonging to a hard-working woman. The other interpretations associate the damaged hands with men, reflecting the common stereotype that men are expected to work harder, resulting in rough, overworked, and drier hands compared to women.

Throughout the advertisement, the use of pathos plays a crucial role in effectively conveying the message. This emotional appeal can be observed in various scenes: the men discussing their personal life experiences where they often overlook the efforts of their female relatives, the advertisers revealing the shocking news and surprising the men with the realization that each hand belongs to their wife, daughter, sister, or mother, and the final scene capturing both men and women's emotional reactions. By evoking emotions, the advertisers aim to create compelling content with a fresh concept. Their creative approach to communication motivates the audience to become engaged, fostering a sense of connection with the individuals on screen. This involvement ultimately inspires them to support the company's unique and relevant concept by purchasing the product.

In summary, this advertisement effectively challenges gender stereotypes by highlighting the exclusion of men in cleaning product advertisements and promoting women's rights to equality. By utilizing thought-provoking social experiments and leveraging pathos, the advertisement captivates the audience's attention and encourages them to take action, ultimately driving engagement and supporting the brand's impactful message.

Ad #3: Maroc Telecom

Television advertising not only aims to boost sales but also plays a significant role in shaping and disseminating various ideas and thoughts. Maroc Telecom, a well-known Moroccan telecommunication company, exemplifies this by showcasing its services through a culturally-based story of a Moroccan family preparing for their daughter's wedding. By presenting a relatable scenario of a family preparing for a wedding, viewers can easily connect with the characters and become emotionally invested in their story. This connection helps to create a lasting impression and makes the advertisement more memorable.

In this advertisement, the focus is on highlighting the unique features of the company's mobile recharge coupons. The story revolves around a mother, father, daughter, and her fiancé. Initially planning to go on a cinema date, the couple's plans take a different turn when the fiancé abruptly leaves due to his extreme fear of the dark. The daughter, undeterred, decides to make the most of the situation by enjoying a movie at home. She happily shares this experience with her surprised parents.

The advertisement challenges traditional gender stereotypes by presenting representations that deviate from the norm. In a patriarchal society, masculinity is often associated with bravery. However, this advertisement defies this notion by portraying that men too can have nyctophobia, a fear of the dark, emphasizing that men are also vulnerable and have fears. In

dominant cultures, men are often discouraged from openly expressing their emotions, as it is perceived as a sign of weakness. By presenting the male character in this vulnerable light, the advertisement challenges these societal norms and encourages a more open and understanding approach to masculinity.

On the other hand, the female character, the daughter, is depicted as highly independent and resilient. Instead of succumbing to disappointment or relying on others to make her happy, she takes charge of her own happiness. This portrayal challenges the traditional notion of women being passive and dependent. By actively deciding to order her favorite food and indulge in a movie at home, she showcases her ability to make independent choices and assert control over her own life. Moreover, the daughter's decision not to let her plans be ruined by external factors demonstrates her determination and resilience. It sends a powerful message that one should not be defined by circumstances but rather embrace the opportunities for self-empowerment and enjoyment that may arise unexpectedly.

In conclusion, the advertisement effectively combines engaging storytelling and the exploration of non-traditional gender roles to promote Maroc Telecom's services. By challenging societal expectations and stereotypes, it encourages viewers to question and reconsider their own beliefs and perceptions. This deeper analysis highlights the advertisement's ability to initiate meaningful discussions surrounding gender issues while promoting the company's products and services.

Ad #4: Maroc Telecom

The second advertisement can be described as a short scene taking place on a shared rooftop. The focus is on two men, one of whom is engaged in an important online meeting while the other is simply relaxing. The man in the meeting appears slightly nervous and lacks a professional physical appearance. The situation becomes more challenging when his neighbor interrupts him, leading to a conversation about the reason for conducting the meeting on the rooftop.

The advertisement's narrative aims to convey a powerful gender-transformative message by challenging traditional patriarchal views of women as solely responsible for housekeeping. Instead, the advertisement portrays men as actively participating in household chores. The male characters discuss housework in a natural and normal manner, highlighting the importance of sharing domestic responsibilities.

This analysis recognizes the advertisement's use of a simple narrative to promote a more inclusive and egalitarian perspective on gender roles. By depicting men as responsible for housework, the advertisement challenges societal norms and promotes a more balanced and equitable division of labor within households. This portrayal contributes to the broader transformation of advertising into a more inclusive gender industry by promoting gender equality and breaking down traditional stereotypes.

Ad #5: Merendina - BIMO

With the launch of this advertisement of Merendina-Bimo that features love-themed catchphrases in Moroccan Darija, the company addresses a variety of culturally constructed messages about gender. By featuring these phrases in the advertisement and creating a well-

constructed short love story, the company is sending a powerful message about gender roles and expectations when it comes to love, control, powerlessness, expectations, and happiness. The ad follows the story of a man who passionately seeks the attention of his classmate. A key element in his pursuit involves anonymously writing short notes that consistently bring her joy upon reading. The portrayal of the man highlights his diligent efforts to transform unrequited love into a mutually reciprocated one, which elicits emotions of jealousy, anger, and carelessness.

Conversely, the woman in the advertisement is depicted as a powerful figure who ultimately controls the direction of the story. She is shown as a loved, independent, charismatic, and influential woman. The man's happiness and fulfillment hinge upon her consent, implying that it is her decision to reciprocate his feelings and nurture the relationship. This portrayal empowers the woman, emphasizing her agency and control over the dynamics of the relationship. It suggests that she has the ability to determine whether to provide the man with an opportunity or not.

The advertisement seeks to underscore the significance of women's agency in romantic relationships, highlighting that their decisions are equally vital as men's. It conveys the message that women possess the power and strength to determine whether pursuing a relationship with a man is worthwhile or not. In doing so, the advertisement champions women's autonomy and the importance of their active participation in decision-making within relationships. Overall, this advertisement effectively utilizes a love story and culturally relevant catchphrases to challenge traditional gender expectations and promote women's empowerment in the realm of romantic relationships.

Conclusion

Throughout history, television advertising has been a powerful means of reinforcing and disseminating a variety of cultural messages that seek to manipulate viewers, or rather consumers of mediated texts. The Moroccan TV cultural scene is no exception. It was for decades centered around fashioning culturally dominated representations of women and men that tend to reinforce the idea of male supremacy and female subordination.

Given this, the Moroccan advertising industry has almost always been a male-run industry. It tends to advertise different products through the creation of gendered content that reinforces the social and cultural construction of gender. This is because advertising is often geared towards very specific target audiences and gender roles are often considered important in reaching those audiences. As a result, the advertising industry often reinforces gender stereotypes by depicting men and women in different roles and responsibilities that strongly nurture the system of patriarchy.

Our analysis of the five Moroccan advertisements that were streamed the most in 2023 revealed that the Moroccan advertising industry is evolving into becoming more transformative regarding gender representations. Our observations demonstrated the extent to which some companies that used to heavily perpetuate gender stereotypes have become less gendered when it comes to the way certain tasks are represented; Maroc Telecom is an example. As a leading telecommunications company in Morocco, Maroc Telecom used to reproduce the dominant conception of gender that naturally widens the gender gap and endorses a variety of gender inequality structures. However, in recent years, Maroc Telecom has become more inclusive in

its representation of gender roles. They have started using gender-neutral language in their advertising, reversing gender roles, and dis-gendering responsibilities.

The two analyzed advertisements of Maroc Telecom unveil the extent to which the conceptualization of masculinity has been adjusted and reformulated. This is indicative of a shift in how gender roles are perceived and addressed in Moroccan culture. By emphasizing the shared responsibilities between men and women, Maroc Telecom is sending a message that gender roles should be viewed in a more equitable way. The advertisements also demonstrate that gender roles are not rigid and that men can be nurturing and supportive of their families, while women can be strong and independent. Hence, carrying some feminine characteristics does not diminish one's masculinity and the same goes for femininity. This shift is an important milestone in Moroccan culture and reflects the changing attitudes of younger generations.

In the short time that MIO has been on the market, it has challenged a variety of gender stereotypes, and more specifically, the concept of separate spheres that tend to enlarge the different inequality structures between women and men. MIO's focus on inclusivity and gender neutrality has encouraged people to think outside the box and challenge gender stereotypes. By promoting the idea that there are no set gender roles, MIO is breaking down the barriers that separate men and women when it comes to domestic responsibilities. Accordingly, creating a gender-neutral cleaning product has disrupted traditional gender roles that are often reinforced by the products we habitually use. It has also created an opportunity for men and women to share the same product, which challenges the idea that certain products are only meant to be used by one gender, excluding the other.

Similarly, the fifth analyzed advertisement of Merendina Bimo demonstrated the extent to which the company seeks to present an altered conception of masculinity and femininity that does not conform to the dominant and traditional perception of gender. Portraying men as the more powerless in emotional relationships is an unusual portrayal of masculinity that strongly challenges the system of patriarchy and the societal hierarchical structure of gender. On the opposite, the advertisement portrays women as more powerful, more dominant, and more decisive. Therefore, this advertisement reversed the definitions by reversing the roles and characteristics adopted by each gender. Consequently, it effectively challenged traditional gender roles and subverted the patriarchal system by inverting the traditional power dynamics.

In light of our analysis, the findings are indicative of the transformative role Moroccan advertisements play in establishing a new agenda for gender representation in the Moroccan media. They are increasingly presenting gender-balanced representations of men and women, which signals a shift in the cultural norms and attitudes toward gender roles. This shift can be explained with the way consumers today are more aware and vocal about the need for advertisements that reflect the diversity of society. They seek advertisements that resonate with their own experiences and identities and are more likely to support brands that align with their values. Advertisers have recognized this shift in consumer expectations and have responded by featuring a wider range of gender roles and expectations, body types, ethnicities, and abilities in their campaigns. This reflects a new era of gender equality in Morocco and has the potential to inspire similar changes in other domains that historically reproduced a variety of gender inequality structures.

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