

# The effect of female portrayal in advertising on the Palestinian females purchase decision

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of female portrayal in advertisements on Palestinian female consumers' purchasing decisions. TV and online media were selected as the medium for the study. Specifically, the researchers examine the one-dimensional sexualized female portrayal in advertisements.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Culture is used as the lens through which the study examines the relationship between independent and dependent variables concerning the topic of this study. The study collected primary data from 395 Palestinian participants through a survey questionnaire.

**Findings** – The findings of the study revealed that there is a relationship between the independent variable (the sexualized female portrayal in foreign advertisements – advertisements originating in foreign countries) and the dependent variable (Palestinian female consumers' purchase decision). Additionally, the study found that the cultural differences between Palestine and other foreign countries have a negative impact on the Palestinian female consumers' perception of the product being advertised.

**Practical implications** – Although traditional marketing procedures would allow companies to filter and adapt particular adverts to suit various cultural, social and political environments, the advent of the open web and satellite TV channels extend the advertisements reach to audiences beyond their intended demographic.

**Originality/value** – This is the first study set in the Arab context (including Palestine) to explore the impact of sexualized female portrayal in advertisements on Palestinian female consumers' purchasing decision.

**Keywords** Cultural diversity, Palestine, Advertisement, Sexualized female portrayal, Consumers' purchase decision, Palestinian females

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

Advertising is one of the most complementary and effective parts of business marketing. It is a paid communication aiming at informing and convincing potential customers to purchase the advertised products, services or ideas (Bovee, 1992). Advertising is an effective marketing tool in attracting new customers and creating product loyalty (Kotler and Keller, 2011; Alsmadi, 2006). Furthermore, it helps companies meet their communication objectives (Singh and Vij, 2007). Advertising is typically related to groups of people rather than individuals; therefore, it is a mass communication. Consumers are increasingly exposed to massive product choices through various marketing channels. Mediums of communicating advertisements include – but not limited to – newspapers, radio, TV, internet and billboards. Satellite television and online channels advertising have both rapidly spread in developing countries (Gallagher, 2016; Nooh, 2009), in an unmanageable way. The wide availability of satellite television facilitated reaching the mass global population and influencing their purchase decisions

The development of mass media technology has had its impact on shaping people's beliefs, attitudes and awareness. It is considered a significant source to control and influence society. Despite the positive role of advertising in the new millennium, it has raised many ethical concerns (Nagi, 2014; Anand, 2007; Chatterji, 2005). Previous research has shed the light on impact of the gender representation on advertising effectiveness, where the company image and purchase intention were the focus (Kumari and Shivani, 2014). However, few studies have investigated the implications of female portrayal on communication effectiveness (Leigh *et al.*, 1987; Kanungo and Pang, 1973; Ducker and Tucker, 1977). The portrayal of females in the advertising industry has been criticized because of unethical advertising practices, such as the dehumanization (Bongiorno *et al.*, 2013) and stereotyping of women (Smith, 2014).

Although women are gaining more rights and undertaking similar roles as men in the society, ads portrayal of women is still biased. The changing role of women in the society has led to a greater awareness of these issues within the advertising process. This biased version of females depicted in advertising becomes more abhorrent and is increasingly challenged. Advertisements look at women as sex objects and adornments strip women of their individual identities. Women being viewed as “things”, objects of male sexual desire, or as part of the merchandise offered as “rewards” for males who select the targeted product, is problematic. However, nudity and repetition of such adverts has increased at an alarming rate over time as a means of gaining more profit (Szymanski *et al.*, 2011; Ali and Shahwar, 2011; El Dahdoh, 2010). Although women are becoming more powerful in the society, still their image continues to be portrayed in a divisive way in many advertisement campaigns. (Alpay *et al.* 2015; Bongiorno *et al.*, 2013; Gallagher, 2016). The ‘sex sells’ axiom has existed for decades; as such, it has become increasingly difficult to elicit a shock factor from the society; thus, an increasingly unfazed populous adverts are continually pushing the lines of acceptability further and further (Smith, 2014; Szymanski *et al.*, 2011). However, the benefits reaped by companies is dubious – Bushman and Bonacci (2002) shows that using sex in advertising to make products and brands more memorable and attention-grabbing does not work, while Parker and Furnham (2007) found that advertisements of a sexual nature were no better recalled than those of a non-sexual nature, for similar products.

Though empirical research has argued the existence of the negative portrayal of women in advertising and its negative consequences on the society (Gallagher, 2016; Alpay *et al.*, 2015; Gulati, 2014; Mehmood and Malik, 2014; Khraim, 2012; Ansarali, 2011; Bayraktar, 2011; Singh and Sandhu, 2011; Feng and Karan, 2011; Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2011; Berberick, 2010; Nooh, 2009; Aryal, 2008; Johnston and Taylor, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2008; Ergin and Ozdemir, 2007;

Baker, 2005; Napoli *et al.*, 2003; Bower and Landreth, 2001; Shrikhande, 2003; Shrikhande, 1998; Ford *et al.*, 1991, 1997); still, its impact on the consumers' purchase decision-making has not been investigated among the female Palestinian market. The Palestinian context is novel and is considered a new contribution to science and knowledge. This is because Palestinian society is heavily influenced by Muslim values where Shariah (*Islamic Law*) prohibits the use of sexual suggestion or the body in any way to attract or convince consumers to purchase products. However, the use and availability of the internet indicates that this market is confronted with advertising campaigns and marketing methods not previously commonplace in the country. Such campaign are in direct conflict with the social norms of the country. Despite the aforementioned large array of studies conducted in disparate contexts, no previous work has considered the ads portrayal of females and its effect on the Palestinian consumers. We seek in this study to tackle this research gap.

## 2. Conceptual background

### 2.1 Purchase decision

Purchase decision can be defined as the thinking process which plays a significant role in addressing a need, selecting options and choosing a specific product and brand. Thus, it can be viewed as series of choices before making the purchase decision itself. Purchase decision include many aspects, as follows: the place at which the purchase decision can be made; what types of brand and model should be purchased; the time at which the purchase decision can be made; the manner through which the purchase decision can be made; the amount of money to be paid regarding the purchase; and what method of payment shall be used (Furaji *et al.*, 2013).

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, other external, internal and marketing factors influence the consumer decision process. External factors include culture, subculture, groups, situation, social class and family. Internal factors include perception, attitude, knowledge, personality, lifestyle, involvement and roles. As for marketing factors, they include product, package aesthetics, promotion, distribution, service and price (Xu and Chen, 2017).

Various models of consumer decision process are thoroughly examined in scholarly works, including: Nicosia model, Howard–Sheth model, Engel–Kollat–Blackwell model and Sheth–Newman–Gross model (Prasad and Jha, 2014). The consumer decision-making process typically undergoes several phases, as follows: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives and product choice (Solomon, 2012). In the problem *recognition* phase, the consumer throws light on the difference between the current state and the desired one. In the second phase, the consumer launches a product investigation to make a crucial decision. Evaluation of alternatives is undertaken in the third phase where the consumer identifies, categorizes and weighs up all the options. In the final phase, the consumers look at all the alternatives that do not meet their expectations (the non-compensatory rule) and then weigh up all the option, before making a momentous decision (Solomon, 2012).

### 2.2 Overview of women portrayals in advertising

Advertisements are usually designed to influence the consumer's purchase decision. They seek to exert an influence on the consumers' options with reference to their interests (Alpay *et al.*, 2015). Advertisements affect the consumers' perception of the product, restricting their capacity to consider other alternatives (Gulati, 2014).

Advertisement can be analyzed from different perspectives with the aim of exclusively focusing on the way in which different roles are represented through the marketing

communication channel. Projection of women in advertisements necessitates attention drawn by both marketing practitioners and scholars (Das, 2000; Lavikka, 2012). Role portrayal effectiveness has been found to be associated with the portrayal liberatedness and realism (Whipple and Courtney, 1985). Many studies discussed the portrayal of women in advertising targeting developed and developing countries. Previous studies have focused on female roles in magazine ads (Bahçeşehir *et al.*, 2015; Zotos and Tsihla, 2014; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009; Royo-Vela *et al.*, 2007; and Wiles *et al.*, 1995), while some studies analyzed the content of television commercials and their portrayal of females (Mansour and Diab, 2016; Asemah *et al.*, 2013; Martin, 2012; Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2011; and Wee *et al.*, 1995). Other studies focused on online media (El-Ibiary, 2017; Kumari and Joshi, 2015; and Bailey *et al.*, 2013).

Women in advertisements are usually represented as stereotypical nurtures or sex objects. This includes female Ad roles as working woman (Rudansky, 1991), sex object (Ibroscheva, 2007; Furnham *et al.*, 2001), physically attractive/decorative (Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente, 2007), housekeeping/household management (Nassif and Gunter, 2008), mother (Ibroscheva, 2007; and Rudansky, 1991), product user (Ibroscheva, 2007; Furnham and Mak, 1999), mannequin (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2011), social being (Koernig and Granitz, 2006), romantic role (Rudansky, 1991) and non-traditional activities (Razzouk *et al.*, 2003). For Whipple and Courtney (1985), when the advertiser chooses to portray a woman in advertising, the proper role portrayal becomes central issue, particularly when in advertising targeting women.

Gilly (1988) compared the advertisements sex role portrayal in the USA, Mexico and Australia. The results reveal differences in the portrayal of the sexes in US advertisements. Australian advertisements show somewhat fewer sex role differences and Mexican advertisements show slightly more sex role differences than US advertisements. Stereotypes are found in the advertising of all three countries. However, Kumari and Shivani (2014) considered advertisement female portrayals in India and evaluated the effect of female portrayals in advertisements based on the ads preference, attitude towards the Ad and the brand, in addition to the buying intention. The study results indicate an association between female portrayal in advertisements and Ad preference, brand liking, recognition, recall and images; however, less influence has been associated with the buying intention.

Research on the portrayal of females in Arab advertisements concluded that such portrayal contributed to predominately damaging the image of Arab females by presenting them in reductionist ways (Mehmood and Malik, 2014; Khraim, 2012; Ali and Shahwar, 2011; Reichert, 2002). This was attributed to the adoption of the following methods:

- restricting the image of Arab females to traditional roles as if they are responsible for meeting consumers' needs of all family households (the model of traditional female);
- linking females with sexual affinities and seduction (the model of the female body). An increased number of ads by large and small companies use the female body in the media in a sexualized way that draws attention. This practice might have been resulted from economic and cultural globalization leading local companies to make the ads of their products in the same style as those of the West; and
- Considering females solely as an article without sensation, dignity or affection, either mentally or intellectually. The model of the dumbbed-down female. Ads showing females as a human that cares only for mode, models and cosmetics and lacking cognitive powers.

Many studies investigate the impact of female portrayal in advertisements on purchasing intentions and behaviors of consumers in the literature. For instance,

[Antoniades and Warren \(2018\)](#) provided a valuable insight on how women are portrayed in the property profession. The property industry and the professional bodies can provide an influential role to promote gender equality. According to [Kordrostami \(2017\)](#), stereotypical female portrayals are still common in advertisements, while the role of women in the society has progressed. The findings of [Krishna et al. \(2015\)](#) proved that the female portrayal in advertising is changing the concept of respect about women, spreading uncultured values and also showed women's physical beauty as an instrument to induce the products demands. As mentioned earlier, the results of [Kumari and Shivani's study \(2014\)](#) revealed that the portrayal of females in advertisements has a lesser impact on intention to buy. The findings of [Dianoux and Linhart \(2010\)](#) showed that women adopt more negative attitudes toward advertisements that use sexy female models than do men, and this effect is independent of nationality in an European context. [Zimmerman and Dahlberg \(2008\)](#) concentrated on young female attitudes towards sexually objectified ads and found that the young females found these ads less offensive than the young females in 1991, and the ads had little effects on their purchasing intentions. In addition, [Reichert et al. \(2007\)](#) explained that media literacy and gender effects had significant effects on cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral responses of consumers towards the sexually objectified advertisements. Moreover, [Harker et al. \(2005\)](#) indicated that there was a significant relationship between feminist conscious and the attitudes towards sexually objectified portrayals in billboard ads by contrast with the results of the study of [Ford and LaTour \(1996\)](#). Furthermore, [Gould \(1994\)](#) examined whether the sexually body portrayals in advertising could prompt to consumers to buy products that they did not need. He found that the sexual appeal in advertising became effective when it was related to the product. Further, he found that the female consumers became dissatisfied with their bodies when they compared themselves with the sexual appeals in advertising. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H1. The portrayal of women in TV ads affects the Palestinian consumers' purchase decision.

### *2.3 Cultural and social diversity*

Culture is viewed as the core of ethics and social norms. In this context, culture could be defined as "ways of living, built up by a group of human beings that are transmitted from one generation to another" ([Robbins and Judge, 2013](#)). Cultural values may be transferred by a number of resources ([Samovar et al., 2012](#)), including family, media, school and state. According to [Morris \(2014\)](#) and [Keegan and Green \(2013\)](#), it is important to consider the cultural context to understand the culture differences and their reactions to communications and behavior.

Culture plays an important role in advertising, with language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and humanities representing major cultural components of ads. Cultural differences introduce a variation of local consumer behavior compared to foreign consumers in various aspects, including the what, why, who, how, when and where ([Albuam et al., 2005](#)). Thus, cultural differences should be managed when designing advertisements ([Albuam et al., 2005](#)). Marketers need to take into account the cultural traits, environments, norms, beliefs, religion and values of a particular country to investigate what is perceived as

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ethical and acceptable among the target audience (Haque *et al.*, 2010; Kalliny and Gentry, 2007).

Researchers argue that cultural differences and their effect on female portrayal in ads is particularly evident (Khraim, 2012; Huang and Elliott, 2010; Usman *et al.*, 2010; Kalliny and Gentry, 2007; Callow and Schiffman, 2004; Hong *et al.*, 1987). Previous studies demonstrate that response to sex appeal advertisement is not universal and varies according to the target viewers (Mittal and Lassar, 2000). Previous studies considered the role of women as portrayed in media ads in various countries (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2011; Nassif and Gunter, 2008; Ibroscheva, 2007; Fullerton, 2003; Furnham *et al.*, 2001; Royo *et al.*, 2001; Al-Makaty *et al.*, 1996). The cultures explored in such studies were heterogeneous economically, politically, racially, ethnically and religiously.

One of the most influencing factors on societies is religion according to Ariffin *et al.* (2016), Alam *et al.* (2011) and Cateora (1996). Religion is considered as one of the most sensitive elements of a culture. Understanding how the value system of the society is influenced by religious teachings and traditions shows the extent to which the religion can affect marketing. Weaver and Agle (2002) state that religiosity also has a strong impact on consumers' attitude and behavior. Religious effect must not be underestimated, as it impacts people's habits, their outlook on life, the product they buy, the way they buy them. Essoo and Dibb (2004) stressed that religion dictates consumers' alternative choices on food, grocery products and others products. Froehle (1994) argues that religiosity of consumers has become a vital part in marketing, especially in advertisements.

The Islamic cultural/social philosophy is based on the belief that all spheres of life: spiritual, social, political and economic form an indivisible unity that must be thoroughly imbued with Islamic values. The Holy Quran prohibits advertising if ads 'exploit' women in unethical ways (Al-Makaty *et al.*, 1996). In Islamic-oriented countries and societies, women are not allowed to be seen as provocative. Furthermore, revealing the female form is prohibited in Islamic laws and teaching; as such, it is difficult to find Ads that portray the female form as a sexual object.

The objectification of women in ads is cultural to a certain point (Kanter, 2008). According to Clow and Baack (2013), culture, religion and value systems determine the levels of nudity, sexual references and gender-specific issues that are allowed in a country. For instance, Muslim nations refuse any kind of nudity, any reference to sexuality and other gender-related issues. Any hint of sexuality or display of the female body is strictly forbidden. Some ads use religious terminology to reassure consumers of the Islamic integrity of products. In this context, some advertisers use selected Quranic injunctions and words to enhance the mood of the advertising communication to make it more appealing to Muslim consumers. A study conducted by Luqmani *et al.* (1987) provides an example of a manufactured water pump that uses a verse from the Quran in advertising. In a sense, it could be argued that people's religious beliefs are being 'exploited' by advertisers – so 'exploitation' is also happening just in a more socially/culturally acceptable way. The terms exploit, exploited and exploitation are in quotations to highlight the transient nature of what does or does not constitute exploitation depending on one's perspective.

Advertisements and products in Islamic countries used to meet cultural and Islamic standards (Wazir and Ezaz, 2012). However, the growth in available channels and the increased prevalence of satellite and internet connectivity has been enabling the reception of foreign television channels. This has been leading to a greater exposure to advertisements that are potentially incongruent with the national and Islamic culture



(Furnham and Paltzer, 2010). This paper examines the differences between the culture and social values of a consuming audience (in this case Palestinian females) and the culture and social values depicted in advertisements they are exposed to. Based on the above, we expect that:

H2. Cultural and social diversity between countries affects the Palestinian consumers' purchase decision.

#### 2.4 Research framework

The original work of various scholars (Schulze *et al.*, 2014; Khraim, 2012; Ali and Shahwar, 2011; Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2011; Berberick, 2010; El Dahdoh, 2010; Nassif and Gunter, 2008; Aryal, 2008; Ibroscheva, 2007) regarding input analyses was found to be useful in constructing this research model. The model is partially normative and descriptive, as can be seen in Figure 1. Cultural and social diversity relates to the difference between the culture and social values of the consuming audience (i.e. Palestinian females) and the culture and social values depicted in the advertisements they are confronted with in their daily life.

The proposals of Schulze *et al.* (2014), Khraim (2012), Ali and Shahwar (2011), Holtzhausen *et al.* (2011), Berberick (2010), El Dahdoh (2010), Nassif and Gunter (2008), Aryal (2008) and Ibroscheva (2007) are partially evident in the normative part of the model. However, the researchers are solely responsible for the descriptive part – upon which the hypotheses of this study will be based.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

In total, 395 female students from the three major universities in Gaza Strip participated in the study. As shown in Table I, Al-Aqsa female students accounted for the largest percentages of consumer respondents. The majority of the respondents were Art students. According to the academic level, female senior fourth-year students represented the highest percentage of respondents. The monthly family income of the respondents majority was less than US\$651.

#### 3.2 Procedure

The study followed a descriptive approach that is appropriate to answer questions on the effect of female portrayal in advertising on the Palestinian females' purchase decision. The

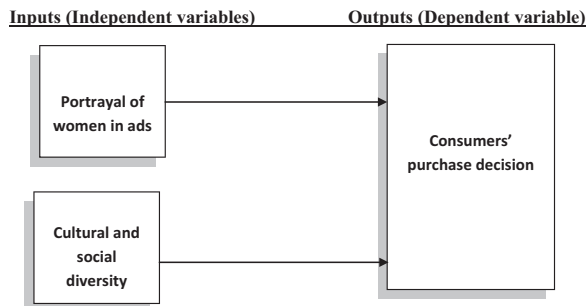


Figure 1.  
The research  
framework

**Table I.**  
Profile of consumer  
responden

Variables	Intervals	Frequency	(%)
University	Al-Aqsa	168	42
	Islamic	137	35
	Al-Azhar	90	23
Faculty	Art	117	30
	Business and Economics	105	27
	Engineering	76	19
	Science	73	18
	Other	24	6
Year of Study	Senior	145	37
	Junior	113	29
	Sophomore	89	22
	Freshman	48	12
Marital status	Single	329	83
	Married	62	16
	Other	4	1
Family monthly income	Less than US\$400	113	28
	US\$400-650	103	26
	US\$651-900	86	22
	US\$901-1,150	54	14
	US\$1,151-1,400	23	6
	More than US\$1,400	16	4

primary methodology of the study was survey research with data collected using a questionnaire. The original questionnaire was translated by a professional to the local Arabic language and then reviewed by two Arabic native speakers. The Arabic version of the questionnaire was pilot tested for accuracy and content validity. The questionnaire was administered by 15 trained data collectors and 3 supervisors who were experienced in marketing (A group of five data collectors with one supervisor for each university). Responses were collected through face-to-face interviews conducted by the trained data collectors. The supervisor duties include overseeing the data collection process and performing quality checks.

The population of the study was all the female students in the three major universities in Gaza Strip-Palestine (The Islamic University, Al-Aqsa University and Al-Azhar University). The number of female Bachelor degree students in the three university is 28,853 students, representing 74 per cent of the total number of female students in all the Gaza Strip universities (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2017). A random sample of 395 students was selected from the population according to the percentage of female students in each of the three major universities as shown in Table II. The sample size was calculated based on the following formula (Saunders *et al.*, 2012):

**Table II.**  
Distribution of the  
sample per  
university

University	Female students	(%)	Sample size
Islamic University	10,038	35	137
Al-Azhar University	6,552	23	90
Al-Aqsa University	12,263	42	168
Total	28,853	100	395



$$N = \frac{NP}{1 + (NP \times e^2)}$$

N: Sample size;  
NP: population size; and  
e: the errors term = 0.05.

More than 395 female students from the three universities were targeted to secure the calculated 395 sample. Some students refused to participate for various reasons. Others agreed to participate in the research, but either did not answer most of the questions or refused to fill in the questionnaire after reviewing it. Despite that, the researchers obtained 395 usable questionnaires. The questionnaire was reviewed and evaluated by marketing specialists (academicians and practitioners). The researchers modified the necessary parts of the questionnaire in response to the received feedback.

### 3.3 Measures

The researchers developed a questionnaire to investigate the effect of female portrayal in convenience and shopping products' ads through TV channels and online media on the Palestinian consumers' purchase decision. Palestinian female consumers were targeted. The questionnaire included 30 items organized as follows: personal information (5 items), women exploitation in convenience and shopping products' ads (11 items), cultural and social differences (9 items) and consumers' purchase decision (5 items). The participants were asked to respond on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = no opinion, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree).

After the preliminary design, a pilot study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the survey. The researchers distributed the questionnaire to a sample of 50 female students from the three major universities in the Gaza Strip. In addition, the researchers used Cronbach Alpha coefficient test to measure the questionnaire reliability of each section and the total average of the questionnaire. From the analysis, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for all questions was equal to 0.847 as shown in [Table III](#), a significant and highly reliable coefficient.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Factor analysis

To determine the factor structure, principal components factor analysis was applied to the scores obtained from the responses given by the 395 participants. In addition, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to evaluate data appropriateness for factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.895 (higher than the recommended KMO value of 0.50), and Bartlett's test was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.00$  level. The results show that the sample can be subjected to the principal components analysis to uncover the underlying patterns of the independent variables.

To present the factor score coefficient matrix estimated by the principal components analysis as shown in [Table III](#), one principal factor was rotated using the Varimax normalization. The factor consisted of 3 constructs for 25 items (questions). A loading value of 0.30 is the suggested minimum level for item loadings on given scales ([Hair et al., 2010](#); [Churchill, 1979](#)). The analysis results did not lead to the removal of any item. In all cases, the factor loadings were higher than the recommended 0.30 minimum and the cumulative percentage of variance is greater than the recommended 50 per cent ([Table III](#)). This indicates that the construct validity of the scales was supported. Therefore, all factors were acceptably good with a minimum value of 0.427.

Item	MV	SD	Component	Cronbach alpha 0.847 (for all questions)	Palestinian womens', purchase decision
			1		
Women exploitation in convenience and shopping products' ads	4.01	0.936		0.857	
The female body is used as a marketing tool in ads excessively	3.90	1.455	0.673		
The way females are portrayed in the ads is mismatched with eastern culture	4.31	1.026	0.616		
Ads emphasize on female beauty and charm rather than the product itself	4.20	1.251	0.678		
Showing females in a sexualized way in ads can negatively impact children watching these ads	4.24	1.218	0.716		
I feel very uncomfortable watching an ad that depicts females in a highly sexualized way in the presence of my family members	4.24	1.204	0.476		
Females are shown in a highly sexualized way in many ads, especially those targeting men	3.98	1.246	0.771		
Females are used in ads even in those not targeted at other females (products for men such as shavers. . .etc.)	3.87	1.213	0.770		
Females are shown in ads in a way that is detached from the reality for many females	3.97	1.174	0.677		
Showing females in a sexualized fashion in ads is merely for sexual incitement and to attract attention	3.91	1.359	0.786		
Advertisers are keen to choose beautiful young females as a means of attracting customers	4.16	1.193	0.720		
Ads disproportionately focusing on young females can damage other groups in society (eg. The elderly)	3.39	1.299	0.751		
Cultural and social differences	4.02	0.637		0.826	
I prefer the ads which are applicable to our customs and traditions	4.49	0.795	0.525		
I prefer the ads which shows our social and cultural environment	4.38	0.820	0.493		
Advertising which uses our cultural symbols influences me more than others	4.28	0.937	0.479		
I find the vocabulary used in ads is considered to be inappropriate and does not relate to our common expressions	3.46	1.194	0.476		
Advertisements which complies with our religious values are more effective and persuasive	4.34	0.856	0.510		
Portraying movements and gestures hinting to sex from a female in an ad is contrary to my ethics and morals	3.80	1.467	0.656		
Putting a great emphasis on beauty standards set by advertisers (using unattainable beauty) negatively affects the self-esteem of regular females	3.62	1.255	0.520		
Ads do not reflect the full range of roles of females in society	3.83	1.175	0.670		
Portraying females in a sexualized fashion may lead to increased instances of sexual harassment	4.02	1.259	0.666		

(continued)

**Table III.**  
Total variance explained and component matrix

Table III.

Item	MV	SD	Component	Cronbach alpha 0.847 (for all questions)
Consumers' purchase decision	3.68	1.076		0.864
Making a female show private body parts in advertising affect negatively my purchase decision	3.74	1.261	0.482	
A female using bad vocabulary in advertising affect negatively my purchase decision	3.71	1.317	0.534	
Seductive movements to males by females in ads affect negatively my purchase decision	3.68	1.336	0.532	
Sexualized clothing worn by females in ads affect negatively my purchase decision	3.52	1.332	0.456	
Adverts in which the image of females is different from my own ideal view in advertising affect negatively my purchase decision	3.76	1.255	0.427	

#### 4.2 Hypotheses testing

A multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between the independent variables (i.e. the portrayal of women in TV ads and cultural/social diversity between countries) and the dependent variable (i.e. Palestinian consumers' purchase decision). As shown in Table IV, the adjusted  $R^2 = 0.483$  which implies that 48.3 per cent of the total variance in consumers' purchase decision is accounted for by the independent variables. The  $F$  value was significant at 0.00. Therefore, the goodness of the model was supported. Further examination of the results showed that the portrayal of women in TV ads ( $\beta = 0.165$ ,  $t = 2.583$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and cultural/social diversity between countries ( $\beta = 0.266$ ,  $t = 4.158$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were positively related to the Palestinian consumers' purchase decision. Hence, there was enough evidence to support  $H1$  and  $H2$ .

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

#### 5.1 Discussion of findings

Analysis of the results show that female Palestinian consumers perception of female exploitation in advertisements, impacts their purchase decisions negatively. Such exploitation perception is linked to the consumers' cultural norms and the societal expectations that surround them. What is perfectly reasonable in one region or culture can be seen as wholly

Table IV.  
Results of multiple regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients Beta	T	Significant
	B	Standard error			
(Constant)	1.184	0.288		4.113	0.000
The portrayal of women in TV ads	0.202	0.078	0.165	2.583	0.010
Cultural and social diversity between countries	0.411	0.099	0.266	4.158	0.000

Notes: Dependent variable: the Palestinian consumers' purchase decision; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.483$ ,  $F = 186.204$  and Significance = 0.000

inappropriate in another. These findings align with the findings of some previous studies (Gallagher, 2016; Alpay *et al.*, 2015 ; Gulati, 2014 ; and Mehmood and Malik, 2014), which indicated that the existence of the negative portrayal of women in advertising and its negative consequences on the society.

The proliferation of satellite TV and online media indicates that advertising agencies and international firms are less able to control the reach of their promotional campaigns. Thus, it is important that they consider the potential impact of the ads when viewed by individuals from different cultures and societal norms. A brand image can become tarnished by particular cultures and societies if it is seen as contravening their morals (Kumari and Shivani, 2014; Furaji *et al.*, 2013). The authors are by no means suggesting advertisements with a potential global reach (via satellite TV and online streaming) should be created with Islam and Sharia law in mind; however, firms should be aware of the potential impact of advertisements on all their markets. While sexually suggestive advertisements may boost sales in one market, this study shows that it can reduce sales among female Palestinian consumers.

In this study, the advertisement role was negative because it was seen as contradicting community values without the advertiser realizing or intending to target that particular audience. Essentially, the role of advertising in stimulating purchase became ineffective, as it challenged the dominated communities culture. According to female Palestinian consumers, the way females are portrayed in certain advertisements (seen via satellite media) is misaligned or mismatched with the eastern Islamic culture. Such adverts highlight the disconnect between the portrayal of females in certain sections of the media and Palestinian females own reality. Cultural and social differences between regions are considered one of the most important factors that advertising agencies should take into consideration (Khraim, 2012). In general, the respondents prefer ads that align with their customs and traditions, social and cultural environment. Given the global nature of communication in the digital age, such alignment is only possible on local and national platforms (Khraim, 2012; Huang and Elliott, 2010; Usman *et al.*, 2010; Kalliny and Gentry, 2007; Callow and Schiffman, 2004). Advertisements that depict great gaps between life as portrayed in the advert and the real-life experience for consumers have a negative impact. These finding are in tandem with the work of other scholars (Khraim, 2012; Huang and Elliott, 2010; Usman *et al.*, 2010).

### *5.2 Managerial implications*

The results reveal that marketing appeals are linked to culture particularly those pertaining to female portrayal in advertising. Thus, it may be pertinent for companies creating campaigns with international or cross-cultural reach to develop culturally amorphous/ambiguous advertisements. Additionally, firms should be aware of the potential impact of advertisements on all their markets. While sexually suggestive advertisements may boost sales in one market, this study shows that it can reduce sales amongst female Palestinian consumers. Thus, firms should be aware of the potential trade-offs when designing and performing advertisement campaigns targeting multiple culture contexts. Such cultural trade-offs in conjunction with market size, disposable income and geographic visibility enable firms to develop advertising campaigns that best suit the majority of their consumers.

### *5.3 Practical implications*

The results as presented in Table III reveal that respondents indicated that the way females are portrayed in the ads is mismatched with eastern culture; ads emphasize on female beauty and charm rather than the product itself; showing females in a sexualized way in ads

can negatively impact children watching these ads; respondents feel very uncomfortable watching an ad that depicts females in a highly sexualized way in the presence of their family members; females are shown in ads in a way that is detached from the reality for many females; and they believe that advertisers are keen to choose beautiful young females as a means of attracting customers. Therefore, marketers should design their ads showing a match between the way females are portrayed and the eastern culture without any sexualized way to avoid the negative impact on children, in one hand, and the discomfort of watching ads that depict females in a highly sexualized way, in the other hand. Furthermore, the ads should be designed to show the reality of the females in their society matching their roles with the product relying on women of different age groups to attract the right customers rather than relying only on beautiful young females.

#### *5.4 Limitations and further research*

Although this study has used quantitative methodology utilizing the survey questionnaire to collect data from a relatively large sample, still like other studies, it has limitations. The study only collected data from female students in one Palestinian Territory, the Gaza Strip, the other West Bank territory was not included. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to all of Palestine. It is, thus, suggested that future study, while assessing the effect of female portrayal in advertising, can compare all Palestinian territories targeting different populations other than the student population within the same period of time.

The data collection in this study used self-reported data. Therefore, it is recommended that further research include multiple measures and data triangulation to more accurately assess the variables. This study was also based on cross-sectional data collection, rather than a longitudinal study to assess the effect of female portrayal in advertising. Future research should seek to improve on the limitations of the study. Researchers may make data collection less subjective by using other methods of obtaining data. Future research can take a longitudinal methodology rather than cross-sectional.

It should be clearly noted that although the research sample was randomly selected it is somewhat small and from a specific area in Palestine. Thus, a future research involving a large national sample – from both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – would offer a more thorough insight into the issue. This is because female attitudes may vary across Palestine.

Furthermore, this study analyzed how Palestinian females' purchasing decision is influenced by female portrayal in advertisements at a particular point in time; therefore, more research, particularly using baseline data, will facilitate to better assess changes in attitudes over time.

A useful study for future research could also focus on examining the attitudes of female consumers toward the portrayal of women in advertising. This will aid in determining whether advertisers are depicting women accurately and realistically, or a stereotypical depiction of women is continuing to persist.

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