

How I Depict Your Mother: A Critical Multimodal Analysis of the Representation of Mothers in Selected Egyptian Memes

*Amira Hanafi Elzohiery**

Introduction

The advent of the internet has had an immense influence on societies worldwide as they were transformed into information societies. Web 1.0 constituted the first generation of the World Wide Web. It was considered a static read-only web with minor interaction or contribution from its visitors as it provided web pages with information only (Sykora 2017). Years later, the late 1990s witnessed the release of multiple tools which made it possible for anyone to create online content that could be controlled by them and accessed by anyone online. That period marked the beginning of the era of Web 2.0 (the development of the web from non-interactive websites to a user-generated content). By 2005, the age of social media had dramatically changed the internet as people knew it as users began to interact closely with each other, build their online identities, and create and control their content and what passes through their feed. Web 3.0 added “another level of complexity, connecting home thermostats to cell phones and laptops” (Kien 2019, 15). In our new era of social media, content is now being controlled by the whims and trends of the masses, while at the same time, everyone’s online experience and feed are being accustomed to their preferences.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Multimodality in Social Media

Communication on social media is now more multimodal and hypertextual as users employ diverse platform affordances along with the usual texting, such as emojis, sounds, hyperlinks, static images, animated images, short videos, long videos, and other semiotic tools to communicate their messages. Kien (2019, 184) stated that this digital world is now “an aesthetically experienced construct that overwhelms our senses, triggering an analog embodied experience.” In response to these advancements, several prominent scholars in digital discourse studies have suggested that studies on digital discourse should shift their focus to include multimodal mediums and the ideologies they index (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos 2019). Research on multimodal discourse has received increasing attention after the groundbreaking books of Kress and van Leeuwen: *Reading Images* (2006) and *Multimodal Discourse* (2001), where they stated that meanings can be expressed

* Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

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through different semiotic modes and in different articulations and that these modes can be interpreted culturally and historically, and marked by power differences. Their works were based on Halliday's (1987) assumption that not only is language capable of conveying meaning, but image and sound are too.

1.2. Gender Representations in Media

Many researchers adopted a multimodal approach to investigate gender portrayal in media contexts. Surveying the acres of research dedicated to exploring these representations shows that despite the achievements, sexism against women remains in the way they are represented in media. Machin and Thornborrow (2006) showed that women's agency in magazines is expressed only through the way they seduce men; nevertheless, Machin and van Leeuwen (2007) showed that in Vietnamese magazines, women are depicted as carrying out actual work strategically, and they are not depicted in a seductive way. Lindstrand, Insulander, & Selander (2016) examined the gender differences in a TV series and a mobile application about the same brand as examples of young children's popular culture. Although both media corroborate the stereotypical portrayal of girls as lazy and inferior to boys, the interactive modes in the application gave the children the freedom to participate in the creation of meaning and the social gender roles. Recently, Thomas and Moya-Guijarro's study (2021) adopted a feminist post-structural theory, Visual Social Semiotics, and the Appraisal Theory to examine how the roles of the female protagonists challenge the traditional stereotypical of females in two children picture books. The analysis indicated that the females in the two stories passed through challenging situations in order to revolt against the confines of their traditional binary roles. In movies, Bezerra (2020) explored the role of women as social actors in the movie *Sex and the City*, and the findings indicated that women were only depicted within the confines of their social norms. Differently, Constanty, Verônica, and M. Heberle (2021) employed a critical multimodal analysis to analyze the verbal-visual synergy used in three recent fairytales which present the deconstruction of their binary positions despite their different backgrounds. These studies illustrate how certain "semiotic choices can be used to signify identities and values associated with women's agency" (Machin and Mayr 2012, 24).

In the Arab world, Abed and Al-Munshy (2017) investigated how women are portrayed on the covers of two Arab magazines: *Zahrat Al Khaleej* and *Sayidaty*, through the use of multimodal and thematic aspects. They found that both magazines depict women as shallow individuals. The representation of Egyptian women in media has been tackled by some research studies, such as the study of El-Nashar and Nayef (2014), which explored the depiction of women in Egyptian print media, especially in headlines and the front-page coverage of June 30th, 2013, events, indicating that there is subtle, indirect sexism in the language of depicting women in media. Similarly, El-Tarabishi et al. (2017) investigated the image of women in Egyptian TV commercials which portrayed women as objectified, subordinate to men, and dependent on others. In the same vein, Abboud (2020) analyzed the

representation of women in digital advertising, finding that women are used as sex tools for marketing products.

1.3. Memes and Social Media Underpinnings

The internet promotes “a plethora of new forms of visual-verbal humor” (Dynel 2016, 660). One of the forms of this *visual-verbal humor* is the format of memes. Back in the 1970s, the term “memes” was first coined by Richard Dawkins (1976) to describe what he theorized as the replicable gene-like infectious unit of culture that can evolve, change, and spread. This seems to agree with the post-modernist theory of Baudrillard (1995) on the creation of simulacra, yet they can exceed its concept by reproducing, mutating, and evolving into new copies that are far away from their origin. Today, online memes can be defined as “viral images, videos, and catchphrases under constant modification by users, and with a propensity to travel as fast as the Internet can move them” (Coleman 2012, 109). The prototypical format of photo memes is composed of a still image and a superimposed text, thus, creating a humorous effect (Mahfouz 2021). The memes can be schematized into two main categories: the recycled images which can virally evolve and serve as a template for further usage, and the other category is that of stable images which are shared without adaptations or transformations. The meme template usually originates from a movie, a TV show, a song, an interview, a viral video/image, a videogame, or a celebrity image. Therefore, a certain level of prior knowledge of the reference of the meme is assumed so as to understand the joke and enable it to resonate within a culture or a community (Drakett et al. 2018). By combining the semantic characteristics of text and image, memes have turned into popular conveyors of meaning (Wagener 2020). Also, communication through memes has been an integral part of everyday communication on digital media platforms. As Kien (2019, 9) pointed out, “memetic communication is already bringing dramatic changes in our everyday world at a historically alarming pace”. Now, it is via memes that “internet users respond to current sociopolitical events” (Dynel 2016, 262). Wiggins and Bowers (2015) considered memes a genre that can provide the basis or shape the dynamics of human culture. Now, given the high demand for more memes, there are dedicated pages and accounts for the creation of memes in exchange for money or views; they are called meme factories (Lee and Hoh, 2021). With the manufacturing of hundreds of memes daily, these meme factories can influence and shape public discourse.

1.4. Gender Representations in Memes

Past explorations of online gender representations reveal the discrimination practiced against women through memes. In the Egyptian context, El-Nashar and Nayef (2014) highlighted the presence of gender inequality and masculine hegemony through the analysis of 239 memes (they called them jokes). Using the thematic analysis of 240 memes, the study conducted by Drakett et al. (2018) also highlighted the sexism and the male sex drive discourse represented through those memes. Further, Brooke (2019) examined how the animal advice memes shared on Reddit

exposed the gender power structures as they were posted mainly by men who contribute to the ostracization of women in online communities. Exploring a different platform and using the second wave of feminist theory as a theoretical framework, Lincoln (2019) examined the gender representations in political memes by analyzing the 100 memes posted on Twitter under the hashtag #election2016. The memes showed underrepresentation of women within media and even negative depiction of women working in politics. In Indonesia, Siregar et al. (2018) examined 21 memes under the scope of critical multimodal analysis as they concluded that women are associated with aggressiveness, weakness, and slowness. Their research showed that women are being portrayed in memes as talkative, ignorant, emotionally possessive, and as sex objects. In 2021, Mahfouz collected a sample of women vs. men memes posted on Pinterest, and she suggested that analyzing gender representations can reveal specific gender stereotypes and ideologies related to men and women. Her study showed similar findings to the rest of the studies in that the memes reinforced the stereotypical image of a woman as being emotional and concerned with her physical appearance, whereas men were represented as aloof and not worried about their physique.

1.5. The Representation of Motherhood in Media

Rarely does research focus on the representation of mothers on the internet, but there are some attempts to shed light on how motherhood has been portrayed in newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and art over decades. The stereotypical image of motherhood in media is always associated with two versions: the evil mother and the angelic one, with the latter being more dominant. Mass media reinforced that the angelic mother is the heart of the family, who sacrifices her life for the sake of her children. Pascoe (1998) examined the representation of mothers in movies from 1900 to 1988, and she found that the *good mother* was depicted as the epitome of sacrifice, love, and devotion. She was always busy preparing meals, non-stop cleaning, guiding her children, and caring for her family's well-being. In the 2000s, the US media focused on stories of mothers rejecting careers and preferring the role of being stay-at-home mothers (Akass 2013, 57). In Indonesia, Siregar et al. (2018) showed different findings with regard to the social role of mothers as they gain some power and dominance once they have a family. In China, Han and Kuipers (2021) investigated the TikTok videos under the hashtag #workfromhomewithchildcare, featuring working mothers trying to balance work and family life during COVID 19 working-from-home period. Their analysis showed that the humor in these videos reaffirmed the traditional gender roles where mothers are struggling to care for their children during the quarantine, documenting their own failure. It also stressed the idea that childcare is the responsibility of the mother even during times of crisis.

The studies mentioned earlier highlight specific facts about women's image in media. First, although sexism against women is practiced through their depiction in media, some recent studies analyzed the few media attempts to empower women. Second, these attempts have not reached the Arab world yet, as women are still

unfairly portrayed through a sexist, patriarchal perspective. Similarly, the world of memes makes no difference where the stereotypical image of women is still reinforced and reproduced. Third, however diverse these studies are, they tend to sketch women as a whole entity with no reference to the different categories the term “women” entails. In light of this, mothers are constantly marginalized and not well-represented in studies on digital discourse, especially in memes. No studies explored how mothers are portrayed in online discourse, especially in Egyptian memes, as this study attempts to do.

1.6. Theoretical Background of Analytical Frameworks

Given the research multimodal focus, the researcher is guided by theories of Systemic Functional Grammar, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, Social Semiotic Approaches, and Multimodal Content Analysis.

1.6.1. Systemic Functional Grammar. Systemic functional Grammar (SFG), developed by Michael Halliday (1985), is an approach that considers language a social semiotic system. Halliday based his work on the theories of his teacher, J. R. Firth. If grammar is ‘the way in which a language is organized’ (Butt et al. 2000, 22), SFG attempts to explain and describe the organization of the ‘meaning-making resources’ (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Halliday (1985) views language in terms of three meta-functions: the ideational, the textual, and the interpersonal. These functions, according to him, help to interpret language as content, exchange, and message. Therefore, he refers to these meta-functions as the multidimensional architecture of language because they reflect the multifaceted nature of human experience and interpersonal relations.

In SFG, ideational meta-function refers to the internal experience of the participants who perform the action and the context that is related to their actions. Transitivity is one of the methods that is used to describe the participants, the process, and the circumstances. Participants are the actors or the sensors of the action (called the process); they can be humans or human-like. Processes can be *material* (physical action), *mental* (emotion, cognition, perception, and desiration action), *beneficiary* (creative or transformative actions), *verbal* (e.g., saying, praying, asserting, claiming, or suggesting), *behavioral* which includes a physiological change (e.g., dream, laugh, sleep, dance, watch, look, listen), *existential* (i.e., the pronoun: there), *relational* (copula, verb to be, and verb to have included), *ergative* (e.g., intransitive verbs), and *casual* (i.e., causative verbs). The circumstances include the location, extent, manner, cause, accompaniment, and contingency. As for the textual meta-function, it enables the clause to be organized differently and achieve different purposes: what is placed first or last in the clause realizes the textual choice. Under this view, the clause is composed of a theme and a rheme. The theme is an element that serves as the fixed point of the message; it contains familiar information mentioned somewhere in the text. The rheme is the part of the clause in which the theme is developed; it typically includes unfamiliar information. With regard to the interpersonal meanings, they refer to the inherent function of language,

which is interaction. They are concerned with the four basic speech roles in analyzing clauses: giving, offering, demanding, and asking for goods, services, or information.

1.6.2. Multimodality and Systemic Functional Grammar. As claimed by Machin and Mayr (2012), visual communication might be open to more interpretation than text alone. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) devised a model which can be utilized to analyze visual representations based on SFG, as they postulated that the meanings embedded in visual representations could have the same characteristics as the meanings in the verbal text. In their view, the relations between the elements in a picture can be transformed into a linguistic form. “What in language is realized by words of the category ‘action verbs’ is visually realized by elements that can be formally defined as vectors.” (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, 46). Therefore, in analyzing images, participants and their actions can be represented by vectors (e.g., the oblique lines of the gaze, arms, and body). According to their model, an image can include two kinds of participants: represented participants (i.e., viewers) and interactive participants (image-producers). Processes can be visually translated as what they named vectors, *tensions*, or *dynamic forces*. The vectorial patterns which connect participants to vectors are the narrative structures that include a multitude of underlying processes and circumstances. Similar to SFG, the processes can be agentive or non-agentive, and the circumstances include setting, means, and accompaniment. If the process has an agent that is non-projective, then the action can be transactional (i.e., at least two participants and a vector) or non-transactional (one participant and a vector). Reactional processes happen when an interactive participant looks in the direction of the represented participant, which is called the phenomena. As in SFG, there are also verbal and mental processes that can be realized in thought and dialogue balloons.

1.6.3. Recent Frameworks in Multimodality. A wide range of researchers developed the framework Kress and van Leeuwen had grounded, and some presented a social semiotic approach to visual communication, stating that all semiotic systems reveal social and power relationships, and those choices in visual communication can carry an ideological agenda (van Leeuwen and Jaworski 2002; Machin and Jaworski 2006). The social semiotic approach is different from the traditional semiotic approach in the way it investigates the details in the semiotic system and their connotations. Machin (2016, 15) focused on how the choice of semiotic elements connotes particular discourses as “choosing visual semiotic resources is, therefore, a process of communicating and constructing the visual world”. According to him, iconography, modality, color, the typography, the representation of participants, their gestures, their facial expressions, their values, and the layout entail possible choices and metaphorical associations that connote complex ideas and contribute to the meaning behind the photograph (Machin 2016, 21). Also, according to him, any semiotic system can fulfill the three basic meta-functions. The ideational meta-function can be realized visually when the signs in the semiotic system can represent ideas, and when there is a relation between the producer and the receiver in this system, their interpersonal meta-function can be interpreted. The textual meta-

function can be extracted visually when the relationship between the signs in the semiotic system is coherent (Machin 2016, 38).

Based on the works of Critical Discourse analysts such as van Dijk (2001) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997), Machin and Mayr (2012, 9) investigated the social relations and ideologies that can be buried in the semiotic system and shape the representations of events and persons. They suggested a toolkit that can be applied when analyzing semiotic choices. That toolkit included analyzing iconography, attributes (i.e., the values which objects represent), settings, salience (e.g., cultural symbols, size, color, tone, focus, foregrounding, and overlapping), gaze, poses (e.g., taking up space or not, emphasis on relaxation or intensity, or openness or closedness), representation of social actors (e.g., their distance with the viewer, angle, individualization vs. collectivization, and generic and specific depictions), and modality (e.g., degree of articulation of details). They highlighted the importance of these strategies in analyzing visual representations as they can map out the ideologies and identities which might not be explicitly stated through language.

Moving beyond the traditional multimodal analytical frameworks, Serafini and F. Reid (2019) developed what they termed Multimodal Content Analysis (MMCA), which aimed to subjectively analyze the themes and patterns recurrent in multiple visual systems and explain the complex relationships among them. Their framework was based on the traditional content analysis theories (Krippendorf 2004; Schreier 2012) and theories of multimodality by Gunther Kress (2010). Their framework also considers how multiple modes “add to or expand the meaning potential of texts beyond the meaning potentials of individual modes” (Serafini and F. Reid 2019, 7).

2. Rationale of the Study

There are several studies that focus on the representation of females in media, particularly in memes; however, there are few studies that investigate how different categories of females are portrayed in memes because the word “females” is a hyponymic term that includes other types: young girls, married women, widows, single women, and divorcees. Moreover, there are rare studies focusing on the representation of mothers, especially Egyptian mothers in memes, although there are diverse pages/accounts on social media (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) that regularly post memes satirizing the stereotypical behavior of Egyptian mothers. It is, therefore, significant to investigate how specific stereotypes about mothers are being created, replicated, and consumed by Internet users. In this study, the researcher directly addresses this gap through the lens of critical multimodal analysis.

3. Delimitations of the Study

The study examined memes written in Egyptian slang and posted by Egyptian internet users, drawn from some of the most followed accounts or pages on three social networks (some of the pages are followed by more than a million followers). The study did not investigate the gender, cultural, or educational background of the meme creators although the findings revealed implications about their social class

and ideology. Also, the researcher did not take into account the font, the layout, or the language patterns in the meme templates.

4. Research Questions

The study focused on analyzing the memes featuring mothers in some of the most followed accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and the main research question of the study is as follows: How are mothers represented in Egyptian memes? This research question was broken down into two sub-questions:

- a) What are the thematic and visual techniques that characterize memes of Egyptian mothers?
- b) To what extent does the representation of Egyptian mothers in memes reflect the power and social role of the mother in her family?

5. Research Design and Procedures

To answer the research question and sub-questions, the present research adopted a mixed-method approach which involved collecting and analyzing the memes quantitatively and qualitatively. Being an active user of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter for more than a decade, the researcher was able to easily find the popular pages/accounts that post memes regularly. A convenience sampling technique was employed as the researcher observed the memes posted on some of the popular Egyptian memes accounts/pages on the three social networks. These accounts or pages are followed by millions of users, and their posts are usually shared and liked a thousand times. The popular memes can be easily created using accessible websites and applications that enable meme designers to add text or photoshopped images to the original meme template. A six-month close observation (from June 2021 to December 2021) of the new and old posts of these accounts allowed the inclusion of the required representations and yielded approximately 250 memes, featuring Egyptian mothers. Several memes were repeated and shared on the three platforms; therefore, the researcher had to eliminate the duplicates, which narrowed down the sample to 200 memes. After viewing and analyzing all the memes carefully, they were downloaded, saved in one folder, coded in an excel sheet according to the representation of the mother agency, and analyzed in accordance with the tools presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), Machin and Mayr (2012), and Machin (2016). These tools included: participants, processes, circumstances, garments, posture, facial expressions, and body language.

Because of the large dataset, the researcher decided to add the thematic analysis, and during the coding phase, key themes emerged from the study. Consequently, based on the model of Serafini and F. Reid (2019) on Multimodal Content Analysis (MMCA), there was further examination of the themes that each meme reflected. During the analysis phase, codes were added, modified, and adapted per the frameworks of the study. The qualitative analysis of the visual and the thematic techniques highlighted the ideology and the stereotypes underlying the content of the memes.

All the memes involved textual commentary, and it was noticeable that not only did some of them feature human beings to represent mothers, but the memes also included cats and other cartoon characters such as Tom, Jerry, SpongeBob, Superman, and Professor Utonium from The Powerpuff Girls as mothers.

6. Results

6.1. Phase One in Data Analysis

Using the frameworks proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), later extended by Machin and Mayr (2012), Machin (2016) to include multimodal critical discourse analysis, and then by Serafini and F. Reid (2019) to analyze the recurrent themes in multiple visual resources, this part of the study aims to answer the first and second research sub-questions quantitatively by presenting the frequencies of each multimodal strategy and theme employed in the selected memes. By coding the frequencies and tendencies within the data, the researcher constructed nine categories: gaze, kinds of participants, symbolic attributes, agency, processes, posture, facial expressions, attitude, social role, and themes.

| Strategies | Examples and Numbers |
|-----------------------|---|
| Gaze | front face of a mother (<i>n=160</i>), side face of a mother (<i>n=16</i>), mother & side face of a son (<i>n=11</i>), mother & side face of a father (<i>n=5</i>), among many (<i>n=4</i>), mother & daughter (<i>n=2</i>), mother & father (<i>n=1</i>), upper face (<i>n=1</i>) |
| Kinds of Participants | mother (<i>n=200</i>), son (<i>n=49</i>), father (<i>n=6</i>), daughter (<i>n=4</i>), family (<i>n=2</i>), seller (<i>n=2</i>), grandmother (<i>n=1</i>), aunts (<i>n=1</i>) |
| Symbolic Attributes | <p><u>Veil</u>: [a man wearing a photoshopped veil] yellow (<i>n=77</i>), blue (<i>n=24</i>), golden (<i>n=10</i>), green (<i>n=8</i>), white (<i>n=8</i>), pink (<i>n=6</i>), orange (<i>n=5</i>), red (<i>n=4</i>), brown (<i>n=4</i>), grey (<i>n=4</i>), purple (<i>n=4</i>), black (<i>n=3</i>), multi-colored (<i>n=1</i>), turquoise (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Beanie</u>: [a woman wearing a beanie] (<i>n=7</i>)</p> <p><u>Veil</u>: [an old woman wearing a photoshopped veil]: yellow (<i>n=5</i>), green (<i>n=3</i>), blue (<i>n=1</i>), turquoise (<i>n=1</i>), brown (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Veil</u>: [a cartoon character wearing a photoshopped veil]: Tom from Tom & Jerry (<i>n=5</i>), Jerry from Tom and Jerry (<i>n=5</i>)</p> <p><u>Veil</u>: [a cat wearing a photoshopped veil] (<i>n=5</i>)</p> <p><u>A wig</u>: [a man wearing a photoshopped wig] (<i>n=2</i>)</p> |
| Agency | mother (<i>n=200</i>), son (<i>n=37</i>), daughter (<i>n=7</i>), father (<i>n=4</i>), grandmother (<i>n=1</i>), aunts (<i>n=1</i>), family as a unit (<i>n=1</i>) |

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| Processes | <p><u>Verbal</u>: saying (<i>n=65</i>), blaming (<i>n=25</i>), complaining (<i>n=25</i>), ordering (<i>n=8</i>), threatening (<i>n=6</i>), ridiculing (<i>n=4</i>), advising (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Material (mother)</u>: holding something (<i>n=32</i>), beating (<i>n=5</i>), cooking (<i>n=1</i>), fighting (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Behavioral (mother)</u>: shouting (<i>n=27</i>), screaming (<i>n=3</i>), weeping (<i>n=1</i>), winking (<i>n=1</i>), kissing (<i>n=1</i>), watching (<i>n=1</i>), walking (<i>n=1</i>), running (<i>n=1</i>), dancing (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Behavioral (son)</u>: pleading (<i>n=2</i>), complaining (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Mental</u>: planning (<i>n=1</i>)</p> <p><u>Existential</u>: mother is in the meme without an evident process (<i>n=26</i>)</p> |
| Posture | <p>fingers pointing out (<i>n=19</i>), using hands to hold a mobile phone (<i>n=13</i>), using hands to beat someone (<i>n=8</i>), using hands to hold food or drink (<i>n=9</i>), using hands to hold a stick (<i>n=9</i>), hands to cover her son's face (<i>n=5</i>), hands holding money (<i>n=5</i>), using hands for threatening (<i>n=4</i>), using hand to say enough (<i>n=4</i>), hands for disbelief (<i>n=4</i>), raising hands in confidence (<i>n=3</i>), hugging son (<i>n=3</i>), hands getting ready for work (<i>n=3</i>), hands covering mouth (<i>n=2</i>), hands over head (<i>n=2</i>), giving thumbs up (<i>n=2</i>), using hands to pray (<i>n=1</i>), clapping (<i>n=1</i>), using hands to give advice (<i>n=1</i>)</p> |
| Facial Expressions | <p>frowning (<i>n=57</i>), smiling (<i>n=32</i>), cheerful (<i>n=12</i>), anger (<i>n=11</i>), open mouth (<i>n=11</i>), squinting (<i>n=10</i>), stupid laugh (<i>n=8</i>), confident (<i>n=8</i>), weeping (<i>n=5</i>), ridiculing smile (<i>n=5</i>), widened eyes (<i>n=5</i>), surprised (<i>n=5</i>), worried (<i>n=4</i>), poker face (<i>n=4</i>), giggling (<i>n=3</i>), focused (<i>n=3</i>), shocked (<i>n=2</i>), side glance (<i>n=1</i>), threatening (<i>n=1</i>), contempt (<i>n=2</i>), peaceful (<i>n=2</i>), neutral (<i>n=1</i>), contempt (<i>n=1</i>), sad (<i>n=1</i>), half smile (<i>n=1</i>)</p> |
| Attitude | <p>aggressive (<i>n=63</i>), kind (<i>n=31</i>), confident (<i>n=27</i>), naïve (<i>n=26</i>), clever (<i>n=20</i>), ridicule (<i>n=11</i>), questioning (<i>n=5</i>), religious (<i>n=4</i>), optimistic (<i>n=3</i>), worried (<i>n=3</i>), proud (<i>n=2</i>), evil (<i>n=2</i>), resilient (<i>n=1</i>), planning (<i>n=1</i>), determined (<i>n=1</i>)</p> |
| Social Role | <p>caregiver (<i>n=136</i>), in control of the house (<i>n=43</i>), not clear (<i>n=20</i>), responsibility with father (<i>n=1</i>)</p> |
| Themes | <p>complaining about house chores and responsibilities (<i>n=27</i>)</p> <p>knowing how to save money on household expenses (<i>n=21</i>)</p> <p>cooking delicious food and wants her children to eat her homemade meals (<i>n=15</i>)</p> <p>forcing her children to help her or do errands (<i>n=14</i>)</p> <p>being technologically illiterate (<i>n=14</i>)</p> <p>knowing everything about her children (<i>n=13</i>)</p> <p>not respecting her children privacy/time (<i>n=12</i>)</p> <p>being overprotective (<i>n=12</i>)</p> <p>caring about the appearance of the family in front of strangers (<i>n=12</i>)</p> <p>performing religious duties (<i>n=11</i>)</p> <p>not keeping secrets (<i>n=9</i>)</p> |

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| | being angry (<i>n=9</i>) wanting her children to study and blames them for poor grades (<i>n=9</i>) attributing any misfortune to the children's use of the mobile phone (<i>n=8</i>) wanting her children to be polite (<i>n=8</i>) comparing her children to other children (<i>n=6</i>) caring about her daughter getting married (<i>n=6</i>) believing in hoaxes (<i>n=5</i>) watching TV with father (<i>n=5</i>) not knowing English very well (<i>n=3</i>) preferring boys over girls (<i>n=3</i>) making fun of her children (<i>n=3</i>) |
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Table 1. The frequencies of the multimodal strategies used in the 200 memes.

Table 1 reveals that of all the shots portrayed in the memes, the *front face of the mother* occurred more often (80%), and the least frequent shot was that of *the father and the mother together* (0.5%) and *the upper face of the mother* (0.5%). About 22 memes included two shots of the mother in the same meme template, and five memes had more than three shots of the mother in the same meme template. The kinds of participants in every meme were not many, as *the mother* topped the list (100%), followed by her *son* (25%), and the least occurred participants were *the grandmother* and *the aunts* (0.5%) equally. As for the symbolic attributes, the photoshopped *veil* was most utilized in 90% of the memes, and the *yellow veil* was the highest with 43% of the total instances. A photoshopped *veil over a male head* had the highest proportion with 79% of the total instances, followed by a photoshopped *veil over a female's head* with 5% of the posts, and only one meme featured a mother with her hair without a veil. Only **one** meme featured a woman with her hair as a mother, another as a superman, once as SpongeBob, and once as a Powerpuff girl. *Mothers* as agents were primarily posted in 100% of all posts, followed by *sons* as secondary agents in 18% of the memes. Of the processes performed in each meme, the *verbal processes* had the highest proportion, accounting for 56% of the total result, followed by the *behavioral process* (17%), and the least used process was the *mental one* (0.5%). As for the body language of the participants, *using fingers to point out* had the highest proportion with 19% of the total cases. In the category of facial expressions, *the frowning of the mother* was the prevalent expression, portrayed in 29% of all the memes. Similarly, *the aggressive attitude of the mother* topped the list of the attitudes expressed in the memes as it comprised 31% of the total result. However, *the kind attitude* followed it, accounting for 15% of the total instances. As for the social role practiced by the mother, she was mostly portrayed as *the main caregiver* in 68% of the memes, and one meme depicted the *shared responsibility between the mother and the father* in the household. Also, the study identified 22

themes where *complaining about the house chores* had the highest percentage, forming 12% of all the themes, followed by *knowing how to save money* (9%).

6.2. Phase Two in Data Analysis

This section focuses on answering the first and second research sub-questions qualitatively by interpreting and analyzing the aforementioned frequencies and shedding light on the top utilized multimodal strategies: gaze, kinds of participants, symbolic attributes, agency, processes, posture, facial expressions, attitude, social role, and themes. It is worth mentioning that the meme creators used in the captions the two possessive pronouns “my” and “your” interchangeably to refer to the stereotypical image of mothers in general.

6.2.1. Gaze. The positioning of the viewer in relation to the participants inside the image is achieved through gaze, angle of interaction, and distance (Machin, 2016). Since mothers are the main characters of the selected memes, it was expected to have their front shot portrayed in most of the memes. The meme creators chose the meme templates based on the viral snapshots of scenes derived from famous movies, series, or viral videos, and most of the memes represented a character talking directly to the viewer. The shots varied between close-up, medium close-up, and over-the-shoulder shots (See Figure 1). Other memes featured a mother talking to her children, where the side face of other members of the family appeared in the frame of the meme, including the son, the father, the daughter, or the sisters of the mother. Looking directly at the viewer reflects the dominance and the power of the mother in the eyes of the meme creators.

6.2.2. Kinds of Participants. Consistent with the previous visual technique, the mother was the leading participant in most of the memes, followed by the participation of her son. The representation of fathers and daughters was minimal in comparison to that of the son. This might indicate that the meme creators are probably young male Egyptians who picture the dominance of their mothers in their lives. In the eyes



Figure 1. A Collage of Four Different Memes Featuring the Mother Looking Directly at the Viewers

<https://tinyurl.com/ywet8dya>

<https://tinyurl.com/huu6kwra>

<https://tinyurl.com/4cpuvvke>

<https://tinyurl.com/5e9kuine>



Figure 2. The Mother, Represented by Adel Emam, an Egyptian Actor, is Forcing her Children to Eat the Leftovers

<https://tinyurl.com/bdea7v6y>

of her children, the stereotypical image of the mother is that she is the one who is in control of the household and responsible for the punishment of her children (See Figure 2). There were few memes in the sample representing the father and the mother watching TV together, especially during Ramadan. There were no precise details in the background of the memes as the focus was on the participants and their roles rather than their interaction within a detailed background. However, given the kinds of themes that most of the memes revolved around, it could be assumed that most of the mother-children interactions are inside their house. Plus, by analyzing the prevalent themes, it could be concluded that the mothers are primarily middle-aged women since there was a reference to topics such as the university education of her children.

6.2.3. Symbolic Attributes. An overarching representation that was noticeable in the analysis was that most of the mothers were portrayed as veiled characters. One of the essential characteristics that differentiates mother memes from the rest of popular memes is the use of the *photoshopped veil*. Almost all the selected memes had a photoshopped veil over the head of the meme character, whether a male, an unveiled female, cats, kids, or cartoon characters (See Figures: 1 and 3).

The number of male characters even outnumbered the number of females because the meme creators often choose meme templates that draw upon scenes from popular Egyptian movies, which are usually starred by a male protagonist. Also, this might indicate that the creators of these memes are mostly conservative Muslim men who might consider it shameful to depict their mothers revealing their hair even inside their houses. This may stem from their perception of women’s hair as a tool of sexualizing women, which is contrary to how they want to depict Egyptian mothers who, in their eyes, are holy human beings. It is worth mentioning that some memes referred to the mother as “El Hagga” which is an honorific title given to any woman who completed her pilgrimage to Mecca in Islam. Metaphorically, the word is used in general slang as an address term for any old woman, and recently, young males from lower social classes tend to address their mothers using this term instead of using “mama” which they might consider unmasculine to say. The use of the yellow veil dominated the other colors, and the choice of the colors was significant as it included bright colors such as yellow, blue, golden, green, white, pink, and orange. This reinforces the stereotypical image of the mother as a veiled religious woman



Figure 3. A Collage of Three Different Memes Featuring a Cat, Tom, and Professor Utonium Wearing a Photoshopped Veil

<https://tinyurl.com/4343dd3c>

<https://tinyurl.com/bp8y8txc>

<https://tinyurl.com/5ac88txh>

who wears bright, tacky colors. Also, this image agrees with Lee and Hoh (2021), who found that memes portray older women as lacking taste. Another symbolic attribute shown in three memes was the “ration card” carried by the mother (Figure 4). In Egypt, ration cards are subsidy cards issued for families who cannot purchase expensive essential products such as bread, sugar, cooking oil, and flour. They are granted to middle-income families to receive these goods at lower prices. The existence of the ration card in some memes denotes the socioeconomic status of the meme creators.

6.2.4. Agency. Mothers were the key agents in all the processes, which indicates how necessary and active their role is in the family. Because most of the themes in the selected memes revolved around the mother-child relationship, this means that the creators of the memes see that women can be the main agents only within the borders of their relationship with their children. While traditional women’s roles are being challenged nowadays in Egypt, the current findings reinforce the stereotypical image of women in the patriarchal culture of the Arab world where women are still expected to have one basic role in society which is to take care of their homes. This comes in line with Abboud (2020) who highlighted that women are represented in media in the domestic sphere as a housewife. However, the findings of the present study are different from other studies with regard to portraying the mother as the heroine of her own story, not as one-half of a married couple since in the memes under scrutiny, the responsibility of the household lies totally on the mother’s shoulders.

6.2.5. Processes. Due to the nature of memes as static images, the verbal processes dominated the other ones because the mother was depicted usually talking to her children about their duties and her familial responsibilities, through the overlaid text caption (See Figure 4). Her top complaint was how endless the household chores and her responsibilities are, followed by blaming her children for disobeying her, eating unhealthy food, excessively using the internet or their mobile phones, getting poor grades, and being the cause of her misfortunes (See Section 6.2.10). This was followed by the material processes where the mother was portrayed holding items in the kitchen, a tray of drinks or food, her mobile phone to talk to her sisters or to check on her children, or carrying a stick to beat her children (See Figure 4). Relating women to the kitchen space aligns with Lincoln’s findings in 2019, where she found



Figure 4. A Mother is beating her Son on the top while at the bottom; the Mother is Holding A Tray of Juice

<https://tinyurl.com/5adhwkmc>
<https://tinyurl.com/yc4z8t3w>



Figure 5. A Mother is Slapping Her Son on his Face because he is Slow in Threading a Needle.

<https://tinyurl.com/35c26kyz>

that even in political memes and during the elections, Hillary Clinton, the 2016 presidential candidate, was mocked through the “go back to the kitchen” memes. The top depicted action in the behavioral processes was *shouting*, as the mother was mainly portrayed shouting at her children (See Figures: 5 and 13). In a meme derived from the movie *Helm Elomr (A Dream of a Lifetime)* starring Hamada Helal and Tawfik Abdel Hamid, the mother, represented by Tawfik Abdel Hamid wearing a photoshopped purple headscarf, was portrayed beating Hamada Helal who stands for her son. In this meme, the mother forces her son to buy the ration as she hands him a ration card (See Figure 4).

6.2.6. Posture. Regarding the body language, as indicated, the majority of the memes included close-up, medium close-up, and over-the-shoulder shots of the mothers; thus, their body language was not represented in nearly half of the memes. However, the top used posture was the mother pointing out to her children, for example, warning, advising, or ordering them to follow her instructions (See Figure 5). This goes against the typical representation of women in mass media who were shown in subordinate roles, based on facial expressions and body positions (Collins 2011; Cuklanz 2016).

6.2.7. Facial Expressions. The image of the mother was constructed with a constant frowned face (See Figures: 6 and 7). The portrayal of the negative facial expressions surpassed the portrayal of the positive facial expressions. This indicates how children see their mothers as always burdened, full of rage, and about to explode at their children. For example, in a meme from the Egyptian movie *El Nazer (The Headmaster)*, the deceased Egyptian actor Hassan Hosney, representing the mother by wearing a photoshopped veil, glares at the viewers while the overlaid caption says: “Psychology says that parents should smile at their children to give them hope, yet this is my mother’s look” (See Figure 6).



Figure 6. A Mother Looking at Her Adult Child
<https://tinyurl.com/yjxhney>

In addition, some memes portrayed mothers passively aggressive smiling or squinting at their children. In a meme featuring the Egyptian actor Mohammed Saad from the movie *Boshkash*, he was depicted as a mother wearing a yellow photoshopped veil and yelling at her children because they do not wear the clothes cramming their clothing cabinets. The seamless transition from the calm facial expressions of the mother in the first part of the meme to the frowning and yelling in the second half should elicit laughter, yet it indicates how the meme creators manifest the bizarre behaviors of their mothers. Other memes portraying the knowing-it-all attitude of the mother (See Figure 14) showed the mother smiling confidently or half-smiling. Plus, some memes depicted the mother giving a threatening look to her children. For example, in a meme featuring the actor Mohammed Ramadan with a photoshopped turquoise veil and widened scary eyes, the superimposed text states,

“This is the look your mother gives if you do something wrong while you are visiting your relatives.”

6.2.8. Attitude. The top attitudes of the mothers varied between aggressiveness, kindness, confidence, and nativity. In accordance with facial expressions, the top portrayed attitude was being aggressive. For example, in a meme about a mother losing her kid, the Egyptian actor Khaled ElSawy from the movie *Ghawi Hob* (Yearning for Love) stands for the mother who once finds her kid, starts to beat and shout at him. In another meme, when the daughter asks her mother why she is shouting, the deceased Egyptian actor Metwally Elwan portrayed as a mother wearing a photoshopped yellow headscarf replies, “Daughter, I do not know; I am just shouting for no reason”. Similarly, in a meme featuring the actor and singer Tamer Hosney from the movie *Omar and Salma*, the mother who is shown as Tamer Hosney, tells her daughter, “Why did not you attend my wedding to your father?”. The meme caption states, “This happens when my mother wants to fight with me without a reason” (See Figure 7).



Figure 7. Two Memes Depicting the Mother Angry Without a Reason

<https://tinyurl.com/2p9xxvc2>
<https://tinyurl.com/yc3mdfva>

6.2.9. Social Role. It was noticeable that the mother was represented as the primary caregiver and mentor of the family, and in other cases, she is the one who is in total control of the household decisions, with minimal presence of fathers. While collecting the data, the existence of father memes was rare compared to the prevalence of mother memes. Again, this corroborates the idea of how children see the conventional presence and dominance of their mothers in their lives. This idea is not in agreement with the findings yielded by the survey done by the UN Women (2017) on gender inequality in the Arab world, where half of the female and male survey participants supported the notion that fathers are the chief decision-makers in most domestic matters (66). However, this agrees with the findings of Siregar et al. (2018), which showed that women are the ones who rule and run their families. The idea of shared parenting existed in three memes where the mother was depicted complaining always to the father about her children’s attitude or quarreling with him. For example, Figure 8 shows a mother and a father, represented by Tom and Butch Cat from *Tom & Jerry*, fighting before Iftar time in Ramadan. The caption states, “My parents are fighting almost every day before Iftar.” This illustrates how the meme creators depicted the turbulent relationship between their mothers and fathers.



Figure 8. Parents Are Ready to Fight.

<https://tinyurl.com/mrybejsz>

6.2.10. Common Themes in the Selected Memes. It is worth mentioning that all the themes that emerged from the analysis revolved around the mother-child relationship, with rare mention of the mother’s life outside the borders of her family

and children. Her actual character was not shown except in the frame of her relationship with her children and her role as a mother. There was no reference to her job, hobbies, friends, or passions. Part of this might reflect the fact that the majority of women in Egypt are not engaged in the marketplace despite the high percentage of educated Egyptian women, as according to CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics), in 2020, the participation of women above 15 years old in the workforce was 14.3% of the total, compared to 67.4% for men. As Linger (2009) explained, “a small minority of women is able to remove themselves from existing ideological role expectations and social structures because of exclusive family situations” (2). Additionally, this might be attributed to the male perspective of the meme creators, who still see that the main job of the mother is to take care of her household. This agrees with the stereotypical image of mothers in old movies, too, as Pascoe (1998) revealed that the mother was always tied to the house where she never reads a newspaper or enjoys a book.

- **Mothers are Responsible for Everything Related to Housework:** This theme was highlighted through their continuous complaining about the household chores, and their skills in knowing how to save money on household expenses and cooking delicious food (See Figure 9). In multiple memes, the mother was depicted ranting on about the behaviors of her adult children as they are not helping her in the house chores, including cleaning the house, washing the dishes, and folding the laundry. For example, in a meme featuring the viral angry Nigerian kid, the angry kid stands for the mother by having a blue photoshopped veil over his head and blaming her children for not being able to keep the house clean throughout the week. She sometimes bribes her adult children by giving them money in return for washing the house carpets. For example, in a meme template from the Egyptian movie *El Nazer (The Headmaster)*, the deceased Egyptian actor Alaa Waly Eldeen represents the mother, wearing a photoshopped brown veil, who orders her son to clean the carpets. When he refuses, she offers 20 LE, which makes her son immediately agree to wash them, telling her, “I can wash the curtains, as well.” In another meme, Professor Utonium from *The PowerPuff Girls*, who stands for the mother by wearing a yellow headscarf, tries to change the bed sheets of her children, depicted as the PowerPuff Girls, by moving the mattress of their bed while they are sleeping on a Friday morning (See Figure 3). Despite the humor in the meme, it reveals that the mother depicted in the memes does the housework even during the weekend. In addition to cleaning the house, the mother was always portrayed cooking throughout the week, but sometimes she needed a break by cooking the leftovers especially before Ramadan and Eid El—Fitr (Sweet Eid). Since vast amounts of exceptional food and delicacies are prepared during the two occasions, the mother in memes decides to depend on leftovers before both occasions.



Figure 9. Tom as a Sacrificing Mother Preparing Food in spite of the Hot Weather

<https://tinyurl.com/3pd2x42r>

For instance, in a meme featuring Adel Emam from the movie *Aris Min Geha Amneya* (A Groom from a Security Agency), when reprimanded by her children because they claim they have been eating leftovers for three days, the mother, represented by Adel Emam wearing a photoshopped yellow headscarf, replies, “I cooked a meal that can last for a lifetime” (See Figure 2). The Egyptian mother portrayed in memes knows how to live on a budget. She, too, has the superpower of knowing how to save money and keep track of the house expenses. In multiple memes, the mother was depicted having the skill of negotiating the purchase price when buying food or cloth for her children. This economic skill was even shown in the way she preserves food in the refrigerator for long periods of time. In one meme, the Egyptian Comedian Mohammed Saad from the Egyptian movie *ELemby*, wearing a photoshopped pink veil to depict the mother, carries a tray of homemade guava juice and says, “This is the freshest juice ever” (See Figure 4). The meme has a caption stating that this guava has been kept in the refrigerator since the 90s and that making juice out of it would be the expected behavior of any Egyptian mother. The same idea was repeated in several memes. In a meme portraying Tom from *Tom & Jerry* as a sacrificing mother, the meme represents Tom, smilingly, backing cookies in spite of the hot weather and the power cutoff (See Figure 9). This corroborates the image of the scarifying mother who gives up her own comfort for the sake of her family.

- Mothers are Technologically Illiterate, Believe in Hoaxes, and Do not Know English: One of the recurrent themes was the idea that mothers do not know how to use mobile phones well. For instance, in a meme from the movie *Morgan Ahmed Morgan* featuring Adel Emam as an Egyptian mother, she says to her son, “How come you unplugged my phone from the charger when it was charged up to 90%?”

Her son was blaming her for unplugging the phone charger when his phone was not charged past 3%. Another meme portrayed the mother creating a weak password that anyone can detect. Also, the mother was sketched believing in hoaxes and not checking facts, through sharing spam posts on her Facebook and WhatsApp accounts. Being technologically illiterate agrees with the findings of Lee and Hoh (2021) who explored the sexist image of older women in memes, which they referred to as *memetic sexism*. In the same vein, she was portrayed in many memes reproaching her children for their continued use of the internet and mobile phones. For example, Tom from *Tom & Jerry* was depicted as a mother by editing it with a photoshopped blue veil. The superimposed text in that



Figure 10. A Mother who Does not Know English Well
<https://tinyurl.com/3t7jhmj7>



Figure 11. A Mother telling her Child that She Unplugged the Router So He Can Focus during His Online Classes
<https://tinyurl.com/2htrvyd4>

meme states, “When my eyes hurt me, and the doctor attributes this pain to my continuous use of the mobile phone..”, and the meme depicts Tom as a mother extending her hands with her palms upwards as if to say to her child, “I told you so” (See figure 3). Another meme showed the Egyptian actress Lebleba from the movie *Wesh Egram (Born to be a Criminal)* as a mother who talks about her adult child being famous on the “social medium,” or as mentioned in another meme from the same movie, the “chochial medium” since she cannot pronounce the expression correctly in English (See Figure 10). Similarly, in a meme derived from the Egyptian movie *Boshkash*, the mother, represented by a background actor, tells her son, who is depicted as the actor Mohammed Saad, that she has unplugged the internet router so he could focus during his online classes. This highlights the idea that the mother in memes does not know how online teaching functions (See Figure 11).

- Mothers Know Everything and do not Keep Secrets:

The Egyptian mother was depicted in memes as the one who knows every bit and parcel in the house and is present in her children’s lives to the extent of not respecting their privacy. Using the same meme template, the Egyptian actress Lebleba from the movie *Wesh Egram (Born to be a Criminal)* was shown as a mother who, out of nowhere during a family gathering, starts indiscreetly talking about the love story of her adult child. In the same vein, yet in another meme, she was portrayed forcing her children to run errands and call their relatives without respecting the time or privacy of her children. A meme from the movie *Ewaa Weshak (Take Care)* featuring the deceased actor Talaat Zakarya as a mother tying up a hostage played by the Egyptian actor Ahmed Eid, who represents her son in the meme, reflected this idea. The son is held as a hostage in order to call his aunt (See Figure 12). Another notion that was prevalent in several memes was that *mothers know everything*, which is an international viral meme. For example, in a meme where the son is searching endlessly for his lost trousers, the mother, represented by Khabane Lame, the Italian-Senegalese TikToker, (wearing a photoshopped yellow veil) extends her arms with her palms upwards as if to say, “Here I can find your lost trousers easily” (See Figure 1). The Egyptian mother was also sketched as a gossipmonger. In a meme from the series *Haza El Masaa (This Evening)*, the mother was depicted as the Egyptian actress Arwa Gouda (wearing a photoshopped green veil), and the daughter was the Jordanian actor Eyad Nassar who tells her, “Mom, I told you not to tell my secret to anyone.” The mother replies nervously, “Are you crazy? I only told your aunt?” (See Figure 13).

- Mothers Make Fun of their Children and Compare them with others: It was evident in some memes that the mother was portrayed mocking the misfortunes of



Figure 12. A Meme Representing a Mother Holding Her Son as a Hostage in order to Call his Aunt

<https://tinyurl.com/mb73w9wp>



Figure 13. A Mother is Shouting at Her Child.

<https://tinyurl.com/5yns5yypb>

her children. In a meme that has an overlaid caption saying, “Your parents should always encourage and motivate you to pass Thanwya Amma (General Secondary Education Certificate), the mother was represented clapping and saying, “What a failure you are!” Also, a recurrent idea that was found in some memes was the comparison with cousins, as the mother was depicted saying her infamous utterance: “Your cousin is better.”

- **Mothers are Overprotective:** There was a number of memes that denoted the overprotectiveness of the mother, such as the meme featuring Hany Ramzy from the movie *Ghaby Meno Feh (Stupid Forever)* as a mother wearing a photoshopped blue veil and advising her children while being at the beach, “You should not touch the water lest we lose one of us.”

- **Mothers are Religious:** In addition to the typical photoshopped headscarf that dominated the majority of the selected memes, multiple memes portrayed the mother praying for her children and asking them to follow the religious rules. This can be exemplified in a meme that depicted a Nigerian kid as a mother wearing a photoshopped red headscarf, and this mother gives the viewers and her son a confident look that says, “I told you so.”, while the caption is “when your girlfriend asks you to pray continually..” (Figure 14). The mother is also represented in several memes worrying about the end of the holy month of Ramadan. Another meme portrayed a son saying, “I can only make it through life because of the power of my mother’s prayers.”



Figure 14. A Mother is Giving the "I told you so" Look.

<https://tinyurl.com/49vyfxkf>

The power of the role of the mothers is highlighted through the previously discussed themes, yet they reinforce the stereotypical image of mothers as housekeepers and main caregivers. However, it seems that the meme creators are also criticizing the embarrassing behaviors of their mothers such as invading their private lives, making fun of their misfortunes, comparing them to their cousins, and being technologically ignorant. The meme creators use in the captions the two possessive pronouns “my” and “your” mother interchangeably to refer to the image of Egyptian mothers in general.

7. Discussion

The primary aim of the study was to explore the viral image of the Egyptian mothers imposed by Egyptian meme creators through a mixed-method, critical multimodal analysis of 200 memes. The findings revealed that these memes, which are viewed by millions of users, shared commonalities regarding their themes, visual elements, kinds of participants, participants’ posture, facial expressions, and their social roles in the domestic context. Using the theoretical framework by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), which is based on Halliday’s SFG (1987), and Machin and Mayr (2012) to investigate the visual aspects of the 200 memes, the quantitative analysis showed that the top used shot was the mother looking directly at the viewers,

which reflects how the meme creators depict the dominance of the Egyptian mothers. In analyzing the processes mothers do, the majority of the processes revolved around the verbal processes as the mothers in the memes complain about the household chores and the huge responsibilities that fall on their shoulders. These findings agree with the UN Women survey (2017) which reported that with little husband's involvement, Egyptian women do most of the house chores, including washing clothes, cleaning the house, preparing food, helping with homework, and taking care of children. According to the meme creators, these responsibilities are the main cause of the constant frowned face and aggressive attitude of the mothers. This agrees with Siregar et al. (2018) who attributed women's aggressiveness portrayed in Indonesian memes to the responsibility of their parenthood role. Also, the mother was the main participant and actor in the majority of the memes.

This is contrary to similar research papers which focused on the representation of women (El-Nashar and Nayef 2014, 2015), where women were depicted as goals rather than actors (agents), even in significant events. Although the selected memes might represent the perspective of their male creators who usually perpetuate and stabilize the feminine stereotypes, the portrayal of the Egyptian mother presents a new perspective on the representation of women in online media. As Brooke (2019) pointed out, "the default masculinity of online spaces is often acknowledged in humor, summed up by the widely quoted phrase; "There are no girls on the Internet." The Egyptian meme creators construe a stereotypical image of the overbearing, aggressive mother who is responsible for every part and parcel of her house. On the surface, this new notion might seem revolutionary in comparison to the image of women in other studies (Machin and Thornborrow 2006; Machin and van Leeuwen 2007; Collins 2011; El-Nashar and Nayef 2014; Cuklanz 2016; Abed and Al-Munshy 2017; Tarabishi et al. 2017; Drakett et al. 2018; Lincoln 2019; Abboud 2020; Mahfouz 2021); nevertheless, the analysis of the semiotic and thematic choices utilized in the memes denoted traces of the patriarchal system which still controls the lives of women. For example, when analyzing the symbolic attributes, the dominating symbol was the photoshopped colored veil which is edited into the majority of the memes. This reinforces the stereotypical image of the mother as a veiled religious woman who wears a veil even inside her home. In addition, by applying the MMCD model of Serafini and F. Reid (2019) to identify the common thematic aspects in the 200 memes, it was apparent that the mother's role in life mainly focused on the relationship with her children. Mothers are only seen within the frame of their relationship with their children or adult children; they are not shown as free individuals who can have other jobs, hobbies, friends, or passions. They are not seen in public places unless they are running errands or buying groceries for their households. It seems that the designers of the memes foist a specific sketch of the domineering veiled mother whose dominance cannot go beyond the walls of her house. This stereotypical image might not be accurate in real life, yet it keeps spreading rapidly by being frequently reproduced and shared with the dominant online groups.

Conclusion

Although the primary purpose of memes is entertainment, they appear to be carriers of the thoughts, emotions, and ideologies of their creators. Shared and consumed by millions of users every day, this makes the genre of memes worthy of investigation as it reflects the mindset of the dominant online groups and implicitly shapes the perspectives of their consumers. In this study, despite the humorous content of the selected mother memes, the analysis revealed broader discourses being communicated. Unlike other media where mothers take minor roles on screen or are marginal to the narrative, in the world of Egyptian memes, a mother has a leading role. At the same time, the meme creators might be criticizing mothers as being aggressive, grim all the time, and not respecting the privacy or the private lives of their children. In the eyes of the meme creators, mothers have a dominant influence on the lives of their children; they are totally in charge of taking care of the household chores and money, making decisions, and caring for their children. This dominance was reflected through the visual techniques employed in the memes, including the close-up and medium close-up shots of the mother in every meme, her being the main actor not a goal, her social role as a decision-maker, and her assertive body language and facial expressions. They were also represented as if they have lost touch with reality by being ignorant of technological advancements, foreign languages, and even human relationships. In the world of Egyptian memes, mothers are constructed as religious, naïve, and scarifying. However, the findings also revealed that this image is the byproduct of the online dominant ideologies which might reflect the cultural beliefs of the males who descend from a middle-class social group. This agrees with Drakett et al. (2018) findings that the producers of these memes are males, and in the present study, the male Egyptians contribute to the propagation, dissimulation, and reproduction of the stereotypical image of women. As van Dijk (2006) states, in modern patriarchal societies, men can be in control of language and determine who is to be represented as what. This might be alarming in the sense that those meme creators can wield power in the constructing of the dominant discourse. Since these unfair representations are shared and accepted by several users, they might be reproduced via other mass media (e.g., advertisements, movies, TV shows, YouTube videos, and TikTok videos) to enable more creators to gain popularity or market their content. Investigating how mothers are depicted in other genres of mass media would be worthy of linguistic and multimodal analysis. It would also be valuable to compare these representations with how mothers are portrayed in memes and trace the changing online and offline attitudes towards mothers in different societies.

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