
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Moroccan Youth and Sexuality: An Empirical Assessment of Visual Media Contribution

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ABSTRACT

Despite the advent of myriads of channels of visual communication, such as social networking sites, the medium of television has managed not only to survive but has rather transcended both time and space to be more readily accessible, be it synchronously or asynchronously and to reach larger audiences in remote and rather disadvantaged areas. However, many critics of televised mediated communication claim that TV offers stereotypical representations of family models gender relations and, at times, inflames racial and ethnic attitudes (Essani, 2007; Makboul, 2007; Marzouk, 2007; & Shalabih, 2007). Many programs aired on Arab satellite television, such as soap operas, sit-coms, and serials, are accused of disseminating illicit practices and allegedly 'deviant' sexual orientations. The purpose of this paper, then, is to examine the extent to which heavy viewing of imported television programs lead Moroccan university students to endorse permissive attitudes regarding premarital sex and same-sex sexual practices. One hypothesis was put forth to test these relationships, and a survey was used to collect data from the participants in the study. Results of the statistical analysis moderately corroborate the proposed postulate, and thus the findings generally do lend support to the cultivation theory. The paper closes by outlining key recommendations and suggesting directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan, television, sexuality, programs, attitudes, viewers

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1. Introduction

The idea that the mass media plays a significant role as a conveyor, teacher, and molder of values has been well-documented (Ayish, 2002; Frith & Mueller, 2003; & Harris, 1994). This becomes even more forceful if we contemplate the contemporary media scenery in which I.C.T.s have occupied a central position in people's lives. Kamalipour (2000) illustrates this point when she states that people "swim in a media-induced cultural environment that is inundated by a barrage of mass-produced images" (p. 56). With the genesis of countless means and sources of communication, information, and entertainment, many analysts and journalists had predicted the demise of the medium of television (TV) and its obsolescence as a potent source of entertainment, learning and socialization. However, the various novel devices, such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones, have rather empowered TV, rendered it more viable, as it did manage to defy the challenges of space, time, and mobility. The merits of this tool, for decades, need not be overstated here. It was once hailed as the most consequential invention and powerful socialization agent of modern times (Gerbner et al., 1994). Nonetheless, TV, in its many multifaceted forms, has also been a target of harsh criticism, mainly by parents, many educationalists and sociologists, for fostering anti-social behavior, endorsing unconventional attitudes and breeding alien values. More strikingly, advertising has been especially criticized among the various TV programs and genres for violating and distorting social values and standards in various areas pertaining to gender, ethnic, racial, and public taste issues (Leiss et al., 1997). Advertisers, on the other hand, have often rebuffed these charges by claiming that they merely have to "respond to social changes in values and taste only if and when they affect the market" (Ibid., p. 379). Critics, on the other hand, have always pointed out that values are not always presented and taught explicitly. Apart from a few programs, such as religious teachings and Public Service Announcements, TV values, goes the argument, may be coated in rather imperceptible and subliminal messages.

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The salient penetration of some unconventional values that are often dubbed as foreign, largely western, or even 'alien' and their presumed effects on the Moroccan traditional value-system constitutes a major motive for the present study. Indeed, the bulk of programming that features on Arab satellite television is imported from non-Arab countries. A huge portion is imported from western and Latin American countries, despite the huge efforts made by the Moroccan state-owned television channels as well as private ones to produce local programs whose content is specifically tailored to the needs and demands of avid Moroccan audiences. Such sheer overreliance on foreign 'diets' often results in accommodating visual material fraught with content and themes that may run counter to indigenous cultural schemata. Arab satellite television -or what came to be known as Direct Satellite Broadcasting (DBS)- is generally often accused of broadcasting scenes and pictures that titillate sexual innuendo, erotic scenes, and latent messages on sexuality and sexual practices.

2. Rationale and Framework

The influence of mass media on young people's sexual attitudes and behavior is perhaps one of the most widely researched topics among researchers in recent years. The increasing number of entertainment programs that teem with controversial sexual content, whether broadcast on TV or presented via other new media outlets, such as the Internet, has formed a constant source of worries for both parents and educators, many of whom are especially skeptical about the role of media as a sexual educator. As stated earlier, this research endeavor seeks to examine the attitudinal effect of heavy consumption of imported programming, particularly on Arab satellite television, on young Moroccan university students' representations vis-a-vis a number of issues related to sexuality. Despite its significance, empirical investigations in the Communications discipline of the theme of sexuality from a Moroccan perspective are anecdotal.

However, from a purely sociological standpoint, the issue of Moroccan youth's sexuality has been an area of inquiry and debate by a few researchers. Given the high influx of foreign popular culture, and thanks to the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (I.C.T.s), many young Moroccans are now able to defy traditional social values, norms, and sexual taboos. Ibrahim et al. (1999) attribute the emergence of nontraditional youth behavior to the lack of parental guidance on information and sexual matters. Rashad and Osman (2003), however, think that practices, such as premarital sex, can be understood as "a coping strategy among youth as a compromise to the economic constraints to marriage and the cultural denial of extra-marital sexual relations" (p. 39). From his part, Rabiaa (1996) thinks that exposure to foreign media may be the main reason behind the loosening of parental control and faith in traditional institutions, such as the school and family. He also believes that young Moroccans are faced with a critical dilemma in which they are torn between "conformity to social values, on the one hand, and a desire to cater for their needs, on the other" (Trans. mine, p. 25).

To conduct this study, the researcher adopted the 'Cultivation Theory' as the guiding framework because it remains, to date, one of the most influential perspectives for understanding and explaining media effects, in general, and television impact, in particular. It is also one of the few dominant models that have "generated considerable debate and criticism among a multitude of scholars" (Oliver, 2003, p. 430).

Simply put, this theory that was developed by George Gerbner, an influential communication scholar, stipulates that heavy exposure to television, in general, leads viewers to "perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the televised world" (Morgan et al., 1999, p. 48). TV, it follows, is a mass medium that performs the function of a homogenizing institution that projects dominant values and ideologies. Cultural identity is partly constructed and reinforced via a multitude of value-laden programs. This perspective bears striking affinity with critical cultural theorists. (Kellner, 1992). Gerbner and his associates liken the medium of TV to a mass religious ritual. They believe that TV presents "a daily ritual of highly compelling and informative content that forms a strong cultural link between elites and the rest of the population" (Gerbner et al. 1986, p. 18). They also posit that TV contributes to the enculturation and acculturation of social groups (Shrum, 2017). Some of the landmark constructs and key tenets of the hypothesis include the concepts of mainstreaming, resonance, Mean World Syndrome, and First Order and Second Order effects.

George Gerbner, the founder of the theory, had himself repeatedly called for more culture-based research to test the assumptions of the theory because he believes that "every country's television system reflects the historical, political, social, economic, and cultural contexts within which it has developed" (Gerbner et al., 1994, p.34). He also admits that the cultivation principles and findings "have been challenged, enriched, confirmed, and extended by studies of numerous independent investigators in the United States and abroad, and are still evolving especially as they are being applied in more and more countries" (Ibid., p.37).

3. Literature Review

Considerable empirical cultivation research has explored whether TV acts as a catalyst for social change or as a stringent lagging mechanism that reinforces the status quo in areas such as homosexuality, lesbianism, and trans-sexuality (Farrar et al., 2003). It should be emphasized, from the outset, that substantial effort has been made to exclusively limit this review to studies that are grounded in the cultivation theory as the latter forms the basic theoretical framework of the present research. Second, the

researcher has also focused on those benchmark studies that relate directly to the research topic and its hypothesis. Therefore, I will only report the results of those influential works that provide insightful explorations and hold interesting implications.

To begin with, a colossal study was conducted à la Gerbner by Nisbet and Shanahan (2005) to examine the long-term impact of cultural products, mainly TV, on the perception of the theme of homosexuality as an indicator of social and cultural shift. To operationalize the construct, the researchers devised a Cultural Indicator Index (C.I.I.) whose aim was to measure potential changes in the audience's views from 1977 through 2002. An extensive content analysis of salient TV programs broadcast over that 25-year period was also carried out.

The results of this large content analysis, enlightened by a similar in-depth analysis of the content of movies, books, and newspapers, showed that the topic of homosexuality was gradually becoming more socially acceptable and since "homosexuality was seen to have crossed an invisible border of permissibility, then television was free to incorporate this theme into its messages" (p. 15). The cultivation analysis in this research corroborated early cultivation findings. Heavy TV viewers were reported to be more tolerant towards homosexuals across the whole period of analysis. The researchers equally reported that TV portrayals act as lagging indicators of cultural change. This finding, they argue, confirms the original claim by Gerbner and his associates that TV is a social regulator that serves as "an arm of the existing social order that helps to express the views of elites that control both society and the media" (Ibid., p. 19). This research is especially praiseworthy for its longitudinal and quantitative design and its attempt to measure the cultivation effect within the broader cultural indicator project that seeks to trace gradual perceptible changes. Yet, the researchers themselves admit that the method of analysis they employed was rather rudimentary and that their C.I.I. need to be expanded in terms of both breadth and depth.

In the same vein, Rossler and Brosins (2001) set out to probe the effects of daily talk-show content on German adolescents' beliefs on the issues of homosexuality, lesbianism, trans-sexuality, and body adornment, such as tattooing and piercing. The researchers hypothesized that, since German talk-shows tend to heavily discuss the above controversial topics, adolescents' opinions and beliefs about those issues are likely to be formed and shaped by the programs' mainstream line of presentation. They also assumed that young viewers may be led to believe that "talk show presentations [act] as a surrogate for public opinion and infer their perception of what others think from talk-show content" (p. 149). What is especially noteworthy about the methodology of this study is its adoption of the experimental design, which is an unusual methodological occurrence in most cultivation studies. The subjects were assigned to two different groups -a control group and a focus one- pre-tested on their media use patterns, exposed to a five-fold treatment, and were asked to answer a lengthy questionnaire and respond to a final interview.

In aggregate, the results of this research indicated that adolescents who were subjected to the treatment, i.e., by watching and attending to unrestrictive attitudes on social and sexually oriented issues, were reported to express rather permissive and extreme viewpoints on the same issues. The cultivation effects were also proven to apply to both first and second order levels. However, the findings failed to support the transfer effect hypothesis that stipulates that the effects of daily talk-shows may extend beyond first and second order impact and influence the respondents' beliefs about other values, such as gender roles and faithfulness (Ibid., p. 157). Being essentially longitudinal and experimental, this study represents a staunch challenge to the conventional cultivation paradigm that conceives of the effects as byproducts of long-term exposure that cannot be measured in a confined laboratory. Still, many researchers might question the findings obtained from an artificial setting over a limited period of one week. Besides, respondents are highly uncontrollable beyond the laboratory treatment, and the replication of the findings is both unreliable and hardly applicable in other cultural settings. The researchers contend, however, that experiments should also be supplemented with other methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, with a view to "providing a complete picture of cultivation effects" (Rossler & Brosins, 2001, p. 160).

Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) employed the cultivation framework to assess the impact of entertainment programs -comedies and dramas- on American young adolescents' attitudes towards sexual beliefs, stereotypes, behavior and expectations. The researchers introduced the variable of the viewer's involvement, which they operationalized into five basic components, namely the "viewing motivation, active viewing, perceived realism, perceived relevance, and identification" (p. 1). The study elicited the 314 participants' attitudes towards sexual issues, such as dating, sexual roles, romantic relationships, personal sexual behavior, experience, and expectations. Using the regression analysis method, the results generally indicated that "TV viewing is associated with sexual outcomes in important and diverse ways" (Ibid., p. 8). They also concluded that viewer amount and viewer involvement were important predictors of the respondents' sexual attitudes, behavior, and expectations. Another interesting finding of the study is the differential divergence among the sexes. Females were reported to expect males to be more sexually active and experienced. In sum, the research carried out by Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) clearly documented that TV does "shape adolescents' sense of what is normative and expected" (p. 9). This project, as the researchers themselves claim, is a pioneering endeavor that "breaks new ground in exploring television's multi-faceted role in the sexual socialization" (Ibid.) of young people. Clearly enough, it remains to be ascertained whether Arab satellite TV programming offers sexual lessons that can shape Moroccan young viewers' sexual beliefs and attitudes.

On the same issue, Werner-Wilson, Fitzharris and Morrissey (2004) explored the extent to which the mass media, and TV in particular, affect the perceptions of both adolescents and their parents about sexuality. The research team was also interested in identifying the various strategies that adolescents use in approaching sexual content. Another purpose of the project was to understand and explain media messages and portrayals that constitute, according to participants, proper and responsible sexual practice. The study, which adopted the qualitative method, used the snowball technique to recruit adolescents. Both adolescents and their parents were given separate interviews, which sought, without prompting, to assess "the relative importance of a fixed set of factors, such as parents, peers and the media" (p. 4) on adolescents' sexuality. What transpired from the study is that, in regard to media effects, most adolescents believed that TV sexual messages did not significantly affect their sexual behavior. In contrast, parents were especially "concerned about the effects of media content" (Ibid., p. 5). At the level of sexuality education, both adolescents and their parents agreed on the positive role the media, and especially TV, play in promoting sexual responsibility and awareness towards many issues like sexually transmissible diseases. While the empirical validity of the study might be well contested because of its qualitative cross-sectional research design, the main merit of this research resides in the downgrading of the moral panic over TV's presumed mesmerizing effect and the conclusion that we "need to convince adolescents that concerns about the media are valid before trying to change media influenced behavior" (Werner-Wilson et al. (2004, p. 6).

Combining two theoretical models, Hackbarth (2006) examined the impact of exposure to sexually explicit media content on the students' sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. The researcher was interested in exploring the proportional effect, compared to TV, several media forms, such as the Internet, music and video programs, and videogames, on the respondents' perceptions of sexuality and the shaping of sexual practices. Hackbarth's study harnessed Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory on the ground that it offers an enlightening insight into the dynamics of TV exposure and how it functions as a source of sexual education and learning for youth. Analyzing the data obtained from a large survey, the researcher's main finding was the absence of a high correlation among young American university students between heavy TV consumption and the development of sexual beliefs and behaviors. Rather, one interesting finding of the study is the significant correlation between the students' sexual value-orientations and behavior and the use of sexually-fraught media content, mainly the Internet, music, DVDs, and videogames. Overall, this study underscored the need for cultivation researchers to expand the scope of their framework to include other media forms, mainly the Internet, and to comparatively gauge their relative weight of cultivating sexual attitudes, especially among young viewers. It also alerts to potentially incremental changes in media consumption patterns. The incorporation of a secondary research tool to obtain data from respondents, however, seems to have limited the reliability and generalizability of most findings of this research.

4. Methodology

Several hardline cultivation analysts utilize the traditional but more standardized and unambiguous measures by splitting the sample into three different categories. The first group of viewers consumes less than two hours per day, whereas the second group watches between 2 and 4 hours per day. The third group consumes more than four hours per day (Gerbner et al., 1980). To find a way out of this methodological clutter, I adopted a lenient version of the traditional cultivation measurement scale. The respondents were given six options, i.e., no time at all, less than 1 hour, between 1 and 2 hours, between 2 and 3 hours, between 3 and 4 hours, and more than 4 hours. The first two options sought to measure light viewership, while the third and fourth options measured moderate viewership. The participants who opted for the fifth or sixth option were considered heavy viewers. This study has put forth one general hypothesis that relates to the issue of sexuality. This research hypothesis runs as follows.

H: High exposure to imported programs will lead viewers to endorse more permissive attitudes regarding premarital sex and same-sex sexual practices.

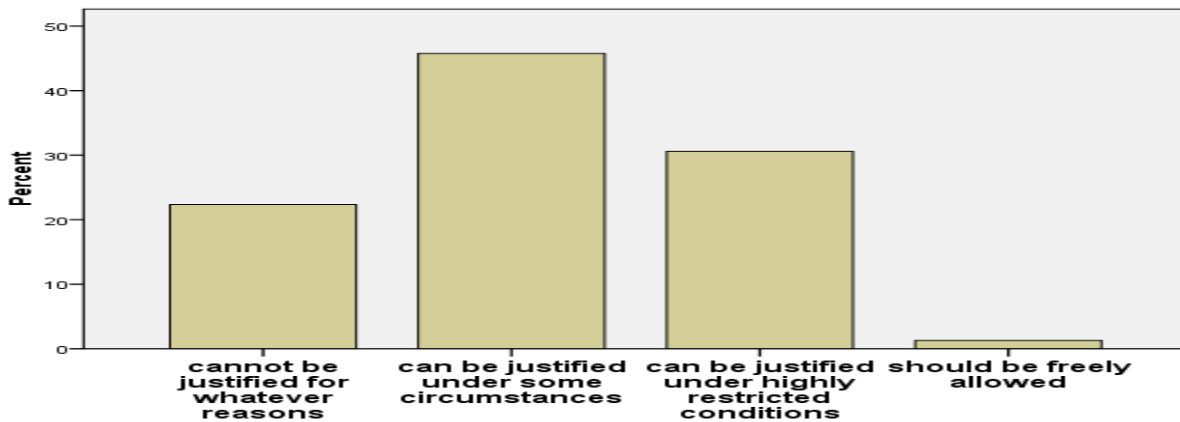
This hypothesis assumes that high exposure to imported programs will lead viewers to endorse more permissive attitudes regarding premarital sex and same-sex sexual practices. In the coding sheets, a respondent was rated amongst the heavy viewers of overall imported programs if s/he is, in priori, considered a high consumer of two or more imported program categories. The initial analysis of the independent variable revealed that 14.5% (59 students) of all respondents were considered heavy viewers of overall imported programs.

The sample of this research comprises 408 students who agreed to voluntarily participate in this study. All these participants pursue their higher education in various institutions in the city of Meknès. 128 participants (31.4%) were enrolled in Les Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles d'Ingénieurs (CPGE) in Omar Ibn El Khattab high school. 94 students (23%) are engineering students from L'École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts et Métiers (ENSAM). A large number of students (106) belong to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Meknes and are registered in diverse paths and streams. A smaller portion of 34 participants (8.3%) are affiliated with the Faculty of Sciences, whereas 46 students (11.3%) belong to the Faculty of Law and Economics. In terms of gender, 54.4% are males, while 46.6% are females.

5. Results and Discussion

This section will report and discuss the statistical findings pertaining to the questions posed in the survey to test the research hypothesis. To begin with, the hypothesis assumes that high exposure to imported programs will lead viewers to endorse more permissive attitudes regarding premarital sex and same-sex sexual practices. As explained in the coding sheets, a respondent was rated amongst the heavy viewers of overall imported programs if s/he is, in priori, considered a high consumer of two or more imported program categories. The initial analysis of the independent variable revealed that 14.5% (59 students) of all respondents were considered heavy viewers of overall imported programs. The first dependent variable in the hypothesis concerned the students' attitudes towards premarital sexual relationships. Graph 1 below displays the results.

Graph 1 Attitudes towards premarital sexual relationships



Generally speaking, only 22.4% of all respondents hold that premarital relationships cannot be justified for whatever reasons and, therefore, must be disallowed. On the other hand, a sizeable portion of 45.8% believes that there exist certain conditions and reasons for allowing such sexual behaviour to occur. It was imperative, naturally, to examine this attitude with reference to heavy versus light viewership. The following contingency table exhibits the results.

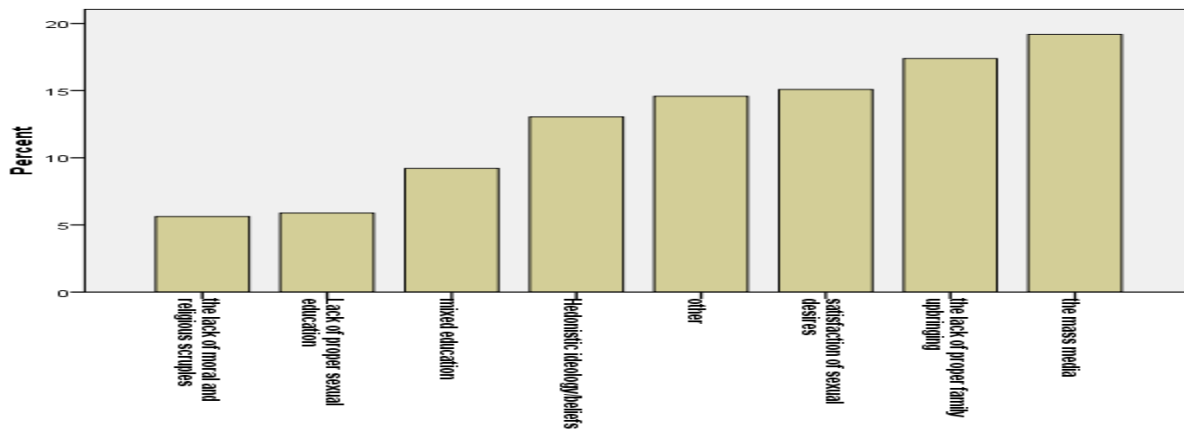
Table 1 Attitudes towards premarital sexual relationships

	Heavy viewer	Light viewer	Total
cannot be justified for whatever reasons	27,3%	21,6%	22,4%
can be justified under some circumstances	38,2%	47,0%	45,8%
can be justified under highly restricted conditions	32,7%	30,2%	30,6%
should be freely allowed	1,8%	1,2%	1,3%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Despite the apparently differing and dissimilar rates in the first and second opinions of heavy viewers, they both generally reflect wide support for premarital sexual relationships. The third and fourth options do also show little differences between the two viewing units. Such unvarying attitudes had definitely been reflected in the correlation test, which yielded 0.009. The Pearson X2 test, in its turn, produced a 0.630 significance level.

The opponents to having sexual intercourse prior to marrying were not asked about the main reasons behind their viewpoints. The regression analysis did not reveal any significant direct relationships between the attitude and other intervening variables, mainly socio-demographics, religiosity, and other media use. These students may probably believe that such behaviour can engender many psychological, physical, and social problems like teen pregnancy. Some of them, girls in particular, also believe that very few premarital relationships end up with marriages and that females are often 'victimized' in a traditional society that often relentlessly blames and incriminates women for wrong-doings. Thus, the fear of social stigma, coupled with religious, moral scruples, can heighten many youths' abstinence and self-restraint and may persuade them to await "safe and pure sex" in later marriages. Those who hold different views on the issues were questioned about their main motives. Let us consider their general opinions.

Graph 2 Attitudes towards reasons for premarital sexual relationships



The above graph, though not very exhaustive, is very suggestive as it mirrors most young students' reasons and justifications that can drive some of them to have premarital sexual intercourse. Interestingly, the mass media stand out as one major important factor (19.2%) behind the temptation of Moroccan youth. Indeed, today's massive influx of I.C.T.s, especially satellite stations and social networks, provide torrents of enticing materials, usually erotic and pornographic, that are liable to drive youth to look for early 'romantic' encounters. To explore the role of imported programming further, the table below reveals the findings.

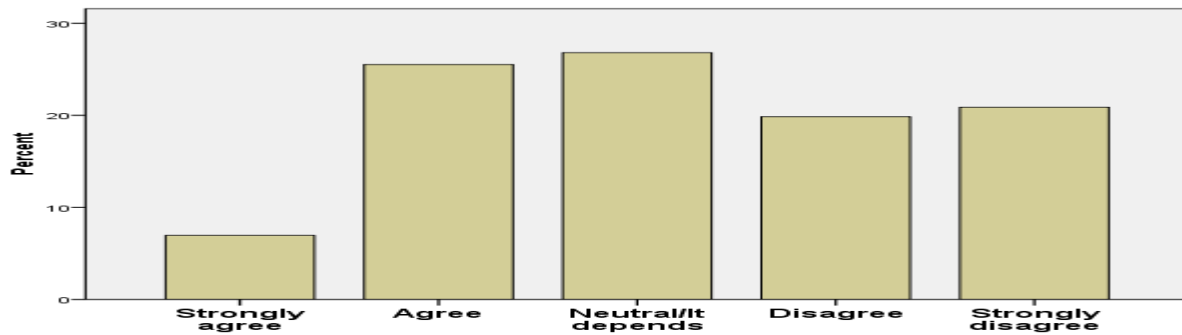
Table 2 Attitudes towards reasons for premarital sexual relationships

	Heavy viewer	Light viewer	Total
the lack of moral and religious scruples	3,6%	6,0%	5,6%
the lack of proper family upbringing	14,3%	17,9%	17,4%
the mass media	23,2%	18,5%	19,2%
mixed education	7,1%	9,6%	9,2%
satisfaction of sexual desires	16,1%	14,9%	15,1%
Lack of proper sexual education	7,1%	5,7%	5,9%
Hedonistic ideology/beliefs	19,6%	11,9%	13,0%
Other	8,9%	15,5%	14,6%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

As the above table demonstrates, there figured no substantial differences between the two viewing classes. Heavy viewers, though, granted more importance to the roles of mass media, the satisfaction of sexual drives and the existence of hedonistic beliefs amongst students. These mild differences, again, did not produce a high correlation level (-0.017). The X2 significance test only yielded 0.594.

These conclusions, then, should mitigate the social panic that imported programs are ferocious agents of youth delinquency and perversion, notwithstanding the numerous Mexican, Brazilian, French, American and other western movies and tele-novellas that tend to legitimate and trivialize, through their portrayals, the acts of premarital sexual relationships. To illustrate, one classic precursor of Mexican tele-novellas -Guadalupe-, which contains more than 300 episodes and which was aired on Al Oula over the years of 1995 and 1996, relates the story of a young girl who was born out of wed-lock and was abandoned by her rich father at a very early age. Later, she fell in love with a tycoon and gave birth to legally an 'illegitimate' girl who, in her turn, engaged in a premarital romantic affair to eventually give birth to another 'illegitimate' child. Next, we sought to elicit the students' views regarding the attitude that early marriage is an effective solution to premarital sexual problems. Let us consider the graph below.

Graph 3 Attitudes towards early marriage as a solution to premarital



A number of respondents (26%) are undecided about the issue. Generally speaking, there seem to be no big differences between agreement and disagreement options. Despite such unexpected figures, nearly all students were familiar with the main changes that were introduced to the Moroccan family code, notably in the integration of strict restrictions regarding early marriage, which was, along with international standards and universal human rights, fixed at the age of 18. So, the word 'early' does not definitely refer to child marriages, which are outlawed by both national and international legislations, as they are considered a sheer violation of basic human rights. The word 'early', thus, is better understood in contrast to delayed marriage or nuptiality, which is a rising phenomenon amongst Moroccan youth because of many factors, such as pursuing higher education and unemployment. Table 3 below exhibits the differences between the two viewing groups.

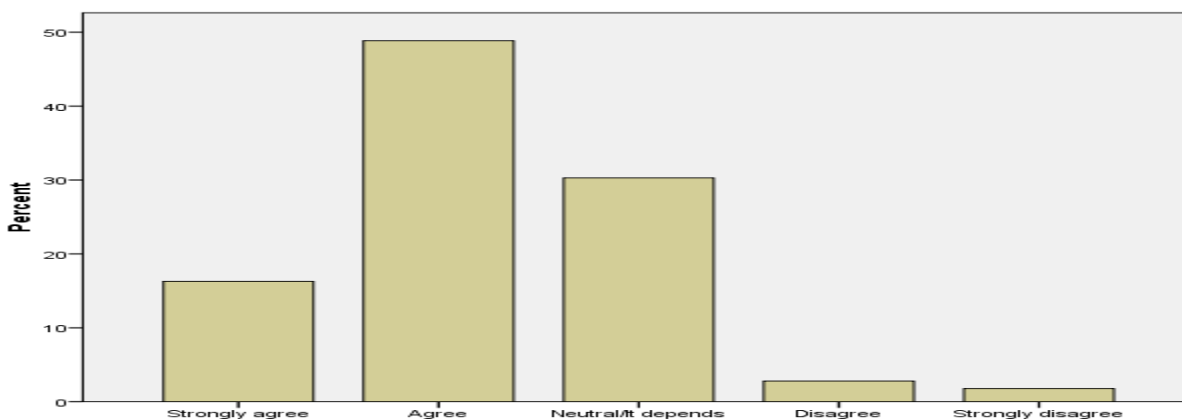
Table 3: Attitudes towards early marriage as a solution to premarital

	Heavy viewer	Light viewer	Total
Strongly agree	7,0%	6,9%	7,0%
Agree	24,6%	25,7%	25,5%
Neutral/It depends	24,6%	27,2%	26,8%
Disagree	14,0%	20,8%	19,8%
Strongly disagree	29,8%	19,3%	20,9%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Here again, no significant differences emerged from the analysis. The poor negative correlation of -0.044 testifies to this observation. Equally, a low significant value was registered in the Pearson X2 test. This partly undermines the hypothesized relationship. Another sub-crosstab analysis was run to explore the relationship between self-rated religiosity and the attitude in question. Curiously enough, no important intervening association was found. Running that sub-analysis was basically driven by a desire to pinpoint any effect of some 'weird' and unusual religious fatwas issued on some Arab satellite TV channels and on the Internet and which authorize child marriage. One such fatwa was issued by the then controversial Moroccan cleric Mohamed ben Abd Arrahmane El Maghraoui in September 2008, who was reported to allow the marriage of 9-year-old girls (Touahri, 2008, p. 1). Obviously, this fatwa was promptly rejected by Morocco's Ulema's council and was met with disdainful reactions from most Human Rights' organizations.

The next item in the hypothesis asked the students to give their opinions concerning a statement that postulates that taking contraceptives and using condoms must be exclusively reserved for married people. First, here is a graphic representation of the overall tendencies.

Graph 4 Attitudes towards the use of condoms and contraceptives



Statement: Taking contraceptives and using condoms must be exclusively reserved for married people.

As the graph displays, 48.9% show their agreement with the statement, while very few respondents expressed their disapproval. Now, we move on to consider the following contingency table.

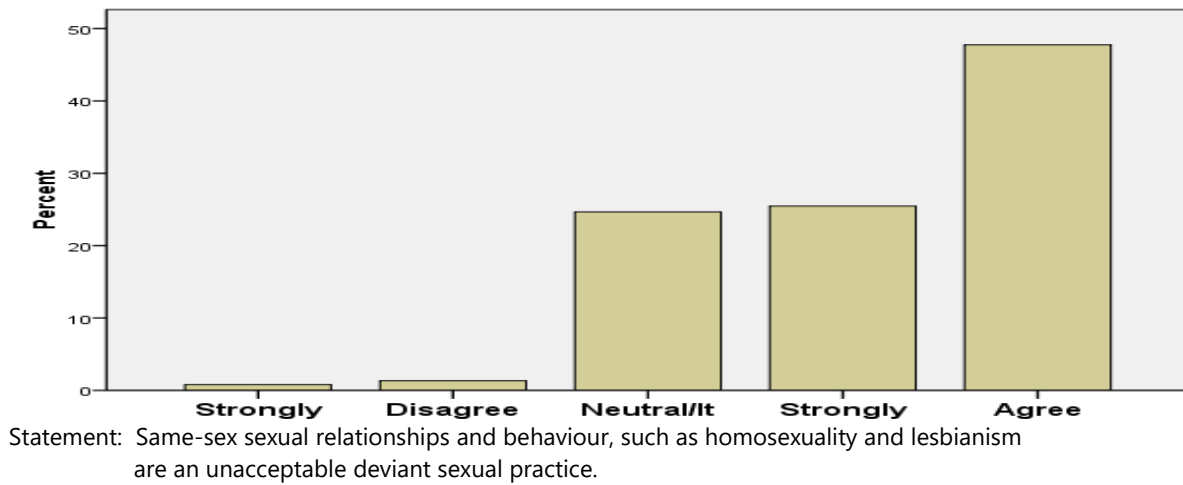
Table Attitudes towards the use of condoms and contraceptives

	Heavy viewer	Light viewer	Total
Strongly agree	29,1%	14,2%	16,3%
Agree	43,6%	49,7%	48,9%
Neutral/It depends	21,8%	31,7%	30,3%
Disagree		3,3%	2,8%
Strongly disagree	5,5%	1,2%	1,8%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Both viewing categories generally share the same inclinations. Although the correlation analysis did not yield a strong relationship pattern (0.062), the Pearson chi-square test revealed a highly statistical significance ($p < 0.005$). Seen from a purely religious perspective, nearly all respondents believe that premarital sex is an unequivocally forbidden act by Islamic jurisprudence. However, the reality is that a fairly considerable number of Moroccan adolescents and young adults (53, 28%) use condoms and contraceptives as 'safer' ways to avoid teen pregnancy and to ward off sexually transmissible diseases (STDs), mainly AIDS (The National Program for the Fight against STDs and AIDS, 2007). Although most respondents seem against the use of preventive measures, at least in principle, the reality may be, in my view, grossly different. Admittedly, the Moroccan media, especially 2M, in an attempt to fight AIDS spread amongst youth, had organized several telethon nights to raise funds for infected people. In doing so, they frequently campaign for the adoption of 'safe' sexual practices that include the use of condoms and contraceptives. These campaigns were, in turn, countered by other similar anti-campaigns by most Islamist press that accused those TV shows of disseminating an alien culture of promiscuity, permissiveness and perversion amongst Moroccan youth.

The last item in the hypothesis is about same-sex sexual relationships and behaviour, such as homosexuality and lesbianism. The students were invited to agree or disagree with a statement that qualifies the above sexual relationships as an unacceptable deviant sexual practice. Let us consider graph 5 below.

Graph 5 Attitudes towards same-sex sexual relationships



As expected, most respondents agreed with the statement, which implied their rejection of such sexual practices within the Moroccan context. Of equal interest is the important rate of neutral respondents (24.7%). Disagreements barely surpass the 02% of total answers. To verify the hypothesis, the following crosstab analysis was run.

Table 5 Attitudes towards same-sex sexual relationships

	Heavy viewer	Light viewer	Total
Strongly agree	33,3%	24,1%	25,5%
Agree	46,3%	48,0%	47,7%
Neutral/It depends	20,4%	25,4%	24,7%
Disagree		1,5%	1,3%
Strongly disagree		,9%	,8%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

To our surprise, amongst all heavy viewers, there transpired no disagreement attitudes at all, compared to light viewers. This finding gives the analyst the impression that light viewers are relatively more tolerant of asocial sexual relationships and practices. One still needs to exercise caution as that difference may be attributed to the larger number of light viewers in comparison to their heavy viewing counterparts. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a highly significant association between the two variables ($p < 0.05$), although the X2 test only produced a tiny significance level (0.498). Several partial correlations were carried out to investigate the potential spuriousness of the relationship. After controlling for age, gender, educational level, socio-economic status, and program-type reality reflection and attention level estimates, the significance level of the association remained very significant.

Broadly speaking, the emergence of opinions that support same-sex relationships may be partly attributed to the role of Arab media in general and also to some Moroccan newspapers and magazines. For instance, the former Moroccan weekly magazine 'Nichane', in my view, tended to generally adopt a more lenient stance towards such people by describing them as being merely sexually different and thus need to be treated with respect rather than be socially stigmatized. Besides, the high rate of neutral responses might support this view. Also, the argument goes on: sexual rights are inextricably related to fundamental human rights. Overall, then, the hypothesis was partly confirmed.

6. Summary of findings and Conclusion

This paper has thus far sought to explore the association between heavy exposure to imported TV programs and the endorsement of liberal and highly 'permissive' attitudes towards premarital sex and same-sex sexual practices. A major significance of the study derives from the attempt to unravel the rather socially controversial and thorny issue of sexuality from the lenses of the cultivation theory, which is basically a theory of social control that focuses on how visual culture molds our view of the world and perception of social and cultural reality. With regard to same-sex sexual relationships and behaviour, such as homosexuality and lesbianism, results showed that most respondents do not endorse such sexual practices within the Moroccan context.

Overall, our initial hypothesis was only moderately validated. Indeed, most respondents believe that premarital sexual relationships can be justified and, therefore, should not be disallowed. Similarly, a sizeable portion believes that there exist certain conditions and reasons for allowing such sexual behaviour to occur. The regression analysis did not reveal any significant direct relationships between the attitude and other intervening variables, mainly socio-demographics, religiosity, and other media use. As to the reasons, the mass media, the satisfaction of sexual drives and the existence of hedonistic beliefs amongst students were particularly accused by many young participants for standing behind the temptation to engage in such acts.

The above results do surely provide significant implications for all concerned parties in the media management system and other institutional agencies. They also offer insights into how today's youth approach media content and how their value system can gradually be shaped in a slightly imperceptible pattern. The findings do also hold serious implications for psychological, sociological, and cultural scholars. The results can equally provide interesting input for specialists in areas of educational policy and curriculum design, as well as NGOs interested in civil liberties and human rights. The ever-growing and fast expansion of a predominantly digital society makes it imperative for the Moroccan stakeholders to cater to the needs of a tech-savvy generation that not only consumes traditional media, such as TV but is now capable of producing digital content on various social networking platforms that is hard to control, verify and assess for veracity. The urgent need to prepare a critical and 'immune' youth who are liable to successfully navigate torrents of largely uncensored media messages and to resist their manipulation remains a crucial challenge to the government's bid to develop the much-awaited national media literacy strategy. Substantial investments should be geared towards developing a media industry that not only entertains the viewers' but does every effort to instil cultural maturity, inspire curiosity and provide avenues for intellectual exchange.

Just like all research endeavors, this study is not without imperfections and limitations. One such limitation concerns the research design espoused to test the hypothesis. Clearly, this study is a cross-sectional one, which means that it was conducted over a limited period of time and, hence, all its findings should be contextualized in both time and space. Truly, this is not the most effective way to gauge the impact of mass media because of the intricate nature of human exposure and consumption patterns, in addition to the intervention of several variables in the cultivation process. Leading cultivation theorists claim that cultivation is a long and cumulative process. Therefore, a reliable and valid measurement of its manifestations presupposes the adoption of not only an experimental design but also a longitudinal one in which viewers are assessed over an extended number of years or even during their whole lifetimes. This is obviously a formidable undertaking as it calls for the involvement of other academic organizations and the sponsorship of the state. Overall, this limitation remains an inherent shortcoming of most research studies carried out within the cultivation framework.

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