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What Really Matters: A Triangular Study of Gender Roles and Standards of Beauty in Cameroon Through the Lens of Television Advertisements

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What Really Matters: A Triangular Study of Gender Roles and Standards of Beauty in
Cameroon through the lens of Television Advertisements

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Abstract

Mass media increasingly has become a powerful force around the world. It is impactful and useful in its various forms such as film, books, newspapers, magazines, television and visual and audio music. However even in its informative, educational, communicative, and entertaining character, the media also has the propensity to mirror larger societal practices, perceptions, thoughts, and opinions pertaining to social dynamics encountered within society. Thus social constructs of gender, race, class and other identity characteristics are exemplified and amplified through media forms. Such realities found in the media have the propensity to be socially dangerous in that it can shape the opinions of an identity group based on the images projected, specifically in persuasive forms of media, like advertisement. This study therefore is a triangular analysis of the gender roles and standards of beauty in Cameroon purveyed through the media; specifically those transmitted through television commercials aired on privately owned Cameroonian television network, Canal 2; using content analysis or observation of the station during an average of 20 hours. The study additionally explores the awareness and perceptions of these images and their accompanied messages by Cameroonian women and men through surveys and formal interviews. Triangular study results revealed that television commercials aired on Canal 2 reproduce gender roles pertaining specifically to motherhood and its assumed associated tasks; cleaning and cooking, and taking care of the children. Beauty standards presented themselves less overtly however a difference was observed and cited by interview participants between cosmetic and alimentation and household items advertisements.

Les medias sont de puissants moyen de communication à travers le monde entier. Ils existent sous formes filmiques, livresques, électroniques et papiers. Ils permettent aussi de s'informer, communiquer et se distraire. C'est aussi par les medias que sont véhiculées des idées, des pensées, et des imaginaires sociétales. Conséquemment, perceptions sociales de genre, de race, de classe, et de l'identité féminines se construisent par le canal médiatique et plus particulièrement celui de la publicité. Ainsi, la présente étude qui se situe au cœur des women's studies explore les imaginaires féminins qui sont véhiculés dans la société camerounaise à travers les publicités. Selon une approche croisée faite à partir des sources orales et écrites, ce travail est aussi le résultat de 20h de décryptage de publicités audiovisuelles diffusées à travers Canal 2. De ce fait, l'analyse des documents filmiques publicitaires a permis de ressortir les différentes conceptions du rôle de la femme qui s'élaborent dans le cadre familial et dans le domaine de l'esthétique.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to LaTanya Grace, a beautiful woman of color and my cousin/aunt who lost her battle against cancer while I was studying here in Cameroon, Africa. I will never forget your beautiful spirit and although I did not get to say goodbye physically, you will always be in my heart and the hearts of others. I love you sincerely. Celebrate in Heaven, Cousin Tammy!

Acknowledgments

To my creator, my friend, my father, my comforter, my shelter, my provider, my strength, my faith; I am eternally grateful and indebted to you. I chose to serve and represent all that you have enabled me to do; for it is through your will that I have arrived at this moment, even when I thought it was impossible. Your will was done, and que ta volonté soit fait.

To my dearest parents, Robert and Kaldejia Faulk, my brothers, my grandparents and other family members- thank you for trusting, believing, and helping to make this experience possible. Know that I take it not in vain this rare and privileged opportunity to represent you all. I carry your spirit and words of encouragement with me wherever I go and it is you that supplemented every lack of faith and courage that I possessed through your prayers, pushing me to go forward.

To my beloved Spelman College, the class of 2014 and the sociology department- Thank you for preparing me academically, professionally and socially to be a global citizen; for teaching me to think critically, objectively and consciously in the face of academia and more importantly in the face of social adversity. I am grateful to have represented you in Cameroon with pride and humility.

To the SIT Cameroon staff and cohort of the spring 2013 semester-We have conquered that which was ahead of us and we leave a legacy of ten students who desired to not only impact but to be impacted by a country that is like none other. I pray that we carry a piece of Cameroon with us always and that we leave a piece of ourselves here. To the program staff specifically, we and certainly not I could not have made it without your words of wisdom and understanding; your patience; and your dedication. Thank you.

To my beautiful advisor, inside and out, it has been a privilege to work with such a welcoming and intelligent spirit such as yourself. I am pleased to have been instructed and guided with your wisdom, Mme. *Amina Djoulde!* Wishing you the greatest success in the pursuit of your doctorate degree! Thank you.

To my dearest friends and host families in Yaoundé, Dschang, and Ngaoundéré thank you for taking this lost American girl under your wings, for telling me how much to pay for a taxi; explaining cultural misunderstandings; telling me I'm beautiful, and being rays of sunshine on the days that felt most gray. Thank you for sharing your culture, your homes, your stories, your lives with me and for taking unimaginable efforts to help us understand one another. I carry each and every one of you in my heart and mind.
"Je vous love."

To Deborwah Faulk you have done it! You set a goal and even in spite of every fear and moment of uncertainty you conquered through strength and courage. You may have bent but you did not break under pressure. You have now completed the first of many research endeavors and this moment solidifies your potential for greatness in the future. No longer doubt yourself, your capabilities, or your strength, for you are brave without measure.

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Introduction

The media has since its creation and more so during its recent evolution, become increasingly woven throughout the daily lives of many people in both a local and global context. Media itself is presented in the form of radio, newspapers, magazines, books, internet, television, films and music (West & Fair 1993). It is thus a combination of visual, textual, and auditory matter and advertisement has been incorporated into each of these media venues.

It is important to acknowledge that the media was created by a social institution. As a result, the media continues to be maintained by this domain. It is people that write scripts for movies, design television sets, and enroll cast members for their roles. These decisions and actions are reinforced by cultural references and experiences encountered within society. Consequently, the media in spite of its varying forms is a tangible representation of ideologies found within a particular cultural context, whether local, national, or international. That is to say that the media is capable of presenting mirrored reflections of greater societal structures, thoughts and perceptions and influencing reality.

In considering a world in which social dynamics persist between various identity groups such as race, ethnicity, gender and class; the media inadvertently presents these dominate perceptions. Media and advertising thus is “as a powerful force [which] often reflects and enhances the social ideologies [and] representations [that] are directly associated with collective meanings [and] power relations” (Mohammad 2011). It is the focus thus of this research to explore the presence of cultural gender roles and standards of beauty in television commercials and the perceptions of Cameroonians.

Literature Review

The Evolution and Power of Media

In the overall conversation of standards of beauty and gender roles one common factor is visible; the discussion lies predominately if not exclusively on the female societal member. Indeed, “pressure to be beautiful has always lain on female shoulders (Johnson 2009:4); however not only that but the fulfillment of cultural gender roles. These realities are not omitted but rather transferred through the media and specifically advertisement and are thus left to be interpreted by its recipients.

Media in general is not necessarily intended to per sway its consumer’s thoughts; however the popular arts, or media, “can be seen to be a potential medium for the transmission of messages” (West & Fair 1993). Media in its initial conception was intended to be a form of communication to societal members and for some societies as signs of modernization; “[a] modern mass media system [being]—radio, newspaper, television and cinema” (West & Fair 1993). Advertising, a form within and utilized by the media, occupies a special position which aids economic organization of a modern society (Zantides and Zapiti 2011:1). However its power does not cease there.

“Advertising [is] a powerful force [that] often reflects and enhances social ideology” (Mohammad 2011). The creation of advertisements was with the intent to obtain consumers in the greatest way possible. Businesses, enterprises and companies, as a result spend significant amounts of financial resources investing in creative and “catchy” slogans, scripts, and props in order to gather the greatest quantity

of new or returned customers. However rarely are the accompanying properties of advertisement acknowledged.

Television advertisements have significantly evolved from “*une image gelée...sur l'écran*”¹ (Nief 1998). The reality of visual advertisement has developed from images where “*on voit seulement les produits*”² (Nief 1998). It is advertisements presently that represent a certain character within media. Advertisements are miniature films that tell a story; a story that is infiltrated with larger societal opinions and ideologies (Mohammad 2011). Advertisements and their associated “[i]mages are actually a reflection of society...prevailing cultural ideas, values, and attitudes” (Zantides & Zapiti: 2011). They are furthermore “a powerful force [which] often reflects and enhances social ideologies (Mohammed 2011). Thus these images are infused with “a meaning that is diffused into the belief system of a society as a code for communication” (Zantides & Zapiti: 2011). These meanings interpretive through visual images often present stereotypical presentations of women (Zantides & Zapitit 2011).

Gender Roles in Media

Women in the media have been a large part of the international mass communication conversation in academia and extended elsewhere. Women in the media as a result of their prevailing position in society are concededly found in positions that support patriarchal ideology throughout the medium. It is within a patriarchal society where the social structure is shaped to identify and benefit the male as superior and the female as inferior (Mohammad 2011). Such societies have been established and in

¹ English translation: A frozen image on the screen

² English translation: We see only the products

some cases maintained throughout the world despite the progress in women's rights and their increased value in social spaces. Accordingly, many entities continue to support and encourage the initial ideology. These perspectives therefore have the propensity to translate themselves into the media sphere.

Patriarchal society presents itself in the media through replicating established gender roles. Therefore media venues display women in the home or other domestic environments. She is shown "to be responsible for washing clothes ...[or using] devices and goods for women". The woman accordingly is found frequently in positions as mother and wife (Mohammad 2011:8; Zantides & Zapiti 2011). Other research shows that women are often objectified sexually, "acting as erotic and provocative creatures" or sexual objects (Mohammad 2011; Nguyen 2005). The aforementioned studies have been limited as they are associated with more obvious themes in regards to media excluding the more subtle tendencies regarding the female character such as standards of beauty.

Standards of Beauty in Media

In the conversation of standards of beauty, discussion lies between physical and internal or moral beauty (Bernier 2003). Beauty like many terms depends on both who defines it and how it is defined. This study is specifically focused on the physical standards of beauty or beauty patterns in a Cameroonian societal context. Previous studies (Johnson 2009; Bernier 2003) regarding African womanhood and standards of beauty have focused primarily on the presence and influence of modernization or westernization in short. It is argued in more recent generations that women in attempt to follow and replicate celebrities adapt to the standards of beauty associated with such

societies encountered through modern or western media (Bernier 2003). However this study does not attempt or aim to define and associate beauty with western practices but rather to explore the existing standards of beauty as defined by Cameroonian women themselves. This research aims to examine the perceptions of woman towards the images within prime-time television advertisements and if these images are reflective of their culture.

Theory and Hypothesis/Research Questions

This research intends to answer the following questions: What are the gender specific and standard of beauty messages conveyed through television commercials aired in Cameroon in their portrayal of women? And how are these messages perceived and interpreted by Cameroonian women? It is the assumption that considering the cultural context of Cameroon, the presence of patriarchal ideologies and gender roles in collaboration with the overall character of media as a mirror of cultural society; that commercials aired in Cameroon will present the woman in roles found in the larger society. Equally each society has their respective standards of beauty, and it is expected that specific patterns regarding physical beauty will be presented in television commercials aired in Cameroon.

Secondly, in analyzing the perceptions and interpretations of these messages by Cameroonian women themselves, it is expected that Cameroonian women as well as men will recognize the gender roles and patterned standards of beauty however they do not identify with these images as accurate representations. Additionally although arguable that an influence of westernization in the media, it is assumed that Cameroonians still maintain some cultural and personal standards of beauty regarding Cameroonian women.

Methodology

This study utilized a triangular system of methodology; a combination of content analysis, interviews and surveys. A content analysis was conducted of television commercials aired on Canal 2³ during a week's period of time totaling approximately 20 hours, one week identified as Monday through Friday twice a day, 12h-14h (2 p.m.) and 19h00 (7 p.m.)- 21h00 (9 p.m.). It was expected that television commercials encountered through this station will be most directed towards a Cameroonian audience, in comparison to other international channels (Canal 2 2013). This selection was also made to limit the direct influence and argument of westernization as a significant factor regarding the research questions. Canal 2 furthermore, was selected in lieu of CRTV⁴, because of the target population and the assumed political control of the station, which could potentially seek a more globalized appearance.

The target population for this research endeavor is indicated as seeking the opinions of Cameroonian adults, adult being identified as greater than 18 years of age. This distinction was made in order to capture the opinions of individuals who are assumingly of age to consciously consider and process the factors engaged in this study including gender roles and standards of beauty and their relation to Cameroonian culture.

The intent was to obtain analyze the opinions and perceptions concerning women through five television commercials aired in Cameroon. Canal 2 in comparison to CRTV is the most viewed channel of the two Cameroonian run television stations.

³ Canal 2 is a privately owned television commercial created in 2002 in Cameroon

⁴ CRTV is Cameroonian Radio Television, a state operated and ran television station that was created in 1985 (Nief 1998)

Amongst 36 surveyed Cameroonians, 15 self indicated Canal 2 in comparison to the 5 that indicated watching CRTV. It also is home to three popular television shows⁵ amongst Cameroonian women. The television channel as previously mentioned was observed between noon and two p.m. (14h00) as well as seven (19h00) and nine p.m (21h00). This time period represents “prime-time” hours; primetime being the highest period of time with the greatest number of viewers. This also is the time that viewers, specifically female viewers are at their residences and watching television (FQ1 2013).

A maximum of five television commercials were analyzed in this analysis out of 7 – 10 different commercials aired during the given time period. This selection was derived using purposive sampling⁶ based on the presence of a female in the leading role. It is perceived that these commercials because of the position of the woman, indicate messages directly to the woman. The television commercials selected thus were observed and analyzed based on multiple characteristics pertaining to gender roles and standards of beauty (see appendix). The data was quantified and qualified; quantified, in that the frequency of recurring variables was recorded and considered and qualified as in the themes that emerge in the form of gender roles and description of the commercials.

Surveys consisting of seventeen predetermined questions utilizing purposive and convenience sampling were distributed and obtained gaining a total of 36 responses (40 being the research goal), 34 females and 2 males. It was the intent to obtain a variety of ethnic backgrounds, professions, educational levels, and age groups in regards to

⁵ Theresa, Irrational Heart, El Capo are the three series that air during the time period of observation.

⁶ Purposive sampling- samples that are chosen because they have particular features of characteristics that will enable detailed exploration (Mohammad 2011)

Cameroonian women and men; however regardless of the differences or similarities presented, is not the intent of this research to consider these factors as direct variables for comparison in this study. The variables provided another layer to research results and were considered in the preliminary and demographic questions of the survey.

Additionally open ended and close-ended questions were posed (See Appendix) regarding frequency of television (hours) watched; period of time during the day; and channel of preference; secondly questions more specifically related to television commercials and lastly survey questions pertaining to the social role of women in television commercials. These survey questions both open and close style formatted provided qualitative and quantitative data results as with the content analysis. Close ended questions were selected to provide a basis of understanding as well as to easily facilitate survey responses, as multiple-choice questions require minimal time. Equally, open ended question were selected to allow a more profound response regarding the opinions of publicities in Cameroon and provide a leeway for follow-up interview discussion. Follow up interviewees were obtained from 7 previous survey respondents whom indicated interest in conducting an interview and from 2 representatives related to the field.

As previously mentioned follow up interviewees were obtained from survey respondents because they possessed familiarity and interest in the research subject. Government and professional representatives were also interviewed in interest of presenting a full picture of television advertisements and their presentation of women in a Cameroonian social context. The government and professional interviews were intended to be conducted with *Canal 2*, *the Ministry of Communication*, and the *Conseil*

*de la Communication*⁷ in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The governmental and professional interviews serve as support for the rationale in selecting Canal 2 as well as the selection process of television commercials for airing. Canal 2, survey respondent follow-ups, the Ministry of Communication and the *Conseil de la Communication* interviews consisted of a variety of different open-ended and predetermined question sets (See Appendix). Interview questions were formal and predetermined however space was allotted for spontaneous questions and were intentionally conducted with the aim of a conversational feel.

Difficulties and Limitations

Minimal limitations and difficulties presented themselves throughout the research period despite the obvious limitation of time, as the study was to be conducted in a 4 week period. However, as accustomed in research some difficulties and limitations were inevitable, including the observation and content analysis of television commercials; the basis of this triangular study. Specifically in relation to commercial access, although purposive sampling was utilized for research conduction, a small representation and variety of publicities were available. This reality is evident through the maximum of three beauty product commercials observed during the observational period. Recording technology equally was not available during observational periods and survey calculations in attempt to quantify data were manually calculated as opposed to utilizing statistical analysis software. These two realities presented the occasion and frequency for human error, in that mathematical and statistical validation as well as an exact and thorough description of television commercials could not be obtained entirely 100%.

⁷ Communication Council

Technology in general proved the most preventive factor as often the channel of observation, Canal 2 was not accessible or more severely an electric current was unavailable. Technology also proved complicated as communication with research advisor, located in a city other than the research site, was transmitted through email, a task which requires reliable internet access. This was a privilege that was not always afforded. However despite research challenges the current study succeeded in presenting a thorough work considering the aforementioned enablers.

Results

Surveys

The average age of survey participants was about 25, with the youngest reported at 18 and the oldest age 38. Survey respondents included 2 male participants were calculated in survey data. Over 55 surveys were printed and distributed gaining a total of 36 responses. These surveys were distributed throughout metropolitan city Yaoundé in Cameroon which explains the variety of demographics presented in the questionnaire data. Equally educational level (question number 2 following age [See Appendix]) of survey contributors presented all available responses including high school and the doctorate level, which was not a survey response but was reported in the other category. A high representation as a result was found in the “other” category including responses from master and doctorate degree holders. It is however difficult to determine from survey data if participants have completed the indicated level, are currently enrolled, or otherwise. Nonetheless the variety of ages and education provides equally a variety of responses presented in research results. Contrastingly variation in survey responses became less notable in reply to questions specifically associated with the role of women in television publicity.

Although this study aimed specifically to Cameroonian interest⁸ many survey respondents (8 out of 36), 22 % reported watching international channels, some which were identified as TF6, TF5 and TF1⁹. TF1 specifically was the most indicated television

⁸ This study targeted Cameroonians and Cameroonian culture through the selection of television commercials aired on Cameroonian owned and run television station, Canal 2 and surveyed and interviewed Cameroonians.

⁹ These channels are French television channels aired in Cameroon

station in the other category. Canal 2 however, the channel of study was reported to be watched (15 out of 36) about 41%, in comparison to CRTV (5 individual responses). There were however several respondents that indicated multiple responses including *Canal 2* but were during data cleaning eliminated. Interestingly, despite the intent to minimize the influence and focus of westernization or external influence; as previous studies in Cameroon have focused on this aspect regarding women in media; various indicators (that will be later discussed) including channel preference, pointed to the influence of external forces. Data however became increasingly unified beginning with the period of day television is watched by survey participants.

Responses to question number 4 (see appendix) inquiring television watching habits presented a greater representation of individuals watching during the evening and at all moments during the day. A response that was anticipated however confirmed by Canal 2 English desk chief and journalist, (2013) who indicated there greatest number of viewers beginning after mid-day and continuing throughout the evening. It is during these periods that television commercials were specifically observed in this study.

26 out of 36 respondents were able to name and describe a current publicity encountered on television. Three of which, B-Light, Maggi, and Azur, were selected for content analysis. Without a clear manner to identify products which are particularly Cameroonian or international, a variety of product names that were reported where not

however encountered during this study. Such products include Garnier, American Garden, and Riz Gino¹⁰.

Television commercials and the presence of women were specifically addressed in response to survey questions eight and ten (see appendix). Such questions were inquiries regarding the category of products in which a female main character is present and her role in these commercials. When asked about the products in which women are most present publicizing, the greatest response of 77% was found in beauty products (Indicated 28 times out of 36 survey respondents), with food 66% (24), cleaning 47% (17), and fashion 41% (15) following. Other responses available included car 8% (3), electronics 5% (2), house 8% (3), and other¹¹ 8% (3) products which were not indicated in great quantities.

Although not indicated in the question's instructions, question number ten (see appendix) presented results significantly targeted to research questions and hypothesis. The question, in line with the previous, presented a variety of selection options (see appendix) regarding the role of women in television publicity. The previous questions similarly presented options to select up to three options. Many participants however selected multiple responses and as result of data cleaning, the first role indicated by the participant was recorded. The first option regarding the role of woman was "*une femme mariée*" (see appendix for full survey questions and selection options). The greatest number of indicators therefore concerning the role of women in television publicities was represented at 17 responses (out of 36) indicating the role as mother the most

¹⁰ Products identified by survey participants. Origin of product is not clear.

¹¹ Items indicated in the other section were *préservatifs (condoms)*, *cuisine (kitchen)*, *société (society)*, and *agricole (agricultural/farm)*

identified, with married woman following with 11 responses. Student, boss/owner, employee and other were not significantly selected presenting ranges from 1 or 2 indicators respectively.

Content Analysis

When Canal 2 was observed Monday through Friday for one week between twelve and two p.m. (14h) and seven (19h) and nine p.m. (21h) or an average of 20 hours, television commercials as mentioned in the methodology section were identified and selected by the presence of a woman in a leading role. During the observation time period, an average of seven to ten different commercials meeting the criteria previously mentioned presented themselves. There were significantly few that women were not represented in, indicating women as a factor in African media, Cameroonian in particular. Additionally a small variety of commercials (categorically) were presented during the observed time period. Commercials, as supported by survey data, were more likely to be presented displaying alimentation, cleaning, and beauty products. This could suggest that women have a strong representation in television commercials and perhaps in the greater society as well.

The presence of women in alimentation, cleaning, and beauty products were largely identified by survey participants. Several commercials as previously mentioned were aired during the commercial period including Kinder Joy, Nestle; and Sephora, a variety specific to both beauty and food products. However as indicated in the methodology section; Azur, Lifebuoy, Magi, Claraderm, and B-light were selected for this specific study as a sample of television commercials aired on Cameroonian and

privately owned station, *Canal 2*. The aforementioned television publicity satisfied the requirements as having a woman as the key role player.

Maggi¹²

The commercial opens the scene in a restaurant or potentially in a large event. People are seated both male and female, a variety of ages assumingly. The guests are seated at tables being served food. The social environment can be perceived as bright and vibrate and full of discussion of customers or family and friends. The scene changes to a kitchen where a woman is found preparing plates with food identified as plantains and legumes, a leafy vegetable. The woman observed preparing is dressed in *pagne*¹³, a *foulard*¹⁴ and an apron. She appears to be in a cooking space and is visibly the only person in the kitchen. She is healthy in size and would be described as having medium brown skin tone. She exits the kitchen space to return to the initial setting and is applauded open entry by the guests. The commercial finishes by the woman with her hands on her hips.

The aforementioned description presents both gender roles and standards of beauty. As indicated by female survey respondent and interviewee, which will be identified as FQ1 (2013), it is mothers that are assumed to know the secrets to cooking. It is in the alimentation category of commercials that this physical genre of woman is most likely presented. Although this woman is not perceived to have any children she is identified in a common space, the kitchen, and promoting a product associated with the cultural gender roles regarding the woman in a Cameroonian cultural context. In

¹² Maggi: a spice or seasoning utilized in cooking tasks it comes in the shape of a cube.

¹³ *Pagne*: African fabric, often vibrant in color.

¹⁴ *Foulard*: A scarf or head dressing

Cameroon it is the woman, “*qui font les cuisines*¹⁵” (Q7 2013). More simply the woman is the « *modèle de la société*¹⁶» In regards to the physique of the woman in Africa a woman is seen to be taken care of if she is healthy, she thus “doit avoir une forme, [être] grasse, [et] ronde¹⁷”. (FQ5 2013). In Cameroon specifically it is culturally encouraged to have “les forms généreuse¹⁸” (MQ1 2013).

Azur¹⁹

The commercial takes place in a home setting the woman is observed from the beginning of the publicity. She is seen washing clothing by hand, then the scene changes to outdoor environment where she is seen hanging clothing on the clothes line and her attire is observed. The female actress is presented in a long dress made of *pagne* and is deep brown in complexion, medium in body size, with straight medium length hair. The scene switches inside the home where the main actress is joined by her daughter, a young girl, as they are washing dishes together and using the product. No other actors are visible at this time. The commercial however ends with the woman joined by her family, a husband and three children on a couch, the focus of the camera remains on the woman as she says the last lines of the commercial.

This woman is cast in the role of mother and married woman the highest ranked role in results of survey data. This role is also coincidentally with the larger representation within Cameroonian social society. The male/father is not present throughout the image until the last screen shot and is not present during the washing of clothes, hanging

¹⁵ English translation: that do the cooking

¹⁶ English translation: model of the society

¹⁷ English translation: must have a shape, be fat, and round

¹⁸ English translation: generous shapes/forms

¹⁹ Azur: household cleaning soap with multiple uses including dish washing and clothes washing. Comes in the form of a cube.

clothing out to dry, nor washing dishes. This reality could be associated with a task completed off screen that viewers may or may not be aware of. However it simply this role in the given commercial that the importance of the woman as a mother, wife and keeper of the home is emphasized. For the role of the woman in Cameroonian culture is firstly her “*rôle dans le foyer*”²⁰ and the woman as “*menagère*”²¹ (MQ1). It is perhaps as articulated by a Cameroonian woman herself that the man does not have time to pertain to such tasks. Nonetheless the woman is presented in this commercial in a similar fashion as the woman in the Maggi commercial, in that she is dressed in *pagne* and is seen in spaces associated primarily with the woman such as the kitchen. There are however no patterns between the woman physically in either commercial. Both there perceived skin tone and body size are contrasting; therefore not presenting any clear cut standards of beauty.

Lifebuouy²²

The scene begins with a woman who receives a call she is dressed in western clothing. She is of medium brown complexion with a straight and long ponytail that is lightly braided. She arrives at the school to learn that her infant is sick with stomach pains. She is informed this information from a female medical professional. The medical professional prescribes a soap that will kill bacteria. There is a scene of the little boy bathing himself and the next scene opens up and viewers can gather that the mother and son are in a home environment. The son appears as if he is again sick, however he

²⁰ English translation: role in the home

²¹ English translation: house wife/housekeeper

²² Lifebuouy: Antibacterial soap product

indicated verbally that he was hungry, they, the mother and son embrace each other and the commercial ends.

The indicator of mother is the gender role present in this commercial. The mother must go to the school to check on her infant and leave quickly her previous obligations be it work or otherwise, it was she, the woman that was called and came “running” to her child’s aid. She additionally is the one her son comes to, after beginning to feel better to ask for something to eat; therefore reinforcing that the woman is to take the responsibility of the child in both their health and in nourishment and that her life revolves around the well being of her family, a theme that is relative in patriarchal societies, specifically in Cameroon (FQ5 2013; MQ1 2013; FQ19 2013). There however is no male present neither objects that suggests a male presence as Mohammad (2011) research suggested. The commercial is limited to the interaction between the child and his mother; motherhood being a part of the primary role of women in a Cameroonian context (FQ5 2013).

In regards to standards of beauty the woman is medium body size, medium brown skin tone and with straight hair and a pony tail; a hairstyle that would be indentified as a “western or modern hair” if we assume that her hair being straight at the roots is western in correlation with Johnsons study of beauty in Cameroon (2009). However as previously mentioned this reality is not particularly relevant to this study. However it did not go unnoticed in this analysis. The utilization of medium brown skin would also go against the phenomenon that lighter skin being more beautiful and an attempt to be more European looking. The woman presented in the Azur commercial was identified as deep brown complexion which does not correlate with the medium

brown woman presented in this commercial. Their body sizes however are coinciding. In comparison to the woman in the maggi commercial the attire and body size are not consistent as the woman presented in the maggi commercial was identified in *pagne* and the woman presented here was not. Secondly, the maggi female character was identified as full figured and the woman here is of medium body size. This would assert the statement by several interview respondents (FQ20 2013; FQ4 2013) that women in publicities are neither large nor small.

B-Light

The scene begins with a tall and light skinned woman that is bathing and following such is visible with long dark hair while leaving either her apartment, hotel or spa room. She is being watched by two other women through the key hole. They are continuously in the process of watching the woman with the leading role. The main character is aware that the other two have been surveying her. The two women introduced second in the sequence of the commercial, succeed at entering the room of the main woman and are looking through her things. The lead enters the room, the others are surprised however the lead presents the product, the product being B-Light and gives it to them. The two women as a result begin to fight over the product and the lead character walks away. The commercial at this moment ends.

This product commercial was specifically selected because it is a beauty product commercial. The leading lady evidently exhibits beauty characteristics that the other two woman envy or would like to obtain. This is evident in that the women proceed to enter the main character's room and are fighting amongst each other at the end even considering that the women finally revealed "the answer" to her beauty, the product.

This commercial evokes several different things, the leading lady is of light complexion, lighter complexion than the other two characters. The actresses' hair however represents similar length and styles and are relatively tall and slim or slender, but specifically the leading lady. As the leading lady at the closing of scene walks up the hallway she has the appearance of a very tall woman. This commercial evokes a theme that slightly came through within survey data but specifically in interview occasions. Firstly the women in general can be perceived as young women, as many interviewee participants associated it in response to survey question. They contrastingly would not be found in an alimentation commercial considering that is "*rare de faire [une publicité] avec maman*"²³ in the commercial advertising a beauty product (FQ1 2013). This is evident also in the commercial Claraderm.

Claraderm²⁴

Claraderm commercial begins with a yellow and bright background and viewers have the impression that the woman present is modeling. The young girl age 20 or greater is slender in size and light in skin complexion. She is dressed in a short black dress accompanied by a black dress coat. After "modeling" the girl is seen in a white towel and is applying the product. Viewers then see all the products that are available with the cosmetic or beauty line. The woman in the commercial's closing is seen twirling around in a yellow and orange dress with flowing curls and a smile. The commercial ends with this image.

²³ English translation: Rare to make a publicity with a mother figure, assumed to be larger in size

²⁴ Claraderm: A natural body treatment system utilized for the treatment of the skin.

This commercial and the previously discussed (B-light) commercial have two things in common, their product is of cosmetic or beauty category and the main character has the appearance to be tall, slim, has long flowing hair and light skin. The factor of light skin, “peau clair”, “ton clair”, or “ton brilliant” came up several times in interviews (FQ1 2013; FQ4 2013; MQ1 2013; Canal 2 2013; FQ15 2013; FQ20 2013). Which could be associated with western standards of beauty in regards to body size, hair, and skin tone as Johnson (2009) study suggested would be evident among values of Cameroonian women.

As previously mentioned there have been several studies concerning the dangers of skin bleaching and lightening techniques by women of color as acknowledged by Bernier (2003) and Johnson (2009); B-Light itself being a product that renders the skin more clear. However although Claraderm is not from appearance a skin lightening system, the commercial employed a woman with lighter toned skin. However light skin women (considered in the target age group) were only observed during these two beauty commercials.

There were three beauty products²⁵ observed during the time period in comparison to a combination of about 7 to 10 alimentation (baby food included) and housing cleaning product commercials. This in itself may speak to the values of beauty in Cameroon; this also evident by the variety of survey responses outside of physical beauty characteristics in response to survey question #15 (See appendix). Although the question searched for responses according to physical beauty a variety of responses

²⁵ The third commercial observed amongst B-Light and Claraderm during the time period addressed in the methodology section was “Sephora” this commercial was identified as not having an adult woman as the leading character in comparison to Claraderm, and B-Light

were indicated including those regarding attire and internal attributes such as being respectable, sensual, captivating, and intelligent supporting the assertion of Johnson (2009)

Beauty vs Mother

As evident through the content analysis observation and discussion with interviewees there is some value or association with lighter skin, long and straight hair, slimmer body size and other “modern” characteristics. The commercials specifically presenting beauty products either portrayed the light skin, slim, “European” hair styled women or gave her the leading role in the commercial. It is only in this type of commercial that this type, specifically in relation to skin color is present. If based on the period of analysis for this study, all other commercials presented a product with a woman as the lead was relative to the home, be it food or cleaning products. It is sure and clear that women are represented in television commercials, a reality of media never denied; however there is a difference between the physical characteristics of the women selected for the role.

The research also suggests that medium brown or deep brown women are frequently presented in roles that suggest or confirm their role as mother and wife. While neither fair skinned woman observed out of five commercials were presented in a stereotypical setting or conducting a gender role. The two women of lighter skin complexion were however casted in attempt to make themselves beautiful.

Aside from the difference directly between women in beauty commercials and house hold products and items there is a less clear cut division between what is

beautiful and what is not. Most women among the genre related to the home were similar neither being extremely small in body size; only one woman would be considered as being full figured. Skin complexion accordingly was close and similar ranging from medium and deep brown. Hair was mostly unified in that it was straight. This perhaps supports that, “straightening hair has already been assimilated into the cultures” (Johnson 2009); if we consider straight hair a western or modern hairstyle. However because straight hair was viewed frequently it can be assumed as beauty characteristic in the portrayal of women in Africa and Cameroon. Canal 2 representative and English desk chair (2013) indicated that in her opinion hair varies some women in commercials having short hair styles and some long. This is partially evident as well in the content analysis as women had from medium to long hair and in some cases hair is not viewable. However no women were observed with short hair interestingly providing another factor to be further explored in future research endeavors.

Conclusion

Women are found in television commercials around the world. Women collectively are most likely found publicizing products that are associated with the female and her role in a patriarchal society including cleaning, homemaking, beauty, and alimentation products. Women however in an African context guard there cultural aspects mostly in commercials that directly support their societal roles as women; that role being that of protector of their family's stability and well being.

Initially this research study aimed to affirm the presence of cultural gender roles found in the society in television commercials aired in Cameroon. In Africa and Cameroon specifically the woman is the support of the family. The product category of commercials and its components observed, in correlation with the indications of survey and interview participants revealed that the family and her role within such an institution is sacred. It is she that supports the husband and children. Thus it was assumed that women would be equally represented perpetuating these roles; roles that support the woman's social position and interest in society. This hypothesis was supported by research data in three methods of research, content analysis, interviews and surveys.

Although beauty is relative (MQ1 2013; FQ5 2013; Johnson 2009), small distinctions can be observed in the media regarding what kind of women is physically represented; a characteristic that can be associated and attributed to the larger social conversation with westernization and modernization in the face of media. It was

anticipated that Cameroonians would not perceive television commercials as presenting accurate representations of Cameroonian women and culture. However survey data suggested this hypothesis was not valid in its assumption. Women however seen in beauty commercials are more so viewed as superficial and incorrect photocopies of the western world.

For the Cameroonian, beauty is not always physical and when one is healthier in size, well dressed, and beautiful, whatever that means to the individual; it is all the better. What is important is not so much the physical, but the value of the woman as a mother; it is this that is evident in television commercials aired in Cameroon and amongst Cameroonians.

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FQ4. 23 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Q7. 2013 Survey Data

FQ5.22 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ15. 22 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos. Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ19. 25 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ20 .25 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos Yaoundé, Cameroon

MQ1. 23 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

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²⁶ The letter F or M is representative of Male or Female Sex, Q represents questionnaire and the number following is the order in which the survey was received. In absence of a formal consent form for participation and inconsistent verbal consent, the researcher opted to leave interviews anonymous. Therefore throughout the paper, Interviewees are cited as such.

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Interviewees

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FQ1²⁷. 18 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ4. 23 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ5.22 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ15. 22 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos. Yaoundé, Cameroon

FQ19. 25 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

²⁷ The letter F or M is representative of Male or Female Sex, Q represents questionnaire and the number following is the order in which the survey was received. In absence of a formal consent form for participation and inconsistent verbal consent, the researcher opted to leave interviews anonymous. Therefore throughout the paper, Interviewees are cited as such.

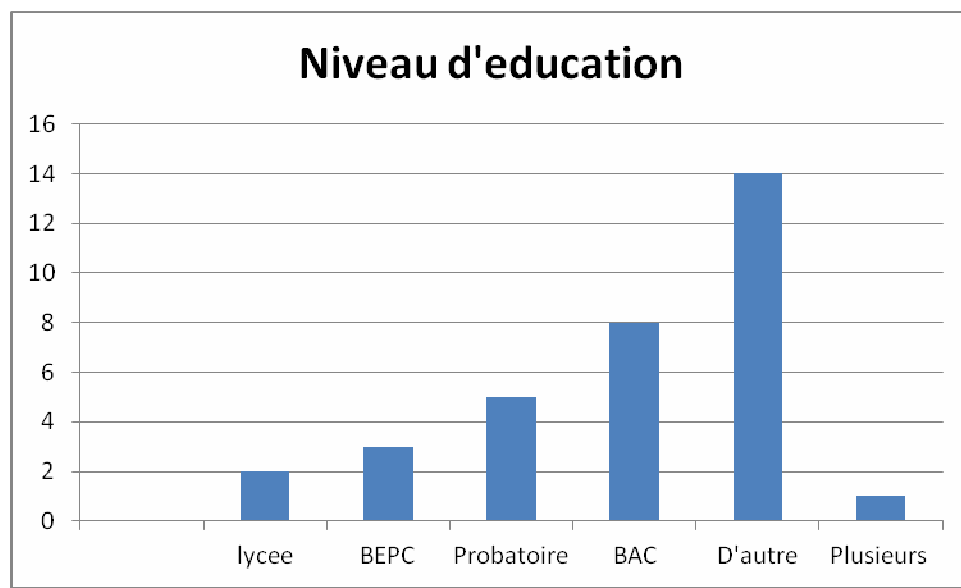
FQ20 .25 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos Yaoundé, Cameroon

MQ1. 23 April 2013. Formal Interview. Bastos, Yaoundé, Cameroon

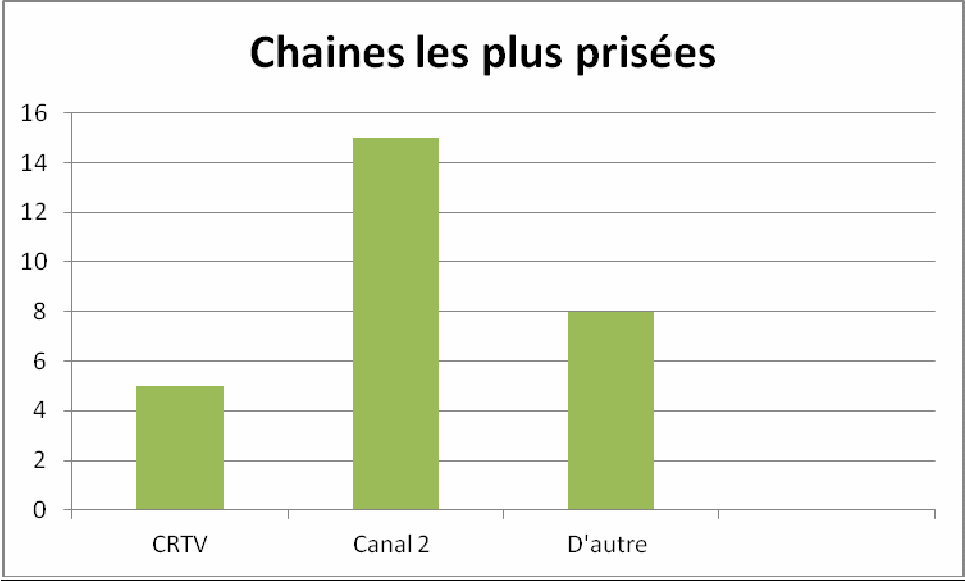
Ministry of Communication 16 April 2013. Formal Interview. Yaoundé, Cameroon

Appendix

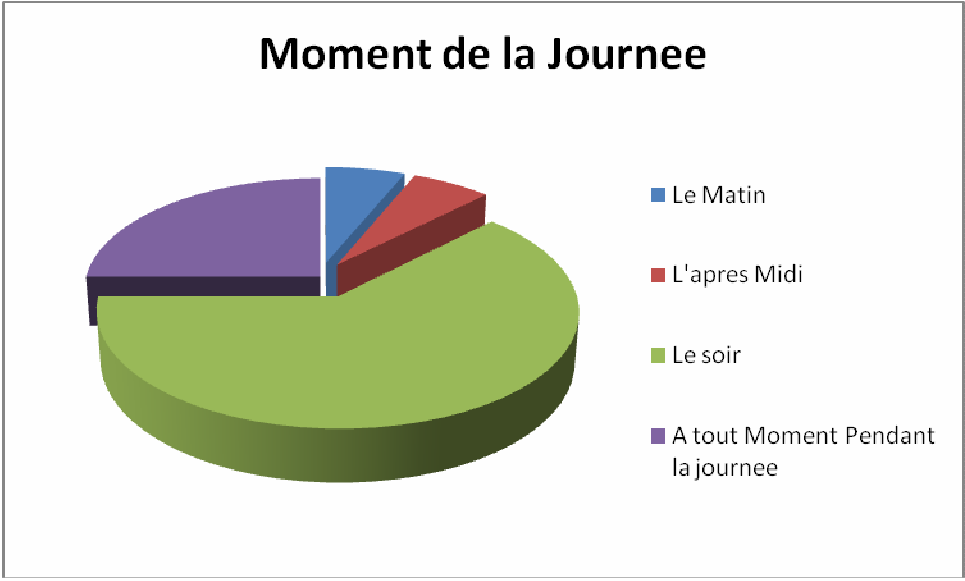
Graph 1



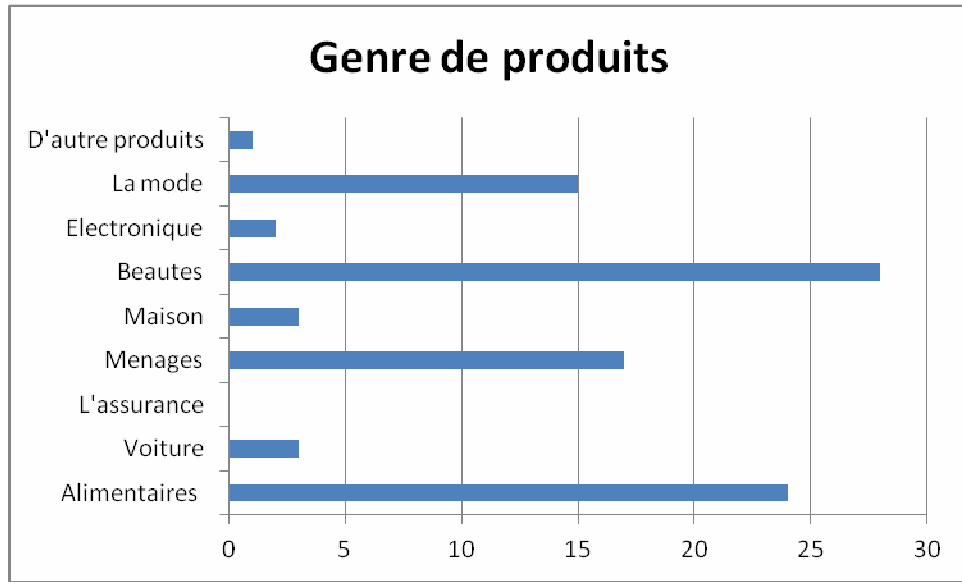
Graph 2



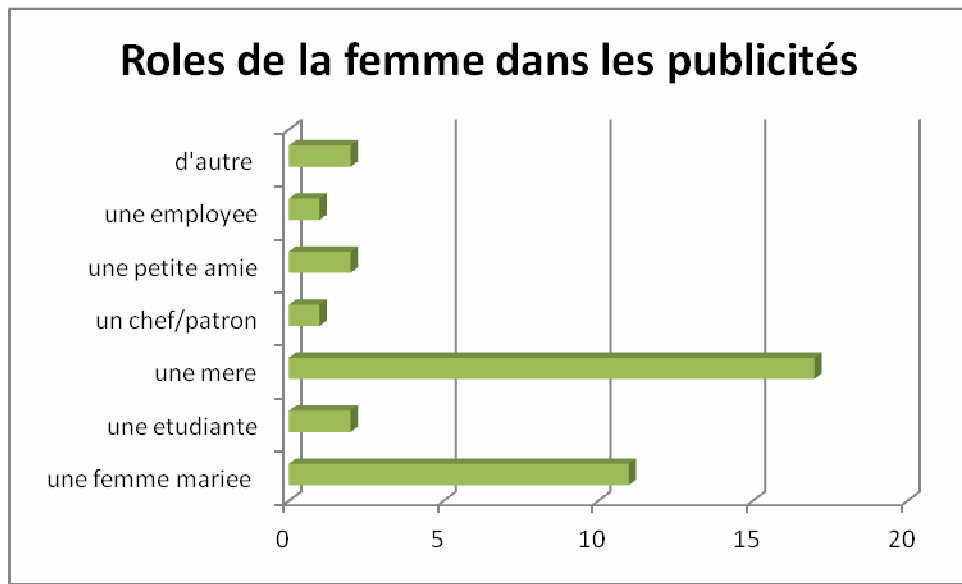
Graph 3



Graph 4



Graph 5



Bonjour, Tout d'abord merci d'avance pour votre aide. Je suis Deborwah Faulk une étudiante américaine et de SIT-Cameroun. SIT est une organisation Américaine qui a été créée dans le but de permettre aux étudiants à apprendre et étudier dans un autre environnement culturelle. Egalement, SIT est une organisation qui encourage les recherches. Comme sujet d'étude, J'ai choisi de conduire des recherches sur les femmes dans la publicité à la télévision. Ce questionnaire a été créé et sera utilisé dans ce but. Je vous prie donc s'il vous plaît de répondre à toutes les questions avec sincérité. Cependant vous avez le droit d'arrêter, évitez ou refuser de réponse aux questions. L'information obtenue sera utilisée pour mes recherches uniquement votre nom ne sera pas utiliser. Merci encore pour votre collaboration.

Ecrivez votre réponse ou en cercle vos réponses aux questions suivantes. En cercelez UNE réponse, si vous plaît.

1. Age _____
2. Niveau d'éducation
 - A. lycée
 - B. BEPC
 - C. Probatoire
 - D. BAC
 - E. D'autre (Indiquez ici _____)
3. Quelle chaine regardez-vous le plus souvent?
 - A. CRTV
 - B. D'autre (Indiquez ici _____)
 - B. Non
4. A quel moment de la journée regardez-vous la télévision ?
 - A. le matin
 - B. l'après-midi
 - C. le soir
 - D. A tout moment pendant la journée
5. Prêtez-vous attention aux publicités pendant que vous regardiez la télévision?
 - A. Oui

6. Identifiez une publicité actuelle ou une femme a le rôle principal. Décrivez-la. Ecrivez votre réponse sur les lignes qui suivent.

7. Décrivez le rôle de la femme dans cette publicité. Ecrivez votre réponse sur les lignes qui suivantes.

8. Dans la publicité, pour quel genre de produit trouve-t-on les femmes? Indiquez au maximum 3 réponses.

- A. Alimentaires
- B. Voiture
- C. L'assurance
- D. Ménages
- E. Maison
- F. Beautés
- G. Electronique
- H. La mode
- I. D'autres produits (Indiquez ici _____)

B. Non

9. En générale, Remarquez-vous souvent les femmes dans les publicités, pendant que vous regardiez la télé?

- A. Oui

10. Quel rôle joue la femme dans les publicités ?

- A. une femme mariée
- B. une étudiante
- C. une mère
- D. un chef/patron
- E. une petite amie
- F. une employée
- G. d'autre (Indiquez ici _____)

14. A votre avis, pourquoi est ce que les femmes sont souvent dans ce genre des publicités ? Ecrivez votre réponse en quelques phrases sur les lignes qui suivent.

15. Décrivez l'apparence physique des femmes présentées dans les publicités. Ecrivez votre réponse en quelque phrases sur les lignes qui suivent.

16. Pensez-vous que le rôle de la femme dans ces publicités reflète la culture camerounaise ? Si oui pourquoi ? Si non pour quelles raisons ?

17. Seriez-vous disposé à avoir une entrevue avec moi? Si oui mettez, s'il vous plaît votre nom et numéro de téléphone ci-dessous.

Content Analysis/Observational Form

Commercial Number:

Time Period:

Date:

Commercial Title/Product Name:

Type of Product/Service:

Perceived Age Range:

18-30 30-50 50+

Hair Length:

Short Medium Long

Hair Texture:

Skin Tone:

Straight Wavy Curly Light Medium Brown
Other

Body Size:

Slim Medium
Heavy

Setting:

Gender Roles Present:

Gender Role indicators:

Description:

Other Notes

Canal 2 Interview Questions

When was Canal 2 created and founded?

Why was Canal 2 created?

What are the objectives of Canal 2?

What is the target population of Canal 2?

Presently, what are the viewer demographics (age group, gender, total number of viewers) of Canal 2?

During what period in the day does Canal 2 experience the greatest volume of viewers? Why?

What kinds of publicities are aired on Canal 2 (Cameroonian/International)?

How are the publicity selected for airing on Canal 2?

Are there specific efforts to obtain Cameroonian publicity for Canal 2?

How much different publicity runs on Canal 2?

How much publicity runs on Canal 2 in a given hour?

At what time during the day does Canal 2 experience the greatest number of viewers?

What is the dominate role of the Cameroonian women in Cameroonian publicity aired on Canal 2?

Physically what kind of Cameroonian woman is found in Cameroonian publicity that is aired on Canal 2?

Are there a physical variety of Cameroonian women found in Cameroonian publicity that is aired on Canal 2? How? How not?

Is there a standard of beauty in Cameroon?

Are these standards of beauty present in Cameroonian television aired on Canal 2? Are traditional and cultural gender roles expressed in Cameroonian publicity aired on Canal 2?

Ministry of Communication/*Conseil de la Communication* Interview Questions

What is your role at the Ministry of Communication/*Conseil de la Communication* ?

What are the objectives of the Ministry of Communication/*Conseil de la Communication* ?

What is the influence of the Ministry of Communication/*Conseil de la Communication* on Cameroonian produced publicity?

What is the influence of the Ministry of Communication/ *Conseil de la Communication* in publicity aired in Cameroon?

Are there any current efforts to increase the number of Cameroonian produced media in Cameroon?

How are television commercials selected for airing in Cameroon?;Is the Cameroonian woman represented in television publicity?

How is the Cameroonian woman physically represented/presented in Cameroonian television commercials?

Are the presentations of Cameroonian women accurate?

Do you think that the role of the woman in television publicity reflect the Cameroonian culture ? If Yes why? If no, for what reasons?

Is the Cameroonian woman positively represented in Cameroonian television commercials?

Follow-up Survey Participant Interview Questions

What are your opinions regarding how women are physically presented in Cameroonian television commercials?

Are the women in Cameroonian television advertisements an accurate reflection of the day to day Cameroonian woman? How so? How not so?

Are the women in Cameroonian television advertisements positive? How so? How not so?

(Female) If you auditioned for a television advertisement (without consideration of talent) would you book the job? Why or why not?

Physically describe the kind of women you usually/typically see in Cameroonian television advertisements? (hair length, skin color, body size)