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**The Relationship between Religious Programs Exposure
and Egyptian Youth Religious Identity**

*Thesis submitted in satisfaction for the degree of Master in
communication*

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

﴿ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ ﴾

(سورة الأعراف الآية: ٤٣)

Abstract

Religious media underwent many changes during the past decade; Islamic media was redefined and went beyond conventional boundaries. Recently, advocates of religious discourse reform are blamed for increasing atheism rate in Arab countries as they present critical discussions of theological issues to the public. This raises the importance of investigating youth religious identity. Thus, this thesis is aimed at studying how different religious programs could affect Egyptian youth religious identity.

A mixed-method research of complementary quantitative and qualitative studies was conducted. The quantitative study was aimed at testing different study hypotheses. The qualitative study (in-depth interviews) was used to draw a picture of how the exposure to Islamic discourse can contribute to the perceived threat of the Egyptian youth religious identity, and how youth are reacting to such threat, depending on the quantitative data proven.

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Chapter I

Study Overview and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Since the end of the twentieth century, many specialized religious satellite channels have started to emerge to counter the wide spread of western media and to meet the Arabic audience needs. In 2010, there were 80 specialized Islamic religious satellite channels, mostly were Saudi-influenced channels, which were clearly embodied by the Salafist ideology. On the other hand, there was another trend towards more moderate discourse or middle-ground ideology. It represented a clear departure from the original trend, as it discussed more issues related to women and provided more diverse artistic offerings, such as songs, video clips, and drama. Many specialized religious channels like "Iqraa" and "Al-Risalah" started to present charismatic new preachers to target youth more effectively and to make religion a cool commodity for consumption, trying to present religion in a new different suit and reposition religion to be at the center of the individual Muslim's life. Thus, Islamic media was redefined, as it went beyond conventional boundaries.

Recently, there are many figures like Islam AlBahairy, Youssef Zidan, Adnan Ibrahim, and others who present more innovative, critical Islamic discourse causing a great controversy. They are blamed for the increasing atheism rate in Arab countries (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, and Yemen are among the highest rates^{*}). This percent reached 3% of the Egyptian society according to a study held by American University of Michigan.

^{*}Fatwa Observatory: "Egypt has the highest Rate within Arab Countries In 'Atheism' and 'Takfiri'," Article published Monday 10.12.2014, 12:00 AM, < <http://www.el-balad.com/1285235>>.

In the light of the above, comes an important question about the ability of the religious programs to affect the youth religious identity. As it was argued that media is one element of culture that can shape and constrain religious identity.

Problem Statement

Considering the new wave of religious preaching, the change in the religious programs content, and the controversy caused by many figures about theological issues, this study is aimed at exploring the impact of the exposure to the religious programs on each of the following: religious identity intensity, religious identity salience, religious perceived threatened identity, and collective self-esteem, which are considered as parameters—according to social identity theory—giving an image of the Egyptian youth religious identity.

Goals of the Study

1. Examining the relationship between the amount of religious programs exposure and the Egyptian youth religious identity.
2. Examining the relationship between the amount of religious programs exposure and Egyptian youth religiosity.
3. Discovering whether Egyptian youth perceive their religious identity as threatened.
4. Discover the Egyptian youth most salient identity.
5. Identifying the main sources of the Egyptian youth religious information and knowledge.
6. Exploring who the most influential new preachers are, as perceived by Egyptian youth, and why.

Theoretical Framework: "Social Identity Theory"

Social identity theory (SIT) was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. It is considered to be Tajfel's greatest contribution to psychology (Mcleod, 2008). The theory was originally developed to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination. Social identity is defined as "that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (Oommen, 2011). SIT focuses on the group in the individual. It is commonly defined as a person's sense of self derived from perceived membership in social groups. When we belong to a group, we are likely to derive our sense of identity, at least in part, from that group (Chen & Li, 2009), meaning that a person does not have only one "personal self" but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel, and act on basis of his personal, family, or national "level of self" (Turner, 1987). The theory assumes that one part of the self-concept is defined by our belonging to social group. The social groups are based on characteristics such as religion, class, race, nationality, gender and so forth. Some of these groups enjoy more power and status than others. The individual is born into an existing structure where categories and groups are formed. The individual will then "internalize the dominant ideology" of their group and in the process acquire a particular social identity which could either be positive or negative depending on the collective group's status. It is also important to note that none of these groups can stand in isolation. This is because groups only exist in relation to other groups, as people categorize themselves and others as belonging to different social groups, evaluate these categorizations, and

derive their descriptive and evaluative properties and, thus, their social meaning in relation to these other groups. So membership, alongside the value placed on it, is defined as the social identity (Walters, 2010, Trepte, 2006, Hogg, 2001).

Social identities are particularly relational because symbolic boundaries—in-groups and out-groups—define social groups. To conceptualize in-group it is best to use the definition provided by Allport (1954). Although he admits to the fact that defining an in-group precisely is difficult, he states that "members of an in-group all use the term 'we' with the same essential significance" (Allport, 1954). In contrast, the out-group is all of those who are not classified as being part of the in-group.

Social identities subsequently produce feelings of not only inclusion, belongingness, and self-worth, but also exclusion, discrimination, and conflict (Vermurlen, 2010). However, those conflictual bases became less central to social identity literature; rather, there is a focus on formation of a stable self-concept (Teo, 2014).

Social Identity Dimensions

Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that there are three mental processes/dimensions involved in evaluating in-groups and out-groups. These take place in a particular order (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The first is **categorization/cognitive dimension**. It refers to categorizing people (including ourselves) in order to understand the social environment. Social categorizations are conceived as a cognitive tool that segments and orders the social environment and, thus, enables the individual to undertake many forms of social action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In other words, due to reduced capacities in

processing information, we define categories and schemes to encode and decode messages. Similar to other entities we categorize people into groups to simplify our understanding of the world and to structure social interaction (Trentham, 2006). The process of social categorization perceptually segments the social world into in-groups and out-groups that are cognitively represented as prototypes. These prototypes are context-specific, multidimensional fuzzy sets of attributes that define and prescribe attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that characterize one group and distinguish it from other groups (Hogg, 2001).

The second stage, **social identification/affective dimension**, is about adopting the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves as belonging to. There will be an emotional significance to the self-identification with a group, and the ones with self-esteem will become bound up with group membership (Macleod, 2008).

The final stage is **social comparison/evaluative dimension**. Once one categorizes him/herself as part of a group and identifies with that group, there will be tendency to compare that group with other groups (Macleod, 2008). There are premises for social comparison. First, the situation must allow social comparison. Second, the out-group must be relevant in terms of similarity and proximity (Trentham, 2006). Social comparisons between groups are focused on establishing evaluatively positive distinctiveness for one's own group (Hogg, 2001).

Depersonalization

When this process completes, the person sees others through the lens of the prototype—they become depersonalized—rather than seeing them as unique and multifaceted individuals. Prototype-based perception of out-group members is more commonly called stereotyping: you view "them" as being similar to one another and

all having out-group attributes. When the person categorizes himself, exactly the same depersonalization process applies to self: you view yourself in terms of the attributes of the in-group (self-stereotyping), and because prototypes also describe and prescribe group-appropriate ways to feel and behave, you feel and behave normatively. In this way, self-categorization produces, within a group, conformity and patterns of in-group liking, trust, and solidarity (Hogg et al, 2004).

Social Attraction

In-group members are liked more than out-group members because the former are perceptually assimilated to a relatively positive in-group prototype, or because their prototypical similarity to self is perceptually accentuated, or because self-liking (self-esteem) is extended to embrace people who are to some extent now viewed as prototypical extensions of self. Within the in-group, there is consensual liking that is stronger for more prototypical than for less prototypical members; there is a prototype-based social attraction gradient (Hogg, 2001).

Identity Salience

A key question for social identity theory is what causes social identity as opposed to personal identity, or one social identity rather than another, to become the contextually salient basis of perception, thought, and behavior. The salience of a social identity, as well as the choice of which social identity to be invoked, is thought to be a product of what are termed as "accessibility" and "fit." Accessibility refers to the relative availability in consciousness of the identity or distinguishing feature or mark. Fit refers to the tendency for groups to stratify by selecting the most efficient discriminating characteristic available to differentiate individuals on an in-group/out-group basis (Mullet et al, 2012).

Social Identity Aspects

A social identity is a label or a category, a way of grouping a number of people together on the basis of some shared features. Beyond the labeling, however, social identity has many more implications, both for the persons who claim the social identity and for others who see them as members of particular categories. Thus, the category label can in a sense be considered the frame for a painting that is rich in cognitive beliefs, emotional associations, and behavioral consequences.

Cognitive aspects: They can be extensive and varied, including personality traits, social and political attitudes, and memories for identity-related events. Because social identities are developed and defined within a social world, many of these cognitive aspects are shared. Indeed, some investigators talk in terms of self-stereotyping, others refer to the social representations of salient categories.

Emotional and motivational aspects: In many cases, social identities include not only "cool" cognition, but "hot" emotions as well. Thus to be a feminist or an environmentalist, for example, may entail strong, affectively based feelings about social equality or the preservation of the environment.

Social identities also have a motivational basis. Particularly in the case of identities that people choose or achieve, specific functions are believed to be satisfied by the choice of identification. Despite the large variety of the functions served by social identities, it is possible to think about only a few general types. First, social identity may serve as a means of self-definition or self-esteem, making the person feel better about the self. Second, social identification may be a means of interacting with others who share one's values and goals, providing reference group orientation and shared activity. Third, social identification can serve as a way of defining oneself in contrast to others who are members of another group, i.e., a way of positioning