

The logo for Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) is a red square containing the lowercase letters 'upf.' in a white, serif font.

**upf.**

**Universitat  
Pompeu Fabra  
Barcelona**

**July'23**

**MASTERS  
THESIS**

**EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF RAMADAN  
ENTERTAINMENT IN EGYPT:  
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT,  
MEDIA STAKEHOLDERS'  
PERSPECTIVES, AND SOCIETAL  
IMPLICATIONS**

A thesis by  
**Malak Nabil**

Supervised by  
**Mercè Oliva**

Department of Communication

# Modality A: Research Dissertation

Exploring the Impact of Ramadan

Entertainment in Egypt: A Qualitative Analysis

of Social Media Engagement, Media

Stakeholders' Perspectives, and Societal

Implications.

*Malak Nabil Abdelnaeim Mohamed*

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of  
Pompeu Fabra University,  
for the award of Masters Degree in Digital Culture and  
Emerging Media

Academic year 2022-2023

## Abstract

---

Ramadan entertainment has immense sway over Egyptian audiences and despite its popularity, there is a gap in the research conducted around this topic, particularly when it comes to the role played by social media as well as the perspective of media stakeholders. This study aims to identify and analyze the key elements that contributed to the popularity of Ramadan entertainment. Additionally, the study aims to assess the extent to which the audience's engagement with these series on social media is creating momentum for reform and raising awareness about the topics discussed on these dramas. Furthermore, the researcher aims to investigate how Ramadan entertainment fits into the broader media landscape of Egypt and how Egyptian media stakeholders perceive the paradigm shift caused by social media. The study employs a qualitative methodology using two main methods of data collection: semi-structured in-depth interviews and thematic social media content analysis. The findings contribute to deeper understanding of the dynamics within Ramadan entertainment and the audience. Additionally, this study provides recommendations for media practitioners on leveraging Ramadan entertainment to address social justice issues and promote responsible media practices. Overall, this research expands the existing knowledge base on Ramadan entertainment in Egypt, shedding light on its cultural significance, the influence of social media, and its potential for driving societal reform. The findings have broader implications for the media landscape and can guide future research exploring the complexities and implications of Ramadan entertainment on Egyptian society.

**Keywords:** Ramadan, Entertainment, Arab media, Egyptian audience, Social media, Social reform, Awareness, Audience engagement, and Media stakeholders

## Acknowledgements

---

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to the completion of this research project.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest thank you to my supervisor, Professor Mercè Oliva, for her invaluable guidance. Her insightful feedback and constructive criticism have been instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of this study.

Additionally, I want to deeply thank Professors Alan Tapscott and Joaquim Colas for their willingness to invest their time and effort in guiding me through the intricate aspects of my research. Your meaningful feedback helped me refine my thesis and expand my understanding. I am immensely grateful for your selflessness and expertise.

I am also indebted to the participants of this research, who generously shared their perspectives and insights during the in-depth interviews. Their contribution has enriched this study and provided valuable firsthand information.

Last but most definitely not least, I would like to acknowledge the support of my family. Starting with my mom, her unwavering encouragement throughout this research endeavor. Her words of wisdom rang in my ear every time I felt burnt out or close to giving up. Her love, warmth and belief in me have been a constant source of motivation, even from continents away. I would like to extend a special mention and heartfelt appreciation to my sister, Farah. She has been my main supporter and a constant source of encouragement throughout this research journey. Her unwavering belief in my abilities, her words of encouragement, and her understanding have played a significant role in keeping me motivated during challenging times. Not only is she an impeccable researcher in her own right, but also the best and most supportive sister. I am truly grateful for her presence in my life and for being a pillar of support. Thank you, Farah, for always being there for me. To my father, thank you for your constant effort to keep me calm and for continuously investing in my academic journey. To my baby brother, you always reminded me how important my work is. Our calls and inside jokes have been a push for me more than you'll ever realize. Finally, to the honorary member of my family, Maryam. You're my best friend and my anchor. You have helped me

tremendously throughout this tough journey. I owe you so much. I love you all from the bottom of my heart. This one goes out to you.

# Table of contents

---

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Table of contents</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Review of literature</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1 Ramadan in context.....	11
2.2 Significant portrayals.....	13
2.3 Nationalistic television series .....	18
<b>Chapter 3: Theoretical framework</b> .....	<b>23</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	23
3.2 Agenda Setting Theory .....	23
3.3 Mediatization Theory .....	24
3.4 Integration of theories .....	24
<b>Chapter 4: Methodology</b> .....	<b>26</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	26
4.2 Data collection.....	26
4.2.1 Social media content analysis .....	26
4.2.2 In-depth interviews .....	27
4.3 Data analysis .....	28
4.3.1 Social media content analysis .....	28
4.3.2 In-depth interviews .....	28
4.4 Inclusion Criteria .....	28
4.4.1 Social media content analysis .....	28
4.4.2 In-depth interviews .....	31
<b>Chapter 5: Results</b> .....	<b>32</b>

5.1	Social media content analysis .....	32
5.1.1	Relationship.....	33
5.1.2	Law, awareness and power dynamics .....	34
5.1.3	Morality and media responsibility .....	36
5.1.4	Critique of the work .....	37
5.2	In-depth interviews .....	39
5.2.1	Ramadan’s popularity .....	41
5.2.2	Ramadan and social media .....	42
5.2.3	Reform and social awareness .....	43
5.2.4	Nationalistic series .....	45
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<b>Discussion &amp; limitations.....</b>	<b>47</b>
6.1	Discussion .....	47
6.2	Limitations .....	49
<b>Chapter 7:</b>	<b>Conclusion and recommendations .....</b>	<b>50</b>
7.1	Conclusion .....	50
7.2	Recommendations.....	52
7.2.1	Recommendations for future researchers.....	52
7.2.2	Recommendations for media stakeholders.....	53
<b>Chapter 8:</b>	<b>References .....</b>	<b>54</b>



## Chapter 1: Introduction

---

The holy month of Ramadan has long been a significant period for Egyptians, not only for the religious value it holds but also as an integral part of the very fabric of Egyptian culture. It is a time of family, gatherings and a continuously growing cultural phenomenon- Ramadan Entertainment. This genre has become a significant part of Egyptian popular culture, with the majority of the population tuning in to watch Ramadan series (Othman, 2020). It's crucial to understand the growth and cultural significance of Ramadan entertainment for a number of factors. Firstly, it offers information on the shifting tastes and preferences of Egyptian viewers as well as the social and cultural conditions that influence these choices. Secondly, it offers a lens through which to study Egypt's larger socio-political and cultural scene and its relation to the media, particularly the connection between political messaging through entertainment. Moreover, the role of social media in creating a forum for debates and discussions, in order to examine how these discussions and debates about Ramadan series on social media have been manifesting. There is ample evidence that suggests that social media debates are creating momentum for reform especially in areas of violence against women, family laws and mental health. Lastly, it facilitates the understanding of the emergence of the newest genre of Ramadan entertainment- Nationalistic series and its reception by Egyptian media stakeholders.

The Guardian recently released an article that explored how a hit Egyptian drama sparked calls for reform of the Egyptian Family law. This article sheds light on the influence of a Ramadan TV drama that inspired two Egyptian members of parliament to demand reform of the country's guardianship statute. The law has been chastised for disproportionately affecting women and causing harm to families. The current condition of guardianship legislation, the TV drama that triggered the issue, and the probable results of the proposed review was examined by The Guardian (The Guardian, 2023).

The article discusses Egyptian guardianship law, which provides that when a father dies, legal guardianship and inheritance for any of his children under the age of 21 pass to their paternal grandfather or a guardian selected by the father in his will, if any, with the woman having no say. This law has been in effect for more than 70 years and has

posed challenges for women since it does not reflect current advancements and is notoriously unjust against widowed mothers.

The 15-episode drama series revolves around a mother of two struggling to maintain her life after her husband's death. The heroine learns that she has no control over her husband's fishing boat (her only source of income), and that the law permits her father-in-law to make decisions regarding her children's education without her consent. Egyptian lawmakers Amira El Adly and Mohamed Ismail have each requested that the speaker of the House of Representatives and the Justice Minister investigate the guardianship legislation in the wake of this show and the social media debates it sparked. El Adly adds that the TV show's momentum on social media has spurred them to act and file legislative reforms. The Egyptian National Council for Women publicly praised the show on their social media pages, for bringing to light the subject of children's education following the death of a parent. The council highlights educational guardianship as a crucial concern for Egyptian women under personal status legislation, notably in guardianship cases.

Similarly, The TV series "Newton's Cradle," directed by Tamer Mohsen and written by Maryam Naoum, has aroused debate among fans, legal professionals, and clergy for covering difficult themes such as verbal divorce and marital rape in Egypt. The series focuses on the difficulties Hana faces in confirming her divorce from Hazem, as well as the subject of marital rape through her connection with Moaness. It also discusses illegal immigration, foreign residency, and homicide vs. self-defense. In 2017, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi proposed legislation to make divorces legitimate only if they are conducted in front of a marriage official, with the goal of reducing the number of verbal divorces. "Newton's Cradle" also addresses the problem of marital rape, which is not recognized or punishable under Egyptian law. However, the scene being aired was in itself a turning point. For many women, the episode evoked traumatic memories but it also gave them the courage to take to social media and share their experiences. In the weeks following the episode, hundreds of testimonies appeared online, including more than 700 on the Facebook page, Speak Up, which advocates for women's rights in Egypt as well as raises awareness about the various forms of gender-based violence. According to Sherine Rashad, a researcher at the Women's Center for Guidance and Legal Awareness, the series was a success for women's rights and has the potential to spark a serious debate and changes to the Penal Code (BBC, 2021).

## Chapter 2: Review of literature

---

### 2.1 Ramadan in context

The Arab media has undergone profound changes over the past two decades. The introduction of satellite television all the way to the role of the internet are key factors in understanding how Arab television works (Kraidy & Khalil, 2009). Khalil (2019), suggests that two major elements have impacted the development of contemporary Arab television: pan-Arabism and regional military conflicts. His work gives a thorough examination of the historical backdrop and important changes in Arab television over the last 50 years, from the era of state television to the birth of satellite television and convergence with new technologies (Khalil, 2019). Pan-Arabism, or the notion of a unified Arab country, has been a common attitude among a significant portion of Arabs since the turn of the century (Abu-Rabi, 2004).

The introduction of satellite television in the 1990s rekindled pan-Arabist fantasies by allowing signals to penetrate boundaries and unify Arabs around shared cultural content (Alterman, 1998). The importance of the ties between Middle Eastern violent conflicts and the emergence of Arab television cannot be overstated. Conflicts such as the Israeli-Arab conflict, the Gulf War, the Lebanese war, and Arab revolutions all played important roles in the formation, financing, and programming of regional television channels (Sakr et al., 2015). Egyptian television served as a beacon for Nasserite pan-Arabism, with programming centered on anti-colonial, development, and modernization ideas (Boyd, 1999). The arrival of satellite broadcasts signaled the beginning of a new era in Arab television. Although broadcasting networks in certain regions in the Gulf were primarily focused on religious programming, its potential for effective media would have to wait a few years (Sakr, 2007). The 1990 Gulf War increased demand for satellite television, prompting Arab media entrepreneurs to set up satellite broadcasting operations in Europe (Kraidy and Khalil 2009).

In the past, regional governments had strict control over the media, directing the content and determining what the populace consumed (Kraidy, "Arab Media," 3). However, with the introduction of satellite television in the 1990s and the subsequent liberalization of the media, the number of pan-Arab broadcasting empires skyrocketed, reaching over 1,300 channels in 2014 (Arab States Broadcasting Union, 2015). Buccianti (2016), believed that there were greater economic and political dynamics that underlie the creation and distribution of drama series, or Musalsalat, the most popular written format on Arab television (Buccianti, 2016).

Since the 1970s, the Islamic month of Ramadan has been linked with distinctive programming designed to encourage people's fasting from nightfall to dawn (Buccianti, 2016). Ramadan television programming was created to meet lifestyle changes such as reduced working hours, family gatherings, and community involvement. This is the time of year when Muslim viewers turn to local networks to reconnect with local stories and celebrities. Aside from religious programming, television producers quickly realized the opportunity they had with Ramadan. They started saving the best Musalsalat, a mix of soap operas and telenovelas, for this holy month. This pattern was multiplied quickly with more and more producers wanting to join in on what has become a television "high-season". These melodramatic series are based on historical, social, political, or religious stories, and they frequently feature a romance theme (Khalil, 2019). These shows, which aired every day and were replayed 24 hours a day, are full of cliffhangers, twists, and shocks that kept viewers on the edge of their seats for a dramatic finale that coincides with Ramadan's completion (Halabi & Salamandra, 2019). The rise of satellite television in the 1990s increased demand for Musalsalat. Egypt was able to rely on its grand film legacy to dominate Ramadan programming.

The dissection of the evolution and influence of Ramadan television series, or 'Musalsalat,' as well as following the emergence of this type of entertainment and its cultural relevance in Arab-speaking communities lies at the core of this research paper.

The modern-day Musalsalat are claimed to have evolved from 'hakawatis,' or storytellers, who entertained audiences with legend and myth tales, functioning as both entertainment and oral history (Abdel-Megid, 2022). Ramadan series became popular in the 1990s as the Egyptian television business expanded, seeing the possibility to captivate people during the holy month. These series acted as a group activity that

needed minimal effort and money. The phenomenon of Musalsalat was more than just amusement; it reflected and occasionally questioned power relations, political agendas, and present societal challenges. While the television landscape has changed since the turn of the century, Musalsalat's influence in normalizing ideas and addressing contemporary issues has remained significant. Ramadan TV series in the Middle East provide a unique perspective on social and cultural life. They are significant not merely for their sociopolitical significance, but also for their artistic characteristics and formal advances (Halabi & Salamandra, 2019). Egyptian Ramadan TV series are one of the country's (and the wider region's) major kinds of cultural creation, engaging in articulate forms of social criticism. The immense, intricate system of production, screenplay, acting, directing, and advertising necessary to bring these series to life makes them a uniquely complicated cultural exercise, as do the enormous resources required to bring them to light. Moreover, these series, known as Musalsalat broadcast during Ramadan, are widely discussed in families and social circles throughout the month (and year). The series follows a typical thirty-episode pattern, (recently 15-episode patterns have been introduced) with one episode televised each day throughout Ramadan, with a possible overflow on the first day(s) of the holiday that concludes Ramadan celebrations. In Nasser's Egypt, Musalsalat supported the larger educational aim of television. While much has changed since the Musalsalat industry's inception, it is not uncommon to hear a screenwriter speak of a series' educational mission or its role in raising awareness. With the introduction of private and satellite channels, competition in the business has increased, putting more pressure on screenwriters to provide entertainment as well as maintain an educational or purposeful image to viewers (Khamis, 2011).

## **2.2 Significant portrayals**

Ramadan series have become an important part of the cultural landscape in the Middle East. In Egypt, one of these series' most notable features is in providing a variety of storylines that reflect diverse parts of Egyptian life and society. With a combination of drama, romance, and humor, these shows frequently deal with difficult social and political subjects like family relationships, cultural standards, religion, and politics. Furthermore, the characters and plots are frequently multifaceted, allowing for nuanced and diverse depictions of people and their experiences (Abu-Magd, 2021). These programs frequently draw enormous audiences from diverse origins and age groups,

making them an important influence in shaping regional cultural discourse. Overall, the variety of stories told in Ramadan series reflect the depth and complexity of Egyptian culture, serving as a forum for examining and commenting on the region's social, cultural, and political realities (Parolin, 2019). There are a couple of scholars who have shown interest in how certain demographics, professions and ethnicities are depicted in Ramadan series.

Lila Abu-Lughod's engaging ethnographic account of Egyptian national television, focusing on soap opera-like series and Ramadan programming is one of the most comprehensive dives on the intricacies of Egyptian culture and its deep connection to television and politics. Abu-Lughod (2004), used the term "television melodrama" over "soap opera"; while Egyptian Musalsalat have many similarities with their melodramatic soap opera relatives in North America, Abu-Lughod highlights important distinctions. For example, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while Islamist groups were changing the public sphere by providing health and educational services to impoverished Egyptians in the vacuum created by state withdrawal, there was a virtual silence about Islamism in television melodramas (Abu-Lughod, 2004). However, since 1993, film and television have been permitted to address the issue. Abu-Lughod talks in an interesting chapter headed "Managing Religion in the Name of National Community" on how television melodramas engage with debates about Islam. She analyzes the problematic picture of corruption and consumerism in television serials in the following chapter, "Consumption and the Eroding Hegemony of Developmentalism," representing the massive, widening disparity between the affluent and the poor. Egyptian viewers come to respect soaps that they characterize as "pulling" them in two directions: into the tale and into their emotions. Invoking Raymond Williams' powerful insight that television drama causes novel changes in subjectivities, Abu-Lughod contends that the quality of heightened emotionality in television melodramas is critical to the formation of new kinds of selves, selves that are encouraged to focus on their own feelings. This process promotes individuality, which is vital to the modernity agenda and favorable to a neoliberal state.

A number of scholars have taken interest in the role of television drama on society. According to Abu Al-Saoud (2015), television drama holds immense power in spreading ideals in society, serving as a powerful influence in changing public opinion and conduct. Abu Al-Saoud believed that in order to maximize the effect of television drama, it is critical to provide significant and purposeful material that correctly portrays

the reality of prevalent societal challenges and problems. The researcher outlines that Ramadan is at the heart of Egyptian television programming, with producers and directors calling it “the Ramadan race”. The study also indicates that the state's role in generating “up-to-standard” television productions is diminishing. It has instead grown to rely on well-known authors and filmmakers to spread high culture and enhance popular taste. This shift emphasizes the significance of drama in fostering “morally-upright” values and conduct, as well as the necessity for social responsibility in the content created and aired. Abu Al-Saoud outlines morality as having family values, being respectful and being (and dressing) modest as well as being honest and kind. The study also addresses the themes communicated through television programs, particularly during Ramadan. The Ramadan series of 2014 addressed serious subjects such as corruption, murder, and drug usage. However, the language used was frequently unfamiliar and upsetting to viewers who derive their opinions and knowledge from television. This underscores the difficulties in reconciling entertaining material with viewers' sensitivities and cultural conventions particularly during the holy month of Ramadan (Abu Al-Saoud, 2015). It is important to note that the average viewer treats the month of Ramadan as a chance to reduce their frequency of committing sins and it's also a month of getting close to God and of increased religious practices and charity. Thus, a significant demographic of Egyptian viewers would be offended when exposed to immoral scenes on television in Ramadan (Abu Al-Saoud, 2015).. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges societal moral decay, which is frequently reinforced by television drama depictions of prostitution, immorality, and commodification. The study outlines that showing scenes of prostitution and drug use not only contributes to the decay of overall Egyptian morality but also in the dilution of the religious messages and sentiments of the holy month of Ramadan. Such images can weaken television drama's potential effect and constructive influence on society. The foundation of Abu Al-Saoud's study is the social responsibility theory, which emphasizes the state's role to generate and oversee narratives broadcast on television, particularly during Ramadan.

Ramadan series, in particular, receive special attention owing to their huge influence on Arab families, as this month sees the greatest number of family reunions compared to other months. These series help to reinforce, change, or distort dominant society perceptions by offering various models. In recent years, Egyptian culture has witnessed a substantial interest in women's concerns and their representation in television shows.

For example, women's rights supporters were outraged and frustrated when the 2001 Ramadan series 'Aeylat Al Hajj Metwalli' was deemed to legitimize and justify sexist behavior. This series was set against the backdrop of Egypt's political scene in 2001, which was marked by growing repression under then-leader Hosni Mubarak and the US invasion of Afghanistan. It portrayed Hajj Metwalli, a rich fabric store owner who was married to four wives, all of whom he placed in separate, luxurious apartments on various levels of the same building. He had a rigorous schedule for seeing each woman. Three of the spouses appeared to be buddies, even dancing at each other's weddings. A fourth, younger woman was portrayed as relentlessly after her husband's riches. Despite the fact that the show is no longer broadcast, it sparked a heated debate among Egyptian sociologists, psychologists, women's groups, and religious organizations over polygamy and its relevance to Islam. Egyptian feminists believed these kinds of series to be degrading and sending the wrong message to women around the country. The polygamy trope remains prevalent in Ramadan series until today.

Television programs have become an inseparable part of the lives of many viewers throughout the world, contributing to various cultural changes through the entertaining presentation of ideas and pictures that can potentially influence the audience, affecting their views, attitudes, and actions (Ahmed, 2017). As a result, Ramadan television dramas, being some of the most viewed content in Arab communities, have a greater obligation to challenge the stereotyped image of women and aid them in understanding their rights. In addition, the stories being shared on television can educate a large demographic that get their knowledge primarily from television as well as push policy-makers towards gender equality (Ahmed, 2017).

Television dramas are one of the most important forms of drama in the modern era because of their ability to attract audiences and participate in changing behavioral habits and moral values through dialogue and visual images by presenting role models, human patterns, and addressing societal problems (Napoli, Amin & Napoli, 1995).

Parolin (2019), argues that Egyptian literature and media might be useful in building alternative grounded theories. The researcher chose 4 Ramadan Television series from the year 2016 to draw results. Nelly we Sherihan, Mo'men we Shorakah (comedies), Grand Hotel and El Mizan (dramas). Anthropologists have already begun to investigate the influence of popular culture on the development of "new communication scales and



new dimensions of modern identity." The writers predict that legal anthropologists will soon acknowledge the significance of Ramadan TV series in the public's image of the judicial system. The paper contends that Egyptian Ramadan TV series provide two essential insights for the mainstream jurisprudential view: (A) law enforcement officials utilize the language of the law to disempower individuals, and (B) class outweighs any pretense of equality in law enforcement. Additionally, the alternating between a "low" and a "high" variety of Arabic, or the stress on class privilege or disadvantage, make it especially clear in the TV series under consideration that those two components significantly appear in the impression of the workings of law enforcement. When it comes to law enforcement in Egypt, the grounded ideas incorporated in TV shows provide an effective counter-narrative to the fictions of law textbooks. These observations, rather than being ignored as just local dysfunctions, contribute to a more comprehensive view of law enforcement across the world.

Given their cultural significance and the complex system of production, screenwriting, acting, directing, and advertising involved, Egyptian Ramadan TV series have been identified as an important site for knowledge production. The instructional and entertaining features of these programs make them an especially excellent resource for examining grounded perspectives on law enforcement (Armbrust, 2000).

Another explored area of Ramadan narratives are the stories set in Upper Egypt. Upper Egypt's populace, which refers to the country's southern region, has long endured marginalization and prejudice on numerous levels. This is mostly owing to the region's social, economic, and topographical characteristics, as well as historical causes that have resulted in discrepancies between Upper Egypt and the rest of Egypt. Upper Egypt is economically marginalized due to high poverty rates, restricted access to resources, and undeveloped infrastructure. This is in sharp contrast to Lower Egypt's more prosperous and urbanized parts, notably the capital city of Cairo and the Nile Delta region. Upper Egypt's economic troubles and underdevelopment have been exacerbated by a lack of investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The literature on Egyptian Ramadan TV shows emphasizes the propensity of series that are set in Upper Egypt, frequently with a southern protagonist who turns to crime as a method of combating tyranny and corruption. These dramas, like the enduring 1992 television program "Dhiab al-Jabal" (Wolves of the Mountain), attract millions of viewers and provide the politically oppressed voices of Upper Egypt a platform to be heard. While

Upper Egyptians have waged several forms of resistance against local and national rulers over the years, the southern area has been politically and economically disadvantaged for generations. In order to make the case for the capacity of marginalized people to speak in unique ways that mainstream history has mostly neglected, Abul-Magd (2021), primarily focuses on the province of Qena, previously the capital of an independent state in the south. The patriotic, elitist, and Cairo-centric perspective that dominates Egyptian historiography, whether it be in Arabic or other languages, has led to the marginalization of Upper Egypt's stories in the larger framework of Egyptian history. These dramas not only provide a means of resistance for the oppressed people of Upper Egypt, but they also provide a chance to contest the prevailing historical narrative and highlight the experiences of underrepresented groups (Abul-Magd, 2021). On the other hand, Upper Egypt has a distinct culture with different traditions, customs, and dialects that distinguish it from the rest of Egypt. While rich and valuable, cultural diversity can sometimes lead to negative stereotypes and discrimination against Upper Egyptians, who may be perceived as less educated or sophisticated by those from other regions.

Upper Egyptians may encounter prejudice and marginalization in a variety of social settings, including education, work, and housing. This discrimination may be motivated by preconceptions, prejudice, or the mistaken belief that individuals from Upper Egypt are less talented or competent than people from other regions. Egyptian dramas can be a contributing factor by spreading negative stereotypes and appropriating their traditions and portraying them as disruptive, turbulent and unruly causing more prejudice and stigma (Hopkins & Saad, 2004).

### **2.3 Nationalistic television series**

In recent years, a new trend has emerged in Egypt that is gaining momentum - nationalistic television series. These series focus on dramatizing the work of the Egyptian Army and Police force, as well as highlighting their achievements in a positive light, while simultaneously condemning opposing views and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. The aim of these series is to instill a sense of pride and patriotism in viewers, while also entertaining them with compelling and dramatic storytelling (Mahmoud, 2022). This emergent genre has gained immense popularity in Egypt and beyond, with viewers on either side of the spectrum supporting or condemning them.

There are considerable studies and books exploring the relationship between television and a country's political climate, especially in the Middle East (Mahmoud, 2022).

Lila Abu Lughod's study on Egyptian television series in her book "Dramas of Nationhood" presents a perspective of television as a modern social arena that includes opposing forces at the junction of the state's agenda, producer vision, and public viewing patterns. Abu Lughod (2004), focuses on the political function of television in nation-state hegemony and how entertainment intersects with national politics and policy. State television broadcasts melodrama serials that develop images of the virtuous nation and citizen, functioning as effective tools for national teaching. While acknowledging television's hegemonic role and the state's deliberate attempt to shape national identity, Abu Lughod also outlines a number of dynamics influencing the construction of a broader cultural identity. Her research focuses on the nuanced ways in which mass media shapes the processes, forces, and resistances that form a nation in flux and construct identities. She is especially interested in how individuals and communities absorb messages about virtuous modern citizenship, react to television entertainment programs, and employ dramas and performers to shape their own lives.

When a 30-episode action-drama series called Kalabsh (English: Handcuff) first aired in Ramadan of 2017 it signaled the emergence of a new era of nationalistic productions. Parolin (2019), examines the changing interaction between law, television, and social media in the context of Egyptian Ramadan TV series in recent years. It explores the 2017 production, the episodes of which received a total of 115 million YouTube views, and digs into the relationship between television broadcasting and social media in affecting the path of justice. Kalabsh portrays social media users as naive agitators who are outwitted and controlled by commercial and political networks, reinforcing the counter-revolutionary narrative of the January 25, 2011 revolt.

Parolin (2019), examines how the Egyptian television drama business has changed since the emergence of private channels and satellite transmission. Despite privatization, the public sector continues to heavily influence production and distribution, and private media outlets are typically owned by regime figures. The 'Maspero consensus,' a unique combination of public and private interests, encodes a socially conservative, politically passive, and religiously conforming view of society in its television drama production. Since the 2011 uprising, the industry has produced numerous 30-episode serials, but

none have prominently featured characters referencing the revolutionary youth. This omission emphasizes the industry's positioning as well as the constraints imposed on television drama creators by the censorship bureau, production, and distribution networks (Parolin, 2019). There are a number of reasons why the current administration could be trying to delegitimize the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution. Firstly, power consolidation by undermining the movement that led to the overthrow of previous President Hosni Mubarak. Secondly, by eroding the legitimacy of the revolution, the government may promote itself as the sole realistic option for restoring peace and order in Egypt (Gerges, 2013). Thirdly, control over the narrative: By delegitimizing the revolution, the government gains control over the narrative surrounding the events that occurred during and after the revolution. This allows the government to mold public opinion in ways that serve their interests and justify their actions, particularly when it comes to cracking down on dissent and civil rights. Discrediting the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution may also act as a deterrent to future demonstrations or revolutions. The administration can dissuade possible challenges to their rule and maintain control over the political landscape by presenting the revolution as a failure or an illegitimate movement (Gerges, 2013).

In Kalabsh, television broadcasting's role is limited to magnifying the pressure generated by new social media, with no plot line dedicated to it. This change from the prior narrative represents a shift toward a more conservative and authoritarian vision of the media environment.

The article also analyzes the new administration's impact on the media industry, which has aggressively recaptured territory in terms of regulatory authority and private media group acquisitions.

From Kalabsh's perspective, social media activity is seen as a nuisance that slows the process of justice and feeds into the 24-hour news cycle. Traditional media, such as television and radio, appear to be fading into obscurity in response to social media developments. The previous series' intricate dynamics in television transmission are abandoned in favor of a more bi-dimensional portrayal of conventional media.

This new genre quickly started penetrating Ramadan series, with the latest three-part saga called *Al-Ekhteyar* meaning *The Choice*. The third volume of *Al-Ekhteyar*, provided a unique peek into the political events preceding Egyptian president Abdel

Fatah Al-Sisi's ascent to power following the toppling of the Muslim Brotherhood. The biopic included classified film and secret recordings from the Heliopolis Palace and the Ministry of Defense, showing the Egyptian regime's inner workings for the first time.

The series has sparked debate and conflicting opinions. Proponents claim that it gives a unique perspective on Egypt's political history and helps the common Egyptian comprehend the country's decision-makers. Meanwhile, critics view the show as a propaganda tool for Al-Sisi and the regime, distorting the image of the Muslim Brotherhood and ousted former President Mohamed Morsi.

The Choice combines politics and art, presenting several viewpoints on Egypt's current scene. Abdel Baki Abdullah, an Egyptian historian, emphasizes the significance of objectivity, realism, and balance in portraying historical events. While some argue that the series exposes the Muslim Brotherhood's false narratives, others argue that it perpetuates a "false version of events." The show, produced by United Media Services, raises concerns regarding the link between the Egyptian government and the media business, as the company co-produced the show with the Department of Morale Affairs of the Egyptian Armed Forces (Mahmoud, 2022).

Lindsey (2005), examines the topics and debates surrounding Ramadan series, or musalsalat. The researcher believes that these series that are created and televised with the participation and approval of the government, frequently address significant and contentious themes that the authorities believe vital, such as terrorism. According to Egyptian scriptwriter Mohammed Amer, soap operas have played an important role in influencing the people to oppose terrorism. Despite Arab governments' willingness to allow Musalsalat to discuss terrorism or rather the armed forces fight against terrorism, other contentious issues are strictly prohibited. This includes issues such as politics, religion, and sex. Government censorship and control of soap operas is widespread, and any new ideas or issues are often denied, resulting in a lack of innovation and variation in the material. The study contends that consumers' growing discontent with substandard, irrelevant dramas may lead to a shift in demand for more engaging and thought-provoking entertainment.

Mounir (2022), delved into the ramifications of nationalistic TV series in Egypt and how the regime is trying to "rewrite history". The author looks at the 3-years-running

TV series Al-Ekhteyar 3 (The Choice 3), which has been chastised for its depiction of Egypt's July 2013 military coup, which resulted in the toppling of the country's president at the time, Mohamed Morsi. The series has been chastised for "falsifying facts and fooling people" by giving a skewed and revisionist interpretation of historical events.

The author dives into the specific components of the show that have enraged human rights groups and Egyptian opposition members. The series portrays Egypt's current president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who was the country's defense minister at the time, as heroic and uplifting, while presenting members of the Muslim Brotherhood as sinister and scheming.

The author also mentions that the series has been chastised in the past for its themes. The show's second season, which aired in 2021, was chastised for depicting the Rabaa Incident, which led to the deaths of around 1,000 civilian demonstrators. Egyptian Media Group, which owns United Media Services (previously known as Synergy), the show's production firm, has been extensively condemned for its ties to Egypt's intelligence agency and for creating programming described as "nationalist propaganda."

---

## **Chapter 3: Theoretical framework**

---

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study's theoretical foundation is based on two major theories: Agenda Setting and Mediatization. These theories provide a comprehensive and rigorous framework for comprehending the complex interaction between media, public opinion, and social and political concerns in Egypt as they pertain to Ramadan entertainment. In the following sections, we will go through each theory in further detail and explore how it relates to the research issues and objectives of this study.

### **3.2 Agenda Setting Theory**

According to Agenda Setting Theory, the media has the ability to alter public opinion by establishing the prominence and relevance of certain problems. This idea was initially coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972), who argued that the frequency and prominence of media coverage influences the public's view of the importance of specific topics.

Researchers have elaborated on this hypothesis throughout time, establishing two layers of agenda formation. The salience of topics is emphasized in first-level agenda setting, but the salience of specific traits or elements of those concerns is emphasized in second-level agenda setting. For example, first-level agenda setting may include media coverage of corruption, but second-level agenda setting could include characterization of specific corrupt persons or groups.

Agenda Setting Theory can help us further comprehend how the stories depicted during Ramadan and the conversations and discussions they generate affect public opinion, perhaps promoting social and political discourses surrounding these series in the context of this research. This study can give insights into the function of Ramadan entertainment in creating social values and raising awareness about significant topics by studying the extent to which discussions and debates about Ramadan series impact public views and momentum towards a certain cause or issue.

### **3.3 Mediatization Theory**

According to Mediatization Theory, the media has become a fundamental element of modern society, and its effect extends beyond just reporting events. This theory holds that the media actively changes and modifies numerous areas of social life, such as culture, politics, and human behavior. Krotz (2007) and Hjarvard (2008) were among the first to propose this thesis, emphasizing the growing significance of media in numerous elements of society.

The theory of mediatization includes four dimensions: extension (how media extends our ability to communicate), substitution (how media replaces other forms of communication), amalgamation (the merging of media and non-media practices), and accommodation (how media shapes institutions and social interactions). In the context of this study, mediatization theory can help elucidate how the increasing importance of media in society, particularly social media, affects the way Ramadan series are produced, consumed, and discussed, as well as their influence on social and political debates.

### **3.4 Integration of theories**

Agenda Setting and Mediatization theories can help us understand the interaction between media and society. The agenda setting theory allows us to explore how media, including Ramadan entertainment, influences public opinion and shapes the issues that are considered important within a given society. During the holy month of Ramadan, the media landscape in Egypt experiences a significant surge in production and consumption of entertainment content. Understanding the agenda setting processes at play can help uncover the mechanisms through which certain topics, narratives, and perspectives are highlighted or suppressed within this context. Furthermore, agenda setting theory acknowledges the active role of the audience in consuming and interpreting media messages. It recognizes that audiences are not passive recipients but rather engage in a dynamic process of information consumption, selection, and internalization. In the context of this study, mediatization theory is particularly relevant and justifiable due to its ability to illuminate the mediating role of media in the production, dissemination, and consumption of Ramadan entertainment in Egypt.



Furthermore, the mediatization theory helps us comprehend the broader societal implications of Ramadan entertainment and its integration into various aspects of Egyptian society. It acknowledges that media plays a central role in shaping cultural practices and rituals, and in the case of Ramadan, entertainment becomes an integral part of the collective experience during this important period. By employing mediatization theory, we can examine how Ramadan entertainment becomes intertwined with cultural norms, religious traditions, and social interactions, shedding light on its transformative influence on Egyptian society.

This research can better comprehend the function of media in molding public opinion, social discourse, and cultural behaviors linked to Ramadan entertainment in Egypt by incorporating these theories. The combination of these ideas enables a thorough investigation of the intricate interplay between media, audience, and society, laying the groundwork for this research. This integrated approach enables the study to investigate not just how media and entertainment influence public opinion, but also how they actively develop social ideals and conversations.

# Chapter 4: Methodology

---

## 4.1 Introduction

The study employed a qualitative approach; combining the literature review with two additional data collection methods: social media content analysis and in-depth interviews. The literature review served as a lens through which we could understand the existing knowledge and identify research gaps in the field of Ramadan entertainment. Particularly, in the context of Egypt, social media and media stakeholders. This approach aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the key themes and discourses that emerge within social media discussions surrounding Ramadan entertainment? Are these debates creating momentum for reform and awareness?
2. How do Egyptian media stakeholders respond to the emergent genre of nationalistic television series and the growing role of social media in the industry? What do they think are the main elements that contributed to the popularity of Ramadan Entertainment in Egypt?

## 4.2 Data collection

### 4.2.1 Social media content analysis

The data were collected by conducting a systematic search on social media (Facebook) using a predetermined criteria (outlined later in this chapter). The aim was to identify relevant posts that aligned with the research question RQ1: *What are the key themes and discourses that emerge within social media discussions surrounding Ramadan entertainment? Are these debates creating momentum for reform and awareness?* All posts that met the inclusion criteria were exported into a text file. To ensure consistency and facilitate the reporting of the findings, all the posts in the text file were translated to English. While the study only included public posts, measures were taken to anonymize the data and protect the privacy and confidentiality of the social media users. This involved removing any personally identifiable information, such as usernames, profile pictures, or any other details that could potentially reveal the identity of the users.

#### **4.2.2 In-depth interviews**

The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews using an interview guide. These themes were carefully selected to address the research questions and explore different aspects of the research topic and aimed to answer RQ2: *How do Egyptian media stakeholders respond to the emergent genre of nationalistic television series and the growing role of social media in the industry? What do they think are the main elements that contributed to the popularity of Ramadan Entertainment in Egypt?*

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their perspectives and experiences in relation to these themes. To ensure the effectiveness of the data collection process, the design of the data collection tool incorporated several key considerations. The tool was designed in a semi-structured format, enabling flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses while still maintaining consistency across interviews. The questions were developed based on an extensive literature review and refined through a pilot testing phase, which involved a small group of participants representative of the target population. The pilot testing helped identify any ambiguities or potential improvements in the interview guide. The themes explored in the guide included questions about their respective positions, their views on Ramadan entertainment, how they viewed the audience and their reactions, their thoughts on social media, their stance towards nationalistic television series and more.

In addition to the thematic exploration, sociodemographic data was collected to provide context and facilitate a deeper analysis of the findings. The sociodemographic variables collected included: Age, gender, occupation, religion and years of experience.

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed in detail about the study's objectives, their rights and how the data will be utilized. Upon obtaining informed consent from each participant, the interviewing process commenced and interviews lasted from 30 to 50 minutes each. The interviews were all held online (using Zoom), they were all audio-recorded with participants' consent. The audio recordings were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. Following the interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and cross-checked to ensure accurate and reliable results.

Transcriptions were then translated from Arabic to English, ensuring the preservation of participants' meaning and intent.

## **4.3 Data analysis**

### **4.3.1 Social media content analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the content of the posts. The translated text files were imported into a qualitative data analysis software (Quirkos). This software facilitated the organization, management, and analysis of the data, enabling systematic exploration and interpretation of the content. The coding tree created through the preliminary exploration of the data was used as a guide throughout the coding process. Additional themes, sub-themes and patterns emerged through iterative coding. The findings of the social media content analysis were reported as a narrative while including quotes to complement said narrative and provide a fuller picture and a deeper understanding of the themes.

### **4.3.2 In-depth interviews**

The data obtained from the interviews was analyzed through thematic analysis. The translated transcriptions were imported into a qualitative data analysis software (Quirkos) and a coding tree was developed based on the emerging patterns and themes identified by participants. This coding tree served as a structured framework for systematically categorizing and organizing the data. The researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcriptions, assigned appropriate codes to relevant segments, and continually refined and updated the coding tree to capture new themes and patterns as they emerged. The themes and patterns were reported as a narrative while emphasizing significant quotes for additional insight. These quotes served as illustrative examples, giving voice to the participants and offering concrete evidence to support the findings. The reporting of the data was fully anonymous, prioritizing confidentiality, ethical guidelines and the removal of personal identifiable information.

## **4.4 Inclusion Criteria**

### **4.4.1 Social media content analysis**

Platform: This study focuses exclusively on posts published on Facebook. In the context of Egypt, Facebook has emerged as a ubiquitous social media platform, effectively penetrating the local online ecosystem as a significant channel for user-generated content sharing and interactive social engagement. As such, it offers a promising venue for conducting a content analysis study that aims to investigate public opinions and discourses on a particular issue, given its widespread usage and distinct characteristics that enable users to share longer and more elaborate posts, express nuanced viewpoints,

and engage in lively discussions with diverse audiences. Therefore, Facebook represents a relevant and appropriate platform for conducting the proposed content analysis.

**Time Frame:** Posts on Facebook between March 22 and April 25, 2023, are to be included in the study. This time window was chosen as it marks the Ramadan period of 2023. Its selection aims to record pertinent information about Ramadan. A 3-day period after the end of Ramadan was added to the time frame to see people's reflection on the series after the final episode of each had aired.

**Post type:** Only text-based posts will be considered. Posts with images or other multimedia will be disregarded in order to preserve consistency and emphasize textual content. However, text-based posts that include images or videos are eligible.

**Privacy:** Only public posts will be taken into account for the analysis. For the sake of openness and accessibility to the broader public dialogue, posts that are private or have limited visibility will be excluded.

**User Type:** The study will include posts from a diverse range of user types, including pages, individual users, public figures, and community groups with a minimum of 10,000 followers/members. This criterion aims to focus on influential voices and communities that have a substantial online presence.

**Location:** The analysis will focus on posts originating from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. This geographic restriction ensures the relevance and contextual specificity of the collected data. Additionally, the series being analyzed are aimed at the public of the MENA region, since they're in Arabic and the viewership is almost exclusively in the MENA diaspora.

**Language:** Posts in English, Arabic and Latinized Arabic (an adaptation of Roman Alphabet for transcribing Arabic) will be included in the analysis. This bilingual approach allows for a comprehensive examination of social media discussions within the target region. English is widely spoken by MENA natives and is used to post on social media interchangeably with Arabic and Latinized Arabic.

**Engagement Levels:** Only posts with a minimum of 100 reactions will be included in the analysis. Reactions may include likes, comments, shares, or other forms of user engagement. This criterion ensures that the selected posts have garnered a certain level of attention and interest from the audience.

**Topic:** The study does not impose specific restrictions on the topic of the posts. It aims to capture a wide range of discussions and themes that emerge naturally within the selected time period and user groups.

**Keywords:** The analysis will consider posts that contain specific keywords: "الهرشة", "جعفر العمدة", "السابعة", and "تحت الوصاية". These are the names of three Egyptian Ramadan Series "Gaafar El-Omda", "El-Harsha El-Sabaa" and "Taht El-Wesaya". Due to the lack of official audience statistics from Egyptian television, a different methodology was used to ascertain the popularity and viewership of Ramadan shows in Egypt. The study relied on information from the two most prominent Video on Demand (VOD) streaming providers. In particular, renowned VOD providers operating in the MENA market offered audience numbers, which were used to pick the top three most watched series (Shahid.net & WatchIt). These platforms were selected because of their large user bases, rich content libraries, and established reputations in the Egyptian entertainment sector. These keywords were chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives and their potential to contribute to the understanding of the study's focus. Posts containing these keywords will be included in the analysis.

Based on such criteria 105 posts were the result of this search and 60 were chosen to be analyzed for this study based on relevance and proximity to the inclusion criteria. 18 from Gaafar El-Omda, 22 from Taht El-Wesaya and 20 from El-Harsha El-Sabaa.

#### **4.4.2 In-depth interviews**

This study specifically targeted media stakeholders who possess extensive experience and expertise in the production, distribution, and promotion of Ramadan entertainment in Egypt. These stakeholders play a crucial role in shaping the media landscape during the month of Ramadan, which is known for its significant cultural and social impact on Egyptian society.

To ensure the selection of participants who were most relevant to the research questions, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling involved carefully handpicking individuals who possessed the necessary knowledge, experience, and expertise in the field. This approach ensured that the participants could provide valuable insights and perspectives on the topics under investigation.

The primary data collection method utilized in this study was individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. These interviews allowed for rich, detailed discussions with the participants, enabling a deeper exploration of their experiences and opinions regarding various aspects of Ramadan entertainment in Egypt. The semi-structured format provided a balance between flexibility and consistency in data collection. It allowed the researcher to follow a predetermined set of open-ended questions while also allowing for probing and follow-up questions to delve further into specific areas of interest.

## Chapter 5: Results

---

### 5.1 Social media content analysis

Key discourses and topics were identified through a methodical coding procedure, offering important insights into how social media users perceived and engaged with this cultural phenomenon. The topics that have been found are further explored in this part, showcasing the depth and complexity of the social media debate on Ramadan entertainment. The analysis digs into these topics' many facets, providing a thorough knowledge of the societal, cultural, and personal viewpoints that are mirrored in the discussions on social media platforms. This part investigates the complex narratives, individual experiences, and wider sociocultural implications embedded within these themes via the prism of qualitative investigation, offering insightful information about the relevance and influence of Ramadan entertainment across Egyptian culture.

<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Frequency (n=60)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
El-Harsha El-Sabaa	20	33.3
Gaafar El-Omda	18	30
Taht El-Wesaya	22	36.6



### 5.1.1 Relationship

The subject of relationships developed as a key topic of discussion within the social media content analysis. Romantic connections, family dynamics, and friendships shown in the Ramadan series sparked user feedback and experiences. The topics discussed varied from applauding positive and helpful connections to criticizing negative, toxic and sometimes unrealistic representations. Users discussed how these relationships seemed on television and how they affected their own lives, indicating the potential influence of media representations on social views and actions. The exploration of interpersonal dynamics in the discussion of Ramadan entertainment on social media demonstrated the significance of said dynamics and how they are reflected in popular culture. The coded posts about relationships in the context of Ramadan entertainment represented a variety of viewpoints, social phenomena and marital relationship experiences. The concept of the "seventh-year itch," in which couples experience boredom and a lack of communication in their relationship after 5-7 years, is one recurrent subject. It highlighted how crucial communication and discourse between spouses are, since failing to address issues like finances, children, and division of labour may result in significant issues and even divorce. These posts emphasized the value of clear communication in preserving a happy and successful marriage. This arose as a result of watching "El-Harsha El-Sabaa" which translates to "The Seventh Itch". The 15-episode series followed the lives of two couples and how their marriage/relationship changes through the years until they reach the seventh year. Additionally, several posts discussed gender dynamics. One user wrote this post about another series "Taht El-Wesaya" which translates to Under Guardianship saying *"What do you think about Saleh's (the children's uncle) relationship with his fiancée? Have you seen how he treats her with harshness, control, domination, oppression, and humiliation? And she responds to that by agreeing with him? Have you seen him attacking her and telling her, "I will marry you against your mother's will"? Well, have you seen how she defends him in front of her mother and tells her, "I don't want anyone in the world except him"? How do you think someone like her would treat her children? How would she raise them? What would she do with her daughters? A woman in a society immersed in male guardianship..."*

One prevalent theme was how in "El-Harsha El-Sabaa" mothers were taken for granted and how no appreciation was shown to all the sleepless nights, physical and emotional exhaustion they went through. Mothers on social media resonated with the feeling of

being underappreciated and overlooked. The show highlighted the gender disparities related to child rearing and reproductive roles.

Other users delved deeper into character analysis and their personal perception of the dynamics differences between characters *“Salma and Sherif are a healthy example of a married couple. You might say, but they also have problems and seek individual and couples therapy. Well, let me tell you, that's precisely why their relationship is thriving. A successful relationship is not devoid of psychological struggles because we are all human and influenced by one another. Salma faces similar parenting challenges to Nadine's, but the difference is that she doesn't succumb to the role of a victim. She chooses to seek help, grow, and overcome”*.

The posts also explored the difficulties and disputes that can develop in partnerships, especially monetary disputes. It was clear that disagreements and financial burdens can make partnerships tense. The significance of participation, support, and appreciation inside partnerships, however, emerged as a crucial role amid these difficulties. The importance of cooperation, kind deeds, emotional support, and understanding was emphasized as essential elements of a fruitful and enduring relationship.

It was emphasized that "affection" was a key component of relationships that had the potential to diffuse conflict and resentment. The posts stressed the need of showing one's spouse sincere affection and providing them with emotional support in order to reassure them that they are not alone and can overcome any challenging situation together. Another user wrote *“Marriage is more than just love, hugs, and a wedding cake distributed to the attendees. It is a relationship that requires a lot of patience, learning, adaptation, planning, and, of course, love. You won't find a husband who perfectly matches your dreams, and you won't find a wife who resembles the fantasies of your heart... Reality is dictated by life”*.

### **5.1.2 Law, awareness and power dynamics**

During the course of Ramadan, social media prominently featured discussions surrounding laws, social reform and awareness. The code “Laws and Awareness” indicates the discussion and involvement surrounding legal concerns, social awareness, and the social effects of media content. It explored the relationship between entertainment, how legal systems were portrayed, and the audience's level of awareness.

The way that laws were portrayed in Ramadan entertainment, as well as the social ramifications that follow, were extremely important for influencing public opinion and society standards. The posts recorded under this code provided insight into how the public viewed, criticized, and thought about how Ramadan series depicted legal subjects. This theme encompasses a wide range of topics, including but not limited to legal frameworks, justice systems, gender equality, social justice, and legal dilemmas portrayed in the series. This code aims to delve into how society at large comprehends the intricacies and complexity of how laws and awareness are portrayed and accepted in Ramadan entertainment. This includes arguments on the role of the media in promoting social change, public perception, and legal awareness. The majority of posts analyzed under the scope of this code discuss the topic of laws and awareness regarding the concept of guardianship and its impact on women. The posts reflected on the limitations and challenges faced by women within the current societal system.

The posts questioned the discriminatory and unjust nature of guardianship laws in Egypt in reaction to the series "Under Guardianship". The 15-episode series follows the life of Hanan, a recently widowed mother of two who discovers she no longer has control over her husband's fishing boat, her only source of income, leaving her struggling to pay rent. She and her kids are under the legal and financial guardianship of the parental family and is trying to navigate such guardianship and find autonomy for herself and her kids, she fights an uphill battle every step of the way because of the way the law is written. The posts alternated between calls for reform with prominent celebrities and government officials demanding these laws be changed as well as people sharing their personal tragedies owing to Egyptian Family laws. One user wrote *"Speaking of the trial in "Under Guardianship" for the charge of misappropriation of the minors' funds. When we were young and our father passed away, the advisory council took control of everything he left behind, every penny. Once, we wanted to buy a computer, and we kept asking our mother persistently. So, she submitted a request to the council to give her some money from our funds to buy the computer. The request was rejected at that time, and the reason given was that it was "luxuries that shouldn't be funded." I was very upset because my mother had promised me that if I ranked among the top students, she would get it for me, and I had fulfilled my part. Of course, I got even more frustrated, so my mother submitted another request. This time they asked that one of my siblings and I go to the council by ourselves because they wanted to ask us a few questions. We went there, and the questions were like, "Are you the ones who actually asked for the computer? Did your mother tell you to say that? Are you sure she will use the money to buy a computer?"In the end, we*

*received the money, but since that moment, I decided not to ask for anything that is rightfully mine as long as it puts my mother in such a situation.*

*The law and society in Egypt are unjust towards women. The TV series barely scratches the surface of reality”.*

*Another user wrote “Women, in the eyes of the state and the law, are untrustworthy with their children's money. We have locked funds that we can't request anything from. The law is ancient; it punishes us instead of protecting us. The advisory council is the worst enemy of orphans in Egypt. The grandfather and uncle who take their share of the inheritance for themselves are violating both religious principles and basic humanity. They are devouring the rights of orphaned children. Guardianship for the mother over her orphaned children is a right, even if they oppose it!”.*

Another male public figure posted the following *“Currently, with regards to the series “#Under\_Guardianship,” should I now write in my will that my wife be the guardian of my child before I die? What are the legal solutions that transfer guardianship to the mother? Let us know; help people come up with a temporary solution until, God willing, they amend the law”.* Others showed their appreciation to the writers of this series and voiced their desire for this law to change. Lawyers also posted lengthy posts trying to explain when and how this law was put into effect and how people, especially fathers could counter it and make sure that in the event of their passing, the rights of the mothers and children are safeguarded.

### **5.1.3 Morality and media responsibility**

Over the course of this social media content analysis, morality and the notion of the media being responsible to what audiences are exposed to, became recurrent subjects. Users engaged in debates on moral principles, moral standards, and how moral decisions were portrayed in the Ramadan series. These debates frequently focused on the acts and choices made by the characters, discussing the moral ramifications, social expectations, and individual convictions connected to those decisions. The discussion on social media concerning Ramadan entertainment demonstrates the intricate interplay between morality, narrative, and the audience's engagement with ethical concerns, adding to larger conversations about principles and moral frameworks in the community. Moral expectations and standards can differ due to Egypt's diverse population, particularly in

respect to the themes covered in Ramadan TV series. However, there are certain universal principles that are broadly accepted and usually regarded as ethically right. These consist of respecting moral standards such as modesty, respect for others, and decency. It is essential for TV series to strike a balance between entertaining and engaging storylines while adhering to these moral guidelines, as they play a significant role in shaping societal norms and values. Users actively participated in conversations regarding how the media affects how people perceive the world and behave. They critically analyzed how media outlets, producers, and content makers should create moral and socially conscious narratives. Users drew attention to situations when they believed media content had strayed from ethical storytelling, reinforced negative stereotypes, or promoted problematic ideas. These conversations included arguments for greater accountability and responsible media practices as well as discussions about how the media affects cultural attitudes and habits. The discussion of media responsibility in the context of Ramadan entertainment on social media shows how viewers are aware of the possible effects of media content and have high standards for morally and socially responsible media. One user wrote *“This is the role model they present to our youth, to undermine values and ethics and promote thuggery and crime. A new war is emerging, called the War of Ethical Destruction in societies. Beware! Mohamed Ramadan (actor) has a clear message, which is to undermine ethics and spread the mentality of thuggery in society. And he is not alone, as Amr Saad (actor) has also joined in forcefully for the past three years, playing the role of a thug in his TV series. Another wrote “Is this supposed to be the right thing to teach our youth and children? Be careful, all of this is not a coincidence. I told you; art and media are powerful weapons.”*

#### **5.1.4 Critique of the work**

An extensive quantity of criticism was leveled at various aspects of Ramadan entertainment, according to the analysis of Facebook posts. Users conducted in-depth assessments and offered their thoughts on the series' plot, character development, cinematography, writing and other aspects. Users praised well created narratives, intriguing characters, and visual aesthetics while also noting complaints about poor plotlines, and uneven character arcs in these conversations. The audience's interaction added to conversations regarding the caliber and impact of the production. A user wrote the following about El-Harsha El-Sabaa: *“The series flows in a structured and elegant context, with music that intertwines Egyptian, Levantine, Moroccan, and English styles,*

*resembling the fluctuations or perhaps the harmony experienced by the couple*". People thought certain series like Under Guardianship were *"a breath of fresh air"* and that they will open doors for creators to be more daring and tackle societal issues in a more realistic and relatable way and in turn, help individuals and society at large to come to terms with significant issues.

One user wrote praised the writing, acting and directing of El-Harsha El-Sabaa saying: *"Where do I even start? The beauty of the cinematography or the power of the performances, or perhaps the strong screenplay crafted by the storytelling workshop led by Mariam Naoum? Or should I mention the talented and renowned director, Kareem El-Shenawy? The screenplay is exceptionally well-written, executed with high professionalism. You don't feel bored at all; on the contrary, you enjoy every scene, even if it's silent"*.

Other posts focused on the writing and how the conversations between characters felt extremely relatable and real. Other posts focused on visual aesthetics and how the scenes looked on screen. These people make use of their platforms to voice their opinions and responses to the visual components of the work—whether it may be the cinematography, the set design, the costumes, or the production design as a whole. This is one of the posts about Under Guardianship *"Each person performs in their role with professionalism and excellence. Exquisite frames capture the essence, using the language familiar to the locals. This is the kind of work that we can truly call "social drama."*

Their posts frequently start discussions among other viewers, creating a community that enjoys and debates the series' artistic decisions and aesthetic appeal. One user wrote the following about the series El-Harsha El-Sabaa *"Kareem El-Shenawy, the director, is capable of transforming any written scene into a work of art. He paints the scenes with camera movements that are always beautiful, and the frames are incredibly stunning, pleasing to the eye with their beauty. Every scene is meticulously crafted, with a high level of attention to detail. The casting is truly professional, with roles being portrayed skillfully"*.

There were also comparisons with Ramadan series that tackled similar issues in previous years. On the other hand, there were negative criticisms related to repetitiveness and unrealistic turn of events. Especially since it was leaked that Gaafar El-Omda re-filmed their last episodes and implemented an alternative ending based on fan theories and suggestions. One user posted *"The series "Gaafar El-Omda" is a symphony of disasters"*.

## 5.2 In-depth interviews

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency (n=7)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender		
Male	4	57.1
Female	3	42.9
Age group (years)		
20-35	4	57.1
36-56	1	14.3
>56	2	28.6
Occupation		

Screenwriter	2	28.6
Assistant Director	1	14.3
Actor	1	14.3
Cinematographer	1	14.3
Producer	1	14.3
Director/Producer	1	14.3
Religion		
Muslim	7	100
Years of experience		
3-10	4	57.1



15-25	2	28.6
>25	1	14.3

### 5.2.1 Ramadan's popularity

Interviewees highlighted the role of Ramadan in socially engineering collective rituals and synchronizing the schedules of millions of people. The predictability and uniformity created timeframes where audiences gathered, broke their fast, and prepared the food. These patterns and rituals simultaneously created prime time for broadcasting television series. Participants emphasized how Ramadan serves as a cultural phenomenon that goes beyond religious observance, influencing various aspects of Egyptian society.

Male, Screenwriter 57, explained: *"Imagine knowing that in a certain moment in time you have almost 100 million people doing the exact same thing, imagine knowing that they're all watching television. This knowledge is what created the phenomenon that is Ramadan series."*

Female, Screenwriter, 27, likened the impact of Ramadan on television viewership to the Superbowl in the United States, stating, *"It's like the Superbowl in the US, except it's running for 30 days."* These patterns and rituals deeply embedded within the Egyptian culture form the foundation for the success and widespread appeal of Ramadan series. Participants emphasized that Ramadan holds a significant place in the cultural fabric of Egypt, with the population cherishing festivities and upholding their rituals and customs. The surge in entertainment during Ramadan was acknowledged as an integral part of this cultural celebration. However, concerns were raised about how the prominence of entertainment during Ramadan may potentially dilute the religious message behind the holy month.

Female, Assistant Director, 23, expressed concerns about the prioritization of entertainment over religious obligations during Ramadan: *"It is a religious month. As filmmakers, we don't have time to do the things we are supposed to do in Ramadan. We don't have time to pray, read the Quran, etc. We have a project and this responsibility to produce series; the entertainment that people are waiting for every year."*

These insights highlight the complex dynamics between Ramadan, entertainment, and religious observance in Egypt. While Ramadan series play a central role in providing entertainment and capturing the collective attention of the population, concerns were raised about potential deviations from the religious aspects of the holy month.

### **5.2.2 Ramadan and social media**

Interviewees discussed how social media and Ramadan interact, as well as how digital platforms affect how Ramadan programs are received and promoted. The interviews produced a number of significant findings that illustrated the intricate connection between these two phenomena. Participants highlighted how Egyptian viewers can be very opinionated and that poses both a threat and an opportunity to them. Female, Assistant Director, 23 explained how the abundance of opinions and reviews can make it very hard to decide what's real and what's not, *"As they say, in Egypt, the country of 100 million doctors, the country of 100 million directors, 100 million photographers. They always have a lot of opinions, you can sometimes make use of these opinions, for example, People were saying that 30 episodes are boring, that the plot is stretched out, and now we have 15-episode series in Ramadan, straight to the point. This helps us know what people want and we can do it for them. But sometimes it can be a lot"*.

Female, Screenwriter, 27 expressed how some groups on social media are dedicated to telling people what to watch during Ramadan, and which series are good, bad, boring, funny etc. *"We have a very famous group on Facebook called What to Watch. Usually, the hype on social media is fixated on a series or two and people talk about them the most. So, of course, this becomes the most watched series. You feel like, no, you have a curiosity to see what people talk about. Even I myself a person who works on these series follow this hype."*

Participants also noted that social media has impacted the Ramadan season in terms of promotion and marketing. In recent years production companies have started teasing their series months before Ramadan and this gets people talking and predicting certain storylines and cast. Female, Cinematographer, 22, said *"This is a big promotional loop. People keep talking about it (the series). It's like advertising for the show from the*

*people themselves, which has been proven to be very effective. So social media of course has changed a lot of things. Even us, the crew themselves, during the airing of the show, no one is watching the episode, but when it's over, we see what people are talking about and what they said about our work”.*

Others participants voiced their suspicion about the buzz and hype surrounding Ramadan series on social media. They expressed worry that the production companies themselves could be behind the seeming participation and passion seen on social media platforms. Their view is that production companies use social media marketers who meticulously produce material and create sponsored posts to give the impression that the enthusiasm is natural and originates from the audience. This perspective challenges the notion that social media platforms serve as an unbiased space for audience expression and feedback. Instead, some participants suggested that production companies strategically manipulate social media channels to create an illusion of organic audience participation and generate greater interest in their series. These insights shed light on the potential commercialization and manipulation of social media within the context of Ramadan series. Male, Actor, 22, expressed *“Social media hype is orchestrated, this is a business after all and production companies understand how powerful social media can be, just like any other CEO in any other industry”.* Male, Screenwriter, 57 emphasized *“This is part of public opinion, part of people's impressions. However, it does not mean it is trustworthy, objective, or accurate. In the best cases, it may represent a specific group or community, but not the entire society. Nonetheless, for production companies, it remains a marketing field. It used to be different, advertisements used to be done on television, billboards in the streets, newspaper ads. Now, the majority of marketing for any artistic work, be it a film, TV show, or even a song, revolves around social media. I emphasize again that social media is important, but it is not the measure of success for any type of Ramadan series. It is just a part of its marketing, much like the series themselves”.*

### **5.2.3 Reform and social awareness**

Participants discussed how Ramadan entertainment in Egypt serves as a catalyst for societal change and raising of awareness in regards to a number of important topics. Participants passionately discussed how Ramadan series have evolved into a venue for addressing and bringing to light pressing societal issues that are frequently disregarded, misunderstood or unknown. This theme investigates the series' ability to change public

perception and raise awareness of issues including but not limited to Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), women's rights, unfair guardianship laws, and marital rape. These themes were extensively explored in Ramadan series in recent years.

Female, Assistant Director, 23 expressed *“These series are changing the law, actually. A series like Under Guardianship, for example, which I find very sad, by the way, that we have to wait for a series to move authorities and lawmakers, to make very important decisions about ancient laws that have harmed people for decades. But, in the end, this is our reality. Hundreds of people shared their stories online after the show aired. One person shared that they couldn’t withdraw money to buy a computer even though their father had left them a big inheritance, but the state wouldn’t give their mother permission to use that money, it’s ludicrous”*.

Participants in the interviews underlined that Ramadan series have taken on a significant responsibility in launching conversations and challenging social conventions around these delicate subjects. By presenting compelling narratives and thought-provoking storylines, these series have captivated millions of viewers, engaging them in conversations that were once considered taboo or silenced. The potential impact of Ramadan series in fostering a sense of empathy, understanding, and social change was a recurring sentiment among the interviewees.

Female, Cinematographer, 22, said *“In Egypt, ADHD was once an unfamiliar term to many, but in recent years, it has become a topic of great significance because of the series “Khali Balak Men Zizi”, it broke this barrier. I was studying for my bachelors at the time, I vividly recall that approximately 90% of the projects written revolved around ADHD. It was a tremendous shift that raised awareness for crucial issues. A series like “Laabat Newton” had a profound impact, tackling subjects like marital rape that were rarely discussed in Egyptian society. They initiated conversations that were long overdue, challenging societal norms and transforming public perception”*.

Moreover, the participants highlighted the significance of Ramadan as a particularly opportune time for these reform-oriented narratives. They believe it can create momentum for change and encourage people to speak up and share their stories. They expressed their hope that this genre will grow and keep discussing these important issues. Male, Screenwriter, 57, said *“This is a genre that I wish would become prevalent, but it's rather scarce. We produce around 35 to 45 dramas during Ramadan, we could use more serious narratives. Diversity is a key theme. However, the purpose and objective of these dramas go beyond mere entertainment and humor. They carry a message of societal change, expressing the aspirations of changing society. The*

*Egyptian audience must engage with the dramas aired during Ramadan or at any other time. Yes, and particularly during Ramadan, people are eager to address important issues and convey messages. Social media helps us listen to people, hear real stories, by creating series that speak to people's pain, you're encouraging them to speak up and hopefully push for positive changes”.*

#### **5.2.4 Nationalistic series**

Participants were asked about their opinions in regard to the emergence of a new genre of Ramadan series that carry a nationalistic tone. These shows provide a platform to showcase the army and police forces' accomplishments and to celebrate their services to the country. The prominence of these series and their effects on the dynamics of viewership throughout the holy month were discussed by the participants.

However, it is crucial to note that some participants showed hesitation or chose not to respond at all while talking about this issue. This reluctance might be explained by Egypt's tight political and media ties, where it can be delicate to criticize the military and patriotic themes. Due to possible political repercussions or a desire to seem impartial in their comments, participants may have been hesitant to voice their thoughts. The presence of this nationalistic genre in Ramadan entertainment highlights a significant nexus between the media and politics in Egypt. These series not only document the achievements of the armed forces but also align with the political narrative and aspirations of the government. The portrayal of the army and police forces in a positive light serves as a means of fostering national pride, patriotism, and unity among the viewers. However, further exploration of this theme is necessary to capture the diverse perspectives of content creators, viewers, and the complex dynamics between the media and political actors.

Male, Screenwriter, 57, expressed how these series require massive funds to be produced and they feature top-notch technical capabilities. *“As for the official series, the nationalistic series, the propaganda series, remains a significant part of the prime time. The massive production scale and elaborate scenes, such as military battles and security pursuits, are hard to achieve for production companies that are concerned about the cost.*

*Then comes the glorification of heroism. The idea of the heroic soldier fighting represents an attractive concept and satisfies the longing of a wide segment of the audience. However, the drawback of this genre is that viewers start to feel the*

*exaggeration and realize that its purpose is not to depict reality but to promote the government and the state. This creates a gap and mistrust between the viewers and the impact of these series. Moreover, these series have become a type of obligatory programming during Ramadan, celebrated through official media channels and social media platforms directed by government entities. This has created an additional gap in the viewers' perception towards these works. Nevertheless, these productions have significant popularity and a large viewership. They possess limited artistic productivity but feature prominent stars who continue the legacy of their successful predecessors”.*

The participants also noted that there is a clear duality and hypocrisy when it comes to what can and cannot be featured in Ramadan narratives. Female, Assistant Director, 23 expressed *“Talking about the army is strictly prohibited, as it is considered a sensitive topic that crosses a red line. Any mention or discussion related to the army, the president's secrets, or anything connected to this domain can lead to severe consequences, including imprisonment and disappearance. This is the harsh reality we currently live in. When it comes to other topics like changing certain laws, there's somewhat of an open dialogue because these are changeable issue, the army and police are not changeable”.*

## Chapter 6: Discussion & limitations

---

### 6.1 Discussion

These findings provide valuable and diverse insights and opinions on Ramadan entertainment. These discussions encompass relationships, laws, social reform, family dynamics, media responsibility, the role of social media, political agendas and more. Additionally, the findings of this study shed light on Ramadan entertainment as a prominent cultural element that is interwoven into the fabric of Egyptian popular culture.

The participants described Ramadan as a cultural phenomenon that extends beyond religious observance and influences various aspects of Egyptian society. The popularity of Ramadan series was attributed to their alignment with these cultural rituals and their ability to capture the collective attention of the population. However, concerns were raised about the potential dilution of the religious message behind the holy month due to the prominence of entertainment during Ramadan.

It is worth noting that there was a sense of ambivalence among the participants when it came to the audience and the impact of their work as professional media practitioners. While some participants acknowledged the influence and power of the audience, others expressed reservations and skepticism regarding the authenticity and reliability of audience opinions and feedback. For example, in the second topic about Ramadan and social media, participants highlighted the abundance of opinions and reviews on platforms like Facebook, which can make it challenging to discern what is genuine and what is not. They mentioned that while they can sometimes make use of audience opinions to shape their work, the sheer volume of opinions can also be overwhelming. While some participants expressed their disappointment that we have to wait for series to provoke change, others were hopeful at the ability of these series to address topics that are frequently disregarded, misunderstood, or unknown in society. The potential impact of these series in fostering empathy, understanding, and social change was acknowledged by the interviewees. They expressed hope that this genre would continue to grow and address crucial issues in Egyptian society.

As for the nationalistic series, participants noted that the presence of such series highlights the nexus between media and politics in Egypt, as they not only document these achievements but also align with the political narrative and aspirations of the government. However, due to the sensitive nature of discussing the military and

patriotic themes, some participants showed hesitation or reluctance to voice their thoughts fully. The participants also noted a duality and hypocrisy in what can and cannot be featured in Ramadan narratives, with strict limitations on discussing the army and potential severe consequences for those who cross the red line.

The results of the social media content analysis align with previous studies on the intersection between traditional media and social media. Particularly how social media can be used as a platform to increase awareness and create momentum for social causes. Khamis and Vaughn (2012), expressed that the Egyptian revolution and the ensuing political change were significantly influenced by the use of social media for advocacy and mobilization. Early users of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter for gathering and expressing their thoughts were Egyptian youth. These platforms widened the public realm, gave young people a forum for expression, and aided in the planning and execution of protests. Egyptian adolescents were able to speak horizontally among themselves thanks to social media, mainly Facebook, breaking away from the country's conventional vertical communication system where they were talked at by adults.

Young people were inspired to express their thoughts, test social and political boundaries, and partake in political comedy and criticism as a result of this sense of equality and empowerment. Other studies examined the role of media content in setting expectations when it comes to relationships. Kulkarni, Porter, Mennick & Gil-Rivas (2019), explored participants' thoughts on romantic relationships and how the media affect relationship dynamics and perceptions. According to their findings, teens are utilizing media depictions of loving couples to define their own expectations and wishes for romantic relationships.

Findings from the interviews align with studies conducted about the relationship between Arab entertainment and political agendas. Lindsey (2005) emphasized that Ramadan productions are typically aired with varying degrees of state cooperation and oversight. In some cases, Arab governments (Syrian and Egyptian) have commissioned shows with the intention of promoting certain values or social cohesion. For example, shows promoting tolerance between Muslims and Christians and others condemning terrorists and extremists. The choice of topics is influenced by political circumstances and the government's agenda.



## 6.2 Limitations

1. Literature limitations: There was a dearth in the research surrounding Ramadan entertainment and its social and cultural implications.
2. Time constraints: As mentioned above, researching this topic for a short period of time may not be able to fully capture the long-term trends and changes in terms of story progression due to the dynamic and evolving nature of Ramadan entertainment.
3. Sample representativeness: It is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study are based on a purposive sampling technique, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The participants selected for the study may not fully represent the diverse perspectives and experiences of all media stakeholders involved in the production, distribution, and promotion of Ramadan entertainment in Egypt. Future research could consider using a larger and more diverse sample to ensure a broader representation of opinions and perspectives.
4. Sample size: The study included a total number of 60 Facebook posts and 8 participants. A bigger sample would represent more diverse opinions and provide more profound insight on the intricacies of Ramadan entertainment. Additionally, it would include a bigger segment of the audience.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and recommendations

---

### 7.1 Conclusion

The study of Ramadan entertainment discussions on social media in Egypt offers important insights into societal, cultural, and individual viewpoints on relationships, laws and awareness, morals, and media responsibility. The findings draw attention to the intricate stories, unique experiences, and broader social meanings that are woven throughout these themes.

Interpersonal interactions are crucial, and studies of these in the context of Ramadan entertainment show how this is reflected in popular culture. Users discussed relationships, family dynamics, and friendships depicted in the Ramadan series, as well as how these relationships appeared on television and how they influenced their own lives, making it clear that media portrayals had a significant impact on societal beliefs and behaviors.

Recurring themes included the value of open communication, gender dynamics, and appreciation in relationships. The investigation also highlighted the gender differences in parenting, with women experiencing sentiments of undervaluation and omission. Particularly how they are expected to solely handle the burdens of childcare and domestic labour.

The representation of legal issues in Ramadan entertainment was discussed, as well as its societal repercussions. Users evaluated these depictions' veracity and their capacity to affect viewers' comprehension and knowledge of legal issues. Concern over guardianship laws and how they affect women became a prevalent subject, with calls for reform and first-person accounts illustrating how unfair and discriminatory these laws are. There is a significant desire for change in the current societal system, especially in terms of women's rights.

On social media, morality and media accountability came up frequently. Users engaged in discussions regarding moral norms, guidelines, and how moral choices were portrayed in the Ramadan television series. The approach emphasized how morality, storytelling, and the audience's involvement with ethical issues interact in complex

ways. Users stressed the need for ethical storytelling, better accountability, and responsible media practices. The debates demonstrated viewers' knowledge of the possible consequences of media material as well as their high expectations for ethically and socially responsible storytelling.

Several significant topics were clarified by the results of the in-depth interviews. First, the cultural significance of the holy month, which acts as a period of group rituals and social synchronization, was cited as a reason for the success of the Ramadan series. The popularity and wide appeal of Ramadan series are based on the patterns and rituals that are strongly ingrained in Egyptian society. However, given to the predominance of entertainment, worries have been expressed concerning the possible weakening of the religious meaning driving Ramadan.

Secondly, the impact of social media on Ramadan programming was also highlighted. Participants emphasized how many thoughts and evaluations there are on social media, which may both assist and obstruct content creators in making decisions. On one hand, it provides insights on what the audience expects, wants and their overall opinion of the series. On the other hand, there can be an oversaturation of opinions that would just be distracting. Some participants, however, voiced skepticism about the sincerity and authenticity of the social media excitement, speculating that production corporations purposefully exploit social media platforms to fake genuine audience engagement.

Thirdly, it was acknowledged that Ramadan entertainment served as a catalyst for change and increased public awareness of significant social concerns. Television shows have developed into a platform for confronting and illuminating subjects that were long shunned or taboo in Egyptian culture. Millions of viewers have been drawn into discussions on topics like women's rights, discriminatory guardianship rules, mental health and marital rape thanks to the thought-provoking plots presented in Ramadan series. Participants noted the potential value of Ramadan series in promoting empathy, understanding, and social change.

Lastly, the development of nationalistic television series during Ramadan was also explored. These programs honor the army and police forces' accomplishments and support the government's political agenda and goals. Even though some participants were reluctant to talk about this genre, its existence demonstrates how closely media

and politics are intertwined in Egypt. To capture the many viewpoints and intricate relationships between content providers, consumers, and political players, more research on this issue is necessary.

The influence of Ramadan on cultural practices, media production, and audience engagement merits further exploration to understand the broader implications of this cultural phenomenon.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

### **7.2.1 Recommendations for future researchers**

1. **Diversification of the sample:** Future researchers should attempt to include a broader sample of media stakeholders, including people from different areas of Egypt, various age groups, and varying professional backgrounds within the media business, in order to increase the generalizability of the findings.
2. **Mixed methods:** Future researchers might benefit from the use of quantitative techniques to collect data from a bigger population to supplement the qualitative insights obtained from this study.
3. **Content analysis:** By conducting a content analysis of Ramadan series, researchers can gain quantitative insights into the prevalence of certain themes, the portrayal of social issues, and the audience's response to specific content.
4. **Longitudinal studies:** Future researchers are advised to undertake longitudinal studies spanning a number of years to better understand the development and changes in the Ramadan series. They would be able to track trends, changes, and innovations in narrative methods, thematic decisions, and audience response. A lengthier study period would also make it possible to examine the long-term effects of the Ramadan series on society, including their influence on social attitudes, public debate, cultural standards, and understanding the growing role of social media

## **7.2.2 Recommendations for media stakeholders**

1. **Diversify Content:** Encourage the inclusion of diverse narratives, perspectives, and social issues within Ramadan entertainment. Use storytelling to promote empathy for oppressed groups and social justice concerns and to increase public knowledge of them.
2. **Responsible Representation:** Ensure responsible and accurate portrayal of social issues, avoiding stereotypes or misrepresentation that may perpetuate biases or reinforce negative perceptions.
3. **Collaboration with NGOs:** Work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are focused on social justice concerns to gather knowledge, inspiration, and direction for creating stories that tactfully and effectively address these topics
4. **Set Ethical Guidelines:** Establish moral standards for content producers that promote responsible storytelling and truthful representation of social justice concerns. This will help to ensure that the material abides by the values of equity, sensitivity, and inclusion.
5. **Educate and Inform:** Incorporate informative elements within Ramadan entertainment to educate the audience about social justice issues, their root causes, and potential solutions. Use storytelling as a tool for empowerment and social transformation.

## Chapter 8: References

---

1. Abdel-Megied, Y. (2022). Romance, drama, propaganda: Ramadan TV's subliminal messages. *The New Arab*. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/romance-drama-propaganda-ramadan-tvs-subliminal-messages>
2. Abu Al-Saud, A. A. (2015). The social responsibility of Egyptian television drama. *Journal of Radio and Television Research*, 2015(3), 137-181.
3. Abu-Lughod, L. (2004). *Dramas of Nationhood*. The University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from <https://www.perlego.com/book/1853285/dramas-of-nationhood-the-politics-of-television-in-egypt-pdf>.
4. Abul-Magd Z (2021). When Upper Egypt Spoke: Dramatized Rebellion. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, 125131. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743821000052>
5. Abu-Rabi, I.M. (2004). *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History*. Sterling, VA: Pluto Press
6. Ahmed, R. (2017). The portrayal of women in Egyptian television drama: A study on a sample of Ramadan 2016 series. *National Social Journal*, 54(2), 21-59.
7. Alterman, J.B. (1998). *New Media, New Politics?: From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World*. Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy
8. Armbrust, W. (Ed.). (2000). *Mass mediations: New approaches to popular culture in the Middle East and beyond*. Univ of California Press.
9. Buccianti, A. (2016). Arab Storytelling in the Digital Age: From Musalsalāt to Web Drama? *The State of Post-Cinema*, 49–70. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-52939-8\_3
10. Gerges, F. A. (Ed.). (2013). *The new Middle East: Protest and revolution in the Arab world*. Cambridge University Press.
11. Guardian News and Media. (2023, April 21). Hit TV drama sparks calls for reform of Egyptian family law. *The Guardian*. Retrieved April 30, 2023, from

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/apr/21/hit-tv-drama-sparks-calls-for-reform-of-egypts-oppressive-guardianship-law>

12. Hopkins, N. S., & Saad, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Upper Egypt: Identity and Change* (No. 7957). American Univ in Cairo Press.

13. Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society. *Nordicom review*, 29(2), 102-131.

14. Hussein, W. (2021). My husband was an angel and then he raped me. BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-57694110>

15. Khalil, J. F. (2019). Television in the Arab Region. *A Companion to Television*, 439–458. doi:10.1002/9781119269465.ch22

16. Khamis, S. (2011). The transformative Egyptian media landscape: Changes, challenges and Comparative perspectives. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 931-954. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/813/592>

17. Khamis, S., & Vaughn, K. (2012). “We Are All Khaled Said”: The potentials and limitations of cyberactivism in triggering public mobilization and promoting political change. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 4, 145–163.

18. Kraidy, M.M. and Khalil, J.F. (2009). *Arab Television Industries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

19. Krotz, F. (2009). Mediatization: A concept with which to grasp media and societal change. *Mediatization: Concept, changes, consequences*, 21-40.

20. Kulkarni, S. J., Porter, A. M., Mennick, A., & Gil-Rivas, V. (2019). “I feel like... their relationship is based on the media”: Relationship between media representation and adolescents’ relationship knowledge and expectations. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 40(5), 545–560. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-019-00565-0>

21. Lindsey, U. (2005). TV versus terrorism: Why this year's ramadan shows tackled one 'controversial' subject, but were barred from broaching others. *Arab Media & Society*. Retrieved April from <https://www.arabmediasociety.com/tv-versus-terrorism->

[why-this-years-ramadan-shows-tackled-one-controversial-subject-but-were-barred-from-broaching-others/](#)

22. Mahmoud, K, Egypt: Drama as a political tool (2022). Fanack, Retrieved from <https://fanack.com/egypt/culture-of-egypt/egypt-drama-as-a-political-tool/>

23. McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public opinion quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.

24. Mounir, G. (2022). The pro-Sisi Ramadan TV drama provoking accusations of revisionism. Middle East Eye. Retrieved from <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/egypt-ikhtiyar-ramadan-drama-causing-anger-why>

25. Mundt, M., Ross, K., & Burnett, C. M. (2018). Scaling social movements through social media: The case of Black Lives Matter. *Social Media+ Society*, 4(4), 2056305118807911.

26. Napoli, J. J., Amin, H. Y., & Napoli, L. R. (1995). Privatization of the Egyptian media. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 18(4).

27. Nour Halabi & Christa Salamandra (2019) Guest Editors' Introduction: The Politics in and of Middle Eastern Television Drama, *Middle East Critique*, 28:2, 97-100, DOI: 10.1080/19436149.2019.1599533

28. Parolin, G. P. (2019). Law enforcement in Egyptian TV series. *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 7(1).

29. Sakr, N. (2007). *Arab Television Today* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.perlego.com/book/918702/arab-television-today-pdf>

30. Tauris. Sakr, N., Skovgaard-Petersen, J., and Della Ratta, D. (2015). *Arab Media Moguls*. London: I.B. Tauris.



