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**“Are they just for venting out?”**

**Exploring discourses on women-only Facebook Groups on television talk show programs in Egypt**

Shaden Kamel, 2024

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## **“Are they just for venting out?”**

**Exploring discourses on women-only Facebook  
Groups on television talk show programs in Egypt**



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**Shaden Kamel, 2024**

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Shaden Kamel is a Media Studies doctoral researcher and Junior Fellow at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies. She holds a master's in media and global communication from the University of Helsinki. Kamel's current research explores women-only Facebook groups as a popular communication phenomenon in Egypt. Her research interests are digital and popular culture, particularly internet-based trends, online community formations, and gender in the MENA region.

## **Abstract**

In Egypt, many women have created various private Facebook groups for women only to support women. As exclusive spaces for women, these Facebook groups enabled women in Egypt to share their experiences and quickly became a source of awareness. Concurrently, their proliferation and popularity as spaces exclusively encompassing thousands of women have attracted extensive mass media coverage in Egypt, particularly from talk show programs. Accordingly, this article uses critical discourse analysis to explore the discourses on popular women-only Facebook groups in mainstream talk show programs in Egypt. Ten talk show program videos were analyzed to identify the discourses on these Facebook groups. The article displays conversations from four talk show program segments to showcase two prevalent and simultaneous discourses. The first discourse conveys a moral panic over these Facebook groups for enabling women to discuss problems on matters of the private sphere. Conversely, the second discourse conveys an embracement of Facebook group creators' entrepreneurial practices manifested from their Facebook group. Subsequently, these two discourses are critically analyzed by drawing on literature on gendered dynamics of the private and public spheres in Egypt and postfeminism in connection with commercial media logic.

**Keywords:** Talk shows, media discourses, Facebook groups, women-only spaces, television, Egypt

## Résumé

En Égypte, de nombreuses femmes ont créé divers groupes Facebook privés réservés aux femmes afin de les soutenir. En tant qu'espaces exclusivement réservés aux femmes, ces groupes Facebook ont permis aux femmes égyptiennes de partager leurs expériences et sont rapidement devenus une source de sensibilisation. Parallèlement, leur prolifération et leur popularité en tant qu'espaces regroupant exclusivement des milliers de femmes ont attiré une vaste couverture médiatique en Égypte, en particulier dans le cadre d'émissions-débats. En conséquence, cet article utilise l'analyse critique du discours pour explorer les discours sur les groupes Facebook populaires réservés aux femmes dans les programmes de talk-show grand public en Égypte. Dix vidéos de talk-shows ont été analysées pour identifier les discours sur ces groupes Facebook. L'article présente des conversations tirées de quatre segments de talk-show afin de mettre en évidence deux discours prédominants et simultanés. Le premier discours fait état d'une panique morale à l'égard de ces groupes Facebook qui permettent aux femmes de discuter de problèmes relevant de la sphère privée. À l'inverse, le second discours fait état d'une adhésion aux pratiques entrepreneuriales des créatrices de groupes Facebook qui se manifestent à travers leur groupe Facebook. Par la suite, ces deux discours sont analysés de manière critique en s'appuyant sur la littérature relative aux dynamiques sexuées des sphères privée et publique en Égypte et au postféminisme en lien avec la logique des médias commerciaux.

**Mots-clés :** Talk-shows, discours médiatiques, groupes Facebook, espaces réservés aux femmes, télévision, Égypte

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# “Are they just for venting out?”

## Exploring discourses on women-only Facebook Groups on television talk show programs in Egypt

Shaden Kamel

### 1 Introduction

Technological shifts have brought interesting reflections regarding the rise of “ideas, identities, and discourses” in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) public sphere (Skalli 2006: 35). For instance, Ayish and AlNajjar (2009) shed light on the way forms of digital communication, such as satellite television and the internet, have contributed to noteworthy social and cultural shifts, particularly for the millennials in the region (26). They noted that young social influencers are gradually developing and shaping the content and form of the virtual sphere to influence society by conveying a combination of local and global discourses surrounding issues such as human challenges and women empowerment. However, Skalli (2006) argued that studies on the technological transformations of MENA’s public sphere fall short in considering the multifaceted positions women and the media engage in within the region. She further argued within a context of longstanding obstacles that restrict women’s physical mobility and visibility, access to new media tools has enabled women in the process of getting involved in “shaping, impacting and redefining the public sphere” (36).

Indeed, mobile phone penetration in the MENA region has clearly increased women’s access to the internet and, thus, the prospect of getting engaged in various forms of communication (Sreberny 2015: 358). Within the context of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and access advancement in Egypt, despite gender disparities in the usage of ICT tools, the percentage of internet usage for social media participation among males and females in Egypt is relatively close, with 91.6% for males compared to 89.9% for females (Ministry of

Communications and Information Technology 2021). These figures signify the potentiality of social media usage for women in Egypt.

The proliferation of popular Facebook (FB) groups created by women for women in Egypt provides an interesting empirical case of a particular form of popular communication phenomenon in the region. They provide a space where women can converse, seek, and offer support on various topics that concern and interest them, such as marital and familial issues, motherhood, fashion, and lifestyle. Concurrently, the popularity of these FB groups as spaces that encompass tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of women has attracted extensive mass media coverage in Egypt, particularly from local mainstream talk show television programs. Considering how influential women-only Facebook groups are for being prevalently used by women in concurrence with talk show programs' persistence in being instrumental platforms for leading news stories and providing Egyptians with the latest information (Barakat 2022), this article relevantly explores the discourses that revolve around the utilization of popular women-only FB groups in mainstream television talk show programs in Egypt.

Firstly, the article draws on recent literature on online platforms providing a space for expression and social activism for women in Egypt to shed light on the vitality of exploring social media-based platforms' potentiality for women to articulate their needs, experiences, concerns and matters that pertain to their well-being in the region. Then, a contextual background is provided on the broadcast media structure in Egypt to contextualize how talk show program structure shapes discourse around Facebook groups. Secondly, the method of data collection and data analysis is described. Thirdly, the results of the prevalent discourse are demonstrated, followed by a critical analysis in the discussion section.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Virtual Spaces and Women**

Extensive scholarly focus has been directed towards the utilization of the internet by Egyptian women for activism during the Arab Spring in 2011 (Elsayed 2016). Dina Hosni's (2017) study showed how, on the one hand, platforms in the cybersphere provided women protestors a space where they could support and encourage each other to go to protests in the face of sexual assault attacks in the streets (206). On the other hand, her study showed that women's insecurity to express their concerns in physical spaces has paved the way for new media platforms to provide alternative spaces where women convey their perspectives of contemporary life, drawing on a range of political, social, economic, and religious experiences (Hosni 2017).

Sara Khorshid (2021) further explained the importance of the virtual sphere vis-à-vis the disadvantages women in Egypt are subjected to due to their gender. She noted that before the 2011 uprising in Egypt, there was a general perception that all Egyptians, excluding the ruling and elite group, suffered from corruption and inequalities. However, the subsequent period after the 2011 uprising mirrored that, among other issues, women in Egypt face "sexism, misogyny, domestic violence, sexual harassment, discriminatory societal expectations, and poverty as a single parent" (Parag. 2). As a result, she pointed out that there is a growing awareness and gender consciousness among women in Egypt and a rising concern over women's rights that stretches

out to wider segments of the Egyptian public, which encompass non-ideological women who have minimal to no engagement with political or social activism (Khorshid 2021).

Another example of non-ideological activism engagement using digital media is reflected in Reem Abuzaid and Yosra Sultan's study (2022). They explored the emergence of a new wave of feminist activism in June 2020 organized by young middle- and upper-class Egyptians in Egypt who depended profoundly on social media tools to share incidents of sexual harassment and assault (307). They indicated that the organizers are not "educated as feminists" but are inspired by the organizational framework of the global #MeToo movement and its discourse against sexual violence (Abuzaid and Sultan 2022). This form of activism in Egypt based on online campaigns has stirred solidarity and vast support from Egyptian women to victims of harassment and sexual assault, stimulating a feeling of sisterhood among them (Khorshid 2021). This idea of what Khorshid describes as 'spontaneous feminism' concurs with Sreberny's (2015) perspective on how women's practices are widening in terms of nature and content in what is considered political. For instance, she indicated that women's participation in discussions on social issues in public debates and their activities that endorse women's awareness of their rights is considered political. Accordingly, it is vital to look beyond a limited conception of cultural productions that explicitly promote feminist issues and defy prevailing gender norms (Pratt 2021).

In her article *Virtual Spaces and Collective Action in Egypt*, Sherine Hafez (2016) highlighted the importance of online platforms in Egypt that, while refraining from engaging in direct political discussions, contribute to political work by providing a space for hundreds of thousands of Egyptians to seek self-help tools and support from others. She indicated that in conjunction with the state's efforts to outline morals and values to repress ideas that threaten social cohesion, these online platforms' affordance of privacy and anonymity has created a space of tolerance for topics largely considered taboo by society. One of the examples she provides is the confessions of a married woman Facebook group that has enabled women to address situations that women commonly face and discuss intimate topics perceived as cultural taboos, such as sex, gender role expectations, and mental and sexual health (Hafez 2016).

While this section highlighted recent literature on how social media platforms are prevalently utilized for women articulating their concerns and social activism, it also conveyed the difficulties women face in the public sphere. Some of the authors highlighted the role of moral discourse in Egypt's public sphere in contributing to these difficulties. For instance, Hafez (2016) highlighted that current public discourse in Egypt is centered on the ground of national unity and state-approved morality, which sustains the traditional values of the mainstream. Likewise, Abuzaid and Sultan's (2022) study also showed that online campaigning against sexual harassment initially caused a stir and gained the state's support. For example, issuing arrest warrants of the men who took part in sexual assaults. However, they indicated that the state took advantage of the situation to convey a moral discourse that criticized the engagement of 'prohibited' sexual practices and called on parents to be attentive to their children's moral upbringing and to take care of the internet's influence (307).

In the context of prevailing morality discourses in the public sphere, it is imperative to look at the broadcast media structure in Egypt and the status of women within this structure to understand

how this context impacts discourses that revolve around women's utilization of digital media platforms.

## **2.2 Broadcast Media structure and Women**

It is paramount to consider the role of media ownership when exploring the role of television as a public sphere (Abdul Wahab 2011: 33). The MENA region witnessed substantial advancement at the end of the twentieth century due to the emergence of satellite channels that are not controlled directly by the government (Sakr 2002). However, privately owned channels in Egypt are associated with the government because they are broadcasted via the Nilesat satellite, of which 40% is owned by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), a public enterprise that answers to the Minister of Information (Dawoud 2011: 152). Nevertheless, as wealthy businessmen are foremost interested in making a profit through their private television programs from advertising (Hamada 2008), this meant more competition for the viewers' attention (Hamada 2008; Sakr 2002).

The competition for viewers' attention to attract advertisers also meant that appearance-focused visual media relies on women to appeal to the audience (Sakr 2001). Consequently, Skalli (2006) remarked that the position and image of female media personalities have become more complex. She indicated that while they acquired greater negotiating power within the competitive media market, women's presence in the public sphere is still met with hostility (Skalli 2006: 44). Likewise, Sakr (2002) pointed out that the increasing quantitative presence of women in media institutes holding influential positions in the MENA region did not contribute substantially to an improvement in the discourse on women's status. She attributed this lack of improvement to the rigid code of ethics imposed by the state that generally undermines the staff's authority. For instance, TV programs, particularly those that discuss women's status, are not allowed to include content that condemns religion, tradition, and beliefs, which are viewed by the state to endanger the sacredness of family values and ties (Sakr 2002: 841).

Due to this structure of television broadcast programs in Egypt, discourses that comply with the status quo are encouraged. Consequently, viewers are not exposed to content considered unsettling or socially disruptive (Sakr 2002: 841). For this reason, private channels are criticized for being a real public sphere for Egyptians, as too often these institutions censor themselves (Hamada 2008). Accordingly, as the literature indicates that commercial television programs in Egypt operate under constrictions, I argue that television talk show programs convey dominant ideology. Furthermore, they have the power to influence public discourse by shaping media discourse (van Dijk 2001).

## **3 Method of Data collection and Analysis**

Ten videos retrieved from the official YouTube channel of talk show programs were purposefully selected to align with the article's research objective of exploring discourses surrounding women's utilization of women-only Facebook groups. The material chosen for the analysis was part of other types of digital ethnographic data collected for my larger PhD research (in progress) that explores popular Facebook groups for women as a communication phenomenon in Egypt. Accordingly, keywords, informed by the other data collected, such as Facebook groups for women or women's Facebook groups were utilized to search and retrieve these videos from YouTube.

The article draws on critical discourse analysis that accounts for power relations in society. It broadly draws on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework for critical discourse analysis. The first dimension encompasses a description of the textual features (written or spoken). The second dimension includes identifying discursive conventions found in the discourse sequence. The third dimension conveys the socio-cultural practices connected with existing hegemonies integrated into discourse articulations (Fairclough 1995: 97). Accordingly, while the findings of this article are based on the analysis of ten talk show videos, four videos, each from a different talk show program, were selected to showcase the characteristics of the form, content of the communicative event, and how it operates.

These talk show programs are 1) *Al Setat Mayrafoosh Yekdbo*, a woman's program hosted by all women. According to this TV program's Facebook page, it is described as a TV program that 'deviates' from women's program that discusses makeup, cooking, and fashion by discussing all social issues through the eyes of women. 2) *Akhir El Nahar* TV program is described on its YouTube channel as a daily program that boldly highlights political and social issues with the best experts and discusses various prominent issues and concerns of the Egyptian street. 3) *Ehna El Setat* is also a woman-led TV program television program. This TV program is described on its YouTube channel as a social program that discusses women's issues and presents everything related to women's interests, including fashion and makeup. 4) *Yahdoth Fi Masr* TV program is described on its YouTube channel as bringing the news and the pulse of the Egyptian street, people's issues, and political events with confidence, credibility, seriousness, and impartiality. It is presented by a prominent television journalist, Sherif Amer, who is described as bringing a different reading and a deeper analysis of the news in Egypt, along with a fleet of experts in various fields.

Subsequently, the discussion section is guided by Fairclough's second and third dimensions of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995), which is an analysis of discursive practices and socio-cultural practices, by drawing connections to the literature on the private and public sphere in Egypt, the structure of local and global media, and postfeminism. Furthermore, as this article is concerned with the representation of women-only Facebook groups, bearing in mind that they are spaces for women and digital platforms used by women, Lazar's (2013) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) provides a valuable additional framework for the discussion presented in this article. Her approach is concerned with distinct communicative phenomena and genres that are broadly utilized within a culture and are potentially perceived as empowering for women's participation in the public realms (219–220). Nevertheless, she concurrently emphasizes accounting for institutional structures in which gender accomplishments are located (221). Accordingly, in addition to Fairclough's framework to guide the analysis of the selected sample, Lazar's FCDA approach is utilized first to identify how power and dominance are constructed and/or challenged in discourse articulating gendered social practices (219–220). Second, it is utilized to locate how conventions of doing and being a woman are co-constructed in discourse (Lazar 2013: 221).

## 4 Results: Moral Panic Vs. Embracement

This article reveals two prevalent discourses on women's utilization of women-only Facebook groups that were evident in all the videos analyzed in the sample. Firstly, a discourse that conveys a concern over women's use of these platforms to vent out about issues that are socio-culturally perceived as matters of the private sphere. Secondly, a discourse that embraces the utilization of women-only Facebook groups for entrepreneurial endeavors is conveyed. In this section, snippets from four videos, each from a different television program, are presented to demonstrate the simultaneous presence of these two discourses. In the following discussion section, these discourses are analyzed to broader societal and structural issues.

### El Setat Mayarfoosh Yekdebo

In this women-led television talk show program, Zeinab Al Ashry, the creator of *Confessions of a Married Woman* Facebook group, two members of Al Ashry's Facebook groups, and a journalist were featured. Al Ashry's Facebook group is known as a platform where women talk about marital problems through anonymous confessions. The term 'confessions' comes from the initial inability to speak about marital issues, as topics that concern the private sphere are perceived as taboo in Egyptian society. Nowadays, her FB group has evolved to become a platform where women talk about various issues that concern them beyond marital problems. Given this context, the following snippet shows how one of the presenters introduced the topic of Facebook groups for women-only as a debatable phenomenon to the viewers:

All the time we find groups for chit-chatting and venting out created by women. All the time we find people complaining about their marriage problems, and honestly, it could sometimes be beneficial. Venting out and listening to the experiences of others has a beneficial, positive, and beautiful side, but some women are addicted to it [FB groups]. Those who want to hear news of others and get into marriage secrets. Is it right or wrong? Are they [the FB groups] just for venting out, or do they lead to a state of struggle with no solutions? (El-Setat, 2022, 51: 30-52:05).

The above introduction by the presenter conveyed concern over FB groups as spaces for venting out and questioned if they are appropriate spaces for women to talk about issues concerning the private sphere and if they even provide women with solutions. In the interview, Al Ashry first validated her FB group by saying her FB group developed beyond being a platform of "confessions" to a company and that she was honored in Sweden for providing sessions and workshops conducted by experts on topics that concern women. Second, Al Ashry displayed awareness of communication forms that have always encompassed women's issues by saying, "I want to say that the idea of venting out and showcasing a problem is not something new... so many talk shows have people calling them to talk about their problems" (1:11:07-1:11:24). In this way, she highlighted that the concept of venting out is not a new phenomenon that emerged from FB group platforms.

A guest journalist was present as a critic in the discussion to provide an opposing view of the impact of the proliferation of Facebook groups for women. She commented on Al Ashry's statement by saying, "But only one person responds who is an expert" (1:11:26). Her comment

implied that in talk shows, individuals direct their concerns to the talk show host who is the proper entity to listen to people's personal or social problems and give advice accordingly. On the contrary, she viewed women who showcase their issues to a group of thousands of women who are not 'experts' as problematic. Such discourse showcases how socially dominant actors as "reliable sources and expert voices" are positioned favorably to regulate discourse and opinion representation (Mowri and Bailey 2022: 9).

### **Akhir El Nahar**

This television program featured Sarah Farid, the creator of *7ad Ye3raf* FB group, and her husband. Unlike the nature of the *Confessions of a Married Woman* FB group that is mentioned above, the nature of her *7ad Ye3raf* FB group generally does not involve discussions on personal or social issues that women are facing. Instead, it follows a question-answer format where women ask questions such as 'Does someone know where to buy...?', 'Where to find...?'. Nevertheless, the focus of the interview also conveyed a general concern over FB groups being platforms for women-only and for providing women the space to speak about their issues. As the following snippet shows:

Sherif Amin [TV presenter]: Since the goal [of the FB group] is to exchange information on where to find certain information, why is it [the FB group] exclusively for women?

Sarah Farid [FB group creator]: because the interests of women are different than the interests of men. For example, if I am looking for something for the kitchen, surely you would not be interested in telling me your opinion about it.

Amin: That is a point of view, but there are shared interests.

Farid: There are, but we women like to talk, to sit with ourselves.

Amin: This is the problem. I have an issue with women sitting with themselves, whether on the internet or in a room. Anything on their own. [...]

FB group creator's husband: It becomes worrying [jokingly]. [...]

Yasmin Al Khatib [TV presenter]: It is a matter of privacy. Women talk about their skin and hair and do not want men to see that [...]

Amin: Never mind talking about hair, skin, and these things. I do not think personal, psychological, or social problems should be discussed in secluded rooms between the sexes. In my opinion, they increase problems and do not solve them, and lead to hatred toward the other party. (TeNTV, 2022, 13:31-27:44)

The above snippet illustrates how Amin problematized the seclusion of women, whether in a virtual or physical space. He also differentiated between the topics that women could talk about. He labeled women's discussions on 'skin' and 'hair' as unproblematic. However, he labeled women's discussion on "personal, psychological or social" issues as problematic. While the FB

group creator and the other television presenter, Al Khatib, as women seem to defend the idea of the need for women's seclusion to speak about their interests, the interests they mentioned are related to skin and hair care. The representation of such interests as unproblematic emphasizes the maintenance of the female body.

### **Ehna El Setat**

In this other women-led and oriented television program, the creator of a prominent women-only Facebook group MissBasket, Nada Alashmouny, was featured. They initially discussed the significance of women-only FB groups as platforms that inform women, give them the space to find support, and know women's public opinion. Then, the focus of the interview was on the prominence of Alashmouny's Facebook group. She was asked by one of the television presenters how she benefits from her FB groups, to which she responded that she created an officially registered social media company that co-operates with famous international and local companies to create marketing campaigns through her FB group. Following Alashmouny's response, the presenters and Alashmouny supported and validated her digitally-enabled entrepreneurial activities. This validation is reflected in the following conversation:

Yasmine Fahmy [TV presenter]: Anyway, it is not wrong that someone would develop an idea into a project

Alashmouny [FB group creator]: I support this point. It is not wrong. When I now devote my life 24/7 to social media, naturally, since this has become my work, I have to benefit from it.

Fahmy [TV presenter]: and there is no harm. She [Elashmouny] advertises for something. If it does not benefit you, it does not harm you [...].

Laila-Ezz-Al Arab [TV presenter]: On the contrary, I encourage it. (TeN TV, 2022, 8:36-8:44)

While Alashmouny is presented favorably as a successful role model of entrepreneurship, the end of the segment emphasized the perceived negative impact of women-only FB groups on women. This emphasis is reflected in how one of the TV presenters, Fahmy, warned the viewers, "Me, Nada, and Laila encourage women to feel each other, but that does not mean to publicize family secrets [on FB groups] or to expose your husband..." (11:56-12:06). This quote showcases again a general discourse that reflects concern surrounding FB groups of women discussing issues that concern the private sphere.

### **Yahdoth fi Masr**

Three Facebook group creators were featured in this talk show program. Alashmouny, the creator of *MissBasket* FB group, Al Ashry, the creator of *the Confessions of a Married Woman* FB group, and Heba Eid, the creator of *the Mommy's Club* FB group. Unlike the television presenters in the other television programs, this program's television presenter does not clearly problematize women's use of women-only Facebook groups to vent about their problems. However, his questions to Alashmouny sought to differentiate the orientation of her Facebook group from Al Ashry's Facebook group *Confessions of a Married Woman*:

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Sherif Amer [TV presenter] To Nada Elashmouny [MissBasket FB group creator]: But your Facebook group is about shopping and lifestyle?

Alashmouny: but because it is the biggest group, as in the biggest in number [of members], so, we have mommies, we have women that have problems, we have a mix of everything.

Amer: So, do they ask you about fashion, or do they talk to you about their problems with their husbands?

Alashmouny: Everything. MissBasket is a world. It reflects everything present in society. (Yahdoth Fi Misr, 0:01-0:22)

Then, the television presenter exhibited an interest in how the three Facebook group creators have turned their Facebook groups into companies:

Amer [TV Presenter] to Alashmouny: How did you start this experience?

Alashmouny: As I started the FB group, I started a company. I did not wait.

Amer to the three Facebook group creators: So, the three of you have companies? With employees?

[Consensus among three interviewees: Yes]

Eid: with offices.

Amer [TV Presenter]: I need to find myself another job. (0:28-0:42)

The above snippet, like snippets from *Ehna el Setat* television program, reflected how the development of Facebook group creators' entrepreneurial practices resulting from creating Facebook groups is viewed favorably.

## 5 Discussion

Women television presenters, particularly in talk shows that follow a 'from women for women' format, slightly conveyed more solidarity with Facebook groups for providing a space where women could share relatable experiences. However, all talk shows analyzed, whether hosted by all women, a man and a woman, or a man only, presented concern over the proliferation of Facebook groups for women as spaces that enable women to discuss matters of the private sphere. I argue that this discourse is intertwined with the relegation of religion to the private sphere in Egypt and women's utilization of gendered spaces as a means to navigate societal constraints.

Prevailing Islamic beliefs maintain the division between male and female domains in Muslim societies (Abdelrazek-Alsiefy 2022: 4). Women are typically assigned to the domestic sphere associated with femininity and sexuality, while men are designated to the public sphere (Mernissi 1987, as cited in Abdelrazek-Alsiefy 2022: 4). However, the demarcation between the private

realm associated with femininity and the public sphere in Egypt is not solely a result of Islamic influence but also an impact of the integration of secularism. Mahmood (2012) argued that one of the paradoxes in the secularization of Middle Eastern societies, including Egypt, is that while religious jurisdiction became peripheral to the activities of civil and political entities, it attained a privileged position in the regulation of the private sphere (which encompasses family and sexuality). Due to the modern governance's relegation of religion, family, and sexuality to the private sphere, the Egyptian state centralized 'the family' as the social unit liable for the structure of the modern nation-state and society (Mahmood 2012: 60). Consequently, it has implemented multiple legal articles to regulate societal morals, including charges against individuals who disrupt 'social and family values' (Noralla 2022). Within this context, matters that revolve around family and sexuality, associated with the realm of the private sphere, are often unspoken in public discourses.

Alternatively, women-only Facebook groups' affordance of privacy and anonymity provides a space that allows its members to openly discuss topics disregarded in public discourse, which encompass personal concerns and sensitive topics like divorce and coping with controlling household members (Hafez 2016). Nevertheless, these gendered spaces formed online are not an entirely new phenomenon. They are an extension of an existing tradition of forming gendered spaces and publics. For instance, in her exploration of sexually segregated spaces of Bedouin women in Egypt, Abu-Lughod (1990) indicated that women habitually engage in trivial forms of resistance, such as utilizing secrets and silences to their benefit and using mockery as a means to express their discontent with men who fall short of their apparent moral and social superiority (45). She vitally noted that what is significant about these practices in these women's spaces is women's enthusiastic engagement in storytelling, listening, and reacting to topics men find objectionable (46). Thus, whether offline or online, women use 'private spaces' or 'the female domain' to gossip and chat, which enables information flow, solidarity, and awareness and forms a basis for power and agency (Wetschanow 1999).

However, unlike Bedouin women in Abu-Lughod's (1990) study who are sedentary in their physical spaces, private women-only Facebook groups encompass thousands to hundreds of thousands of members who are scattered in different geographic locations, making these Facebook groups semi-public spaces. Accordingly, discussions move beyond the boundaries of these online platforms to offline contexts, challenging symbolic boundaries of modern society of what constitutes issues of private spaces, such as the home or the bedroom, and public spaces. Women-only spaces then are perceived as problematic for invoking women's discussion on 'private' marital or family matters and thus perceived as a threat to moral values, norms, and social order. This moral panic over women's seclusion also has historical roots in Egypt. Abu-Lughod (1998) indicated that Qassim Amin, known as the father of feminism in Egypt, criticized the segregation of women for enabling them to talk to one another about their personal lives, leading to their moral corruption. Nowadays, this conception that problematizes women's discussions on issues that concern the private sphere, based on endangering family cohesion, is reflected in television talk show programs' discourse.

Nevertheless, Mahmood (2012) noted that while the family unit in Egypt, based in the private realm, is tied to "privacy, affect, spirituality, nurturance, and reproduction" (58), the public sphere

and the market follow a separate individualistic and competitive ideological rationality. This market-oriented rationality is conveyed in the discourse that embraces the successful business developments manifested from their women-only Facebook groups by Facebook group creators and television presenters. The Facebook group creators' articulation of their business endeavors conveys Abu-Lughod's (1990) remark that women capitalize on societal contradictions and engage in practices that result from power relations, which cannot be observed outside of them.

When speaking about their FB groups, and not the general phenomenon of the proliferation of FB groups for women only, FB group creators' discourse showed neoliberal and postfeminist tendencies that represent femininity, the maintenance of the female body, and successful entrepreneurship (Gill 2007; Weber 2010). While the concept of post-feminism originated in the global north, where forms of femininity prevail due to media accessibility (Boshoff 2021), Dosekun (2015) noted that post-feminism has made its way into the global south because of its transnational sensibility that circulates effortlessly through global media networks and commodities. Thus, similarly to vloggers in Henderson's study, when FB group creators speak about the successful developments of their FB groups, their postfeminist stories are complexly shaped by technological affordances, its commercial impact, and the context in which this articulation takes place (Henderson 2020: 124). For example, FB group creators steered the discussion away from the representation of their FB groups as problematic for enabling women to vent out. They instead validated the popularity of their FB groups by indicating that they have developed their FB group into an official company that provides women with various services (educational/ informational/ entertainment) and connects them with experts (e.g., doctors) to support their well-being. Such discourse is vital for sustaining their brand, which then corporations capitalize on and audiences get affectively devoted to (Henderson 2020: 125). Furthermore, this discourse that incorporates neoliberal corporate culture attracts extensive media coverage, circulation, and effective embrace (Banet-Weiser et al. 2020; Fisher 2009). It is also easily diffused, popularized, and capitalized because they conform to the format of mass media platforms (Banet-Weiser et al. 2020; van Dijck and Poell 2013: 7). For example, both Facebook groups for women-only and mainstream television programs' structure follow what van Dijck and Poell (2013) term the Media Logic that blurs between news and advertising, as well as public service and commerce (4).

The frequent appearance of FB group creators on popular mainstream television programs promotes the visibility of their platforms and their activities to the broader public sphere. Their FB groups gain what Ardèvol et al. (2010) term the 'fame effect' in which internet phenomena 'jump' to the mass media sphere. This means new platforms of communication, such as these FB groups, get to validate themselves as media that generated a mass phenomenon (Ardèvol et al. 2010). Consequently, the position of influential social media platforms, such as these popular Facebook groups for women, is magnified (van Dijck and Poell 2013: 7). Concurrently, talk shows make use of the intimacy and familiarity appeal of oral forms of communication and forums of communication that encompass a women's public (Wetschanow 1999: 6). However, by mediating a women's public, talk shows restructure the social reality from the perspective of women where women's experiences that functions as 'venting', or deviating from 'the norm' can be maintained (Wetschanow 1999: 6). Accordingly, on the one hand, Facebook group creators engage in what Banet-Weiser describes as corporate feminism via media-friendly discourse that barely criticizes

patriarchal structures or deep structures of inequities (Banet-Weiser et al. 2020: 11). On the other hand, mainstream mass media channels, such as these TV programs, take a proactive and reactive role in making popular internet-based discourse salient (Fisher 2009: 75).

In this way, women's conversations that convey private discourses are appropriated when they make their way to more public spheres (Wetschanow 1999: 6). This is reflected in the TV presenters' discourse that is infused with moral panic over women's usage of the FB groups to discuss their problems. This prevailing media discourse, on the one hand, maintains the status quo in society (Rao and Lingam 2021: 143). On the other hand, this discourse infused with moral panic entertains and engages the audience to profit from sales, clicks, and ratings instead of investigating difficult issues (Rao and Lingam 2021: 131). For instance, discussions on domestic violence prevalent in women-only Facebook groups are barely or superficially discussed in the sample of videos analyzed. These findings support El-Ibiary's (2017) study that showed that while women activists and media professionals in Egypt viewed that social media enables expression and highlights women's issues, they noted that television coverage, as well as other traditional mainstream platforms, barely allocated space for women's problems and the magnitude of violence against them (53).

## **6 Conclusion**

Women-only Facebook groups can be viewed as a progressive communication phenomenon for affording women a more comfortable environment for expressing their problems and for achieving visibility in local mainstream broadcast media. However, it is vital to regard gendered developments in relation to the opportunities and limitations inherent in specific societal structures and practices (Lazar, 2013: 218). Situating broadcast media in Egypt as conveyors of dominant ideology, this article explored the discourses on women's utilization of women-only Facebook groups within mainstream commercial talk show programs in Egypt by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis on a sample of ten videos from YouTube.

Snippets from four videos, each from a different television program, demonstrate two salient discourses present simultaneously. The first prevailing discourse conveys concern over women using women-only Facebook groups to discuss problems that are socially conceived as matters of the private sphere. Concurrently, the second prevailing discourse conveys an embracement of Facebook group creators' digitally enabled entrepreneurial practices that have stemmed from members' engagement on their Facebook group platform. To provide a critical analysis to the two prevalent discourses conveyed, the discussion section offered insights from anthropologists Lila Abu-Lughod and Saba Mahmood that describe the dynamics of the private and public spheres in Egypt, which impacts how women are expected to conduct themselves in these spaces. This contextualizes prevalent discourses in Egyptian society that mirror anxieties over women's discursive spaces. Concurrently, I drew on insights from feminist scholars and media scholars to delineate women-only FB groups as a postfeminist phenomenon located in Egypt in connection to global media structures and commercial market logic to explain the embracement of Facebook group creators' digitally enabled entrepreneurial practices. Through this analysis, I demonstrated that the discourses of women-only Facebook groups in Egyptian mainstream commercial television programs offer a broader insight into not only the representation of women's utilization of social media platforms but also the assigned conventional responsibility of women to maintain the social image of the family in society. Articulating such a discourse in concurrence with a discourse that celebrates Facebook group creators' entrepreneurial endeavors for connecting women with products and services reproduces gender norms and maintains existing structures that marginalize women's issues.

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