



Aalborg Universitet

AALBORG UNIVERSITY  
DENMARK

**Dissonance of media image and reality : Content analysis of women in commercial advertising on Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) television.**

Layton, Roslyn Mae; Khajeheian, Datis; Sørensen, Jannick Kirk

*Publication date:*  
2015

*Document Version*  
Også kaldet Forlagets PDF

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Layton, R. M., Khajeheian, D., & Sørensen, J. K. (2015). *Dissonance of media image and reality : Content analysis of women in commercial advertising on Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) television..*

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

CMI working paper no. 9, 2015

# Dissonance of media image and reality

Content analysis of women in commercial advertising on  
Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) television

Roslyn Layton and Datis Khajeheian



Center for Communication, Media and  
Information technologies (CMI), Electronic  
Systems, AAU Copenhagen, Denmark



**CMI Working Paper no. 9:**

Roslyn Layton & Datis Khajeheian (2015) *Dissonance of media image and reality : Content analysis of women in commercial advertising on Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) television*. AAU, Copenhagen

ISBN: 978-87-7152-086-6

**Published by:**

center for Communication, Media and Information technologies (CMI)

Department of Electronic Systems,

Aalborg University Copenhagen,

A.C. Meyers Vænge 15,

DK-2450 Copenhagen SV

Tel +45 99403661

E-mail [cmi@cmi.aau.dk](mailto:cmi@cmi.aau.dk)

URL <http://www.cmi.aau.dk>

CMI Working Papers provide a means of early dissemination of completed research, summaries of the current state of knowledge in an area, or analyses of timely issues of public policy. They provide a basis for discussion and debate after research is completed, but generally before it is published in the professional literature.

CMI Papers are authored by CMI researchers, visitors and participants in CMI conferences, workshops and seminars, as well as colleagues working with CMI in its international network. Papers are refereed before publication. For additional information, contact the editors.

Editor: Anders Henten, co-editor: Jannick Sørensen

**DISSONANCE OF MEDIA IMAGE AND REALITY:**

**Content analysis of women in commercial advertising on Islamic Republic of Iran**

**Broadcasting (IRIB) television**

**Roslyn Layton (Corresponding Author)**

Ph.D. Fellow  
Center for Communication, Media and  
Information Technologies  
Aalborg University  
Frederikskaj 12, Room Sal 3  
2450 København SV  
Denmark  
rl@cmi.aau.dk | Mob: +45 3131 0079

**Datis Khajeheian**

Part-time Lecturer  
Center for Communication, Media and  
Information Technologies  
Aalborg University  
Frederikskaj 12, Room Sal 3  
2450 København SV  
Denmark  
[datis@es.aau.dk](mailto:datis@es.aau.dk) | **Mob: +45 5222 2455**

**January 2015**

## **About the Authors**

Roslyn Layton, American, is a PhD Fellow at the Center for Communication, Media, and Information Studies at Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Denmark. She earned an MBA from the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University and B.A. in International Service from the American University, Washington, DC. USA.

Datis Khajeheian, Iranian, is a lecturer in media studies at the Center for Communication, Media, and Information Studies at Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Denmark. He earned a PhD in Media Management and a M.A. in Entrepreneurship from the University of Tehran.

## **Abstract**

This paper investigates women in IRIB commercials and compares their depiction on television to their status in Iranian society. The research consisted of systematically collecting commercials from IRIB television broadcast and then analyzing them quantitatively and qualitatively. The results were compared against demographic statistics to see how and to what degree television portrayals of women differ from women in real life. This research finds that women are significantly absent from IRIB television commercials, and when they do appear, they are portrayed in traditional and stereotypical roles such as wife and mother. The commercials overwhelmingly feature men, and men are portrayed in positions of power. Some suggestions explaining the dissonance between the television commercials and everyday life are offered.

## **Keywords**

Content Analysis, Women and Media, Television Commercials, Iranian Studies, Women Studies, IRIB, Women and Society, Women and Advertising

## **Introduction**

The status of women in education, employment and other areas of Iranian society has changed significantly in recent years. In contrast to the view that women are engaged primarily as wives and mothers, women comprise more than half of university students, earn a majority of university degrees, and comprise an increasing share of the workforce. Their presence in education, industry, journalism, politics, and other areas of society has increased considerably from the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Women also occupy important position in the government.

A conventional assumption is that there should be parity between depictions of women in TV commercials and in everyday life, ostensibly because the goals of the advertising are furthered when the audience can identify with the subject matter. Given that women have increased presence in various aspects of Iranian society, we assume that the images of women in TV advertising should reflect these changes, at least to some extent. However this research shows that IRIB commercials conform, if not reinforce, the traditional understanding of the role of women, namely as wives and mothers in the home.

A cliché or stereotype is a specific pattern of representation that emphasizes certain generalized characteristics to a group of subjects regardless of their differences. The depictions of women on IRIB commercials border on caricature and cliché, to the point of comedy. However it is not the case that all imagery of women on the IRIB is clichéd. A number of Iranian television programs feature dynamic women in a variety of roles and portrayals.

Dissonance is this paper describes the discrepancy between what is observed in television commercials versus what is experienced or known in real life. In particular we find that Iranians' perception of the commercials is that they are more reflective of women's enhanced role of society, even though the data show that they are not. While IRIB commercials portray an idealized Iranian woman in monolithic roles of wife or mother, Iranian women generally consider themselves to be multifaceted, dynamic, global, modern, and even "Western" (Rafaatjah, 2008).

The critique of the dissonance between commercials and real life is a frequent theme in Western media studies. However, this paper simply attempts to observe the magnitude of the dissonance in Iran and suggests to some appropriate, context-specific explanations. Given that there is limited study of women in IRIB television commercials, we believe this research provides a valuable, if not definitive addition to the literature.

## **Research Question**

The research question is how the portrayal of Iranian women in IRIB commercials compares to the reality of women in Iranian society. To answer the question, television commercials from IRIB were collected over one month and then analyzed and classified across a set of parameters. The analysis is presented in light of statistics about the status of women in Iranian society and explanations are proposed about the reasons for the discrepancy.

## **Literature Review**

In preparing this paper we reviewed three sets of academic literature, but mainly the academic literature in Persian by scholars studying women and the media in Iran. Incidentally this literature is found primarily in print journals and is little known outside Iranian libraries.

A number of Iranian researchers have studied the role and depiction of Iranian women in different media such as film, literature, computer games, visual art, and so on. Abbas Kazemi is a leading academic observer of Iranian society and has performed a number of analyses using semiotics, studies undertaken to reveal hidden meaning. He notes that Iran has become more consumer-oriented and that commercial advertising is an important part of the consumer economy. He observes in his paper with Nazer Fasihi "Reflection of Women in a Commercial Television Advertising" that despite the apparent changes in Iranian women's lives in the last generation—and even with the public debates about changing women's roles—that women are portrayed with increasingly obsolete stereotypes. They are depicted in one-dimensional caricatures, wives and mothers at home tending to cooking and cleaning, and even more traditional pursuits such as rice farming. Men are generally in positions of power while women are submissive. He is concerned about the continuing media stereotypes because they inform belief systems, and viewers internalize the images and messages of commercials to form their ideas about women and femininity.

Kazemi and Nazerfasih (2007) observe that advertising tends to reinforce the cultural clichés and stereotypes of women. Even when a modern woman is depicted in advertising, she acts in a traditional way and appears to be under male supervision, even if a man is not present. They describe an ad for Tabarrok Tea where even a "modern Iranian woman", who would seemingly be in charge of her life and responsibilities, hears the voice of her wise and all-knowing husband guiding her on the most basic of tasks. They observe that women are generally featured indoors and men outdoors, symbolizing the traditional dividing lining between the feminine home and the masculine world. This

advertisement emphasizes the traditional province of women in the home. These redefined women can't get along without the help the knowledge and intelligence of men.

The findings of this paper show overwhelmingly that men are featured more than women in commercials. Moreover the narrators are also men. This was also the conclusion of Haghghi Nasab and Hedayati (2005) who found that women, when they are even depicted at all, generally appear in the home. In the commercials, women are generally younger than men and almost always are married and occupied as housewives. Men, on the other hand, are frequently single and employed outside the home. Men do the talking in the commercials while women look and listen. Men are the experts; women are the users. Women just talk about advantages of products, but men make the product recommendations. Nasab and Hedayati lament that there is not a better reflection of women in commercials, noting that 65 percent of students entering universities are women but very few female students are depicted in commercials where education is the theme. They call for standards or regulation to right the balance between the commercial depiction of women and the reality.

Interestingly the Iranian film industry differs markedly in the depiction of women compared to commercials. Javadi Yeganeh and Varij Kazemi (2006) performed a content analysis of women in domestic Iranian film industry for the three periods after the Islamic revolution: war, reconstruction, and reform. They noted trends and themes in film including the lifestyle of single women, having fewer children, negative attitudes about marriage, less negative attitudes against divorce, increased employment, more property ownership, more women entering the upper class, more economic independence, less focus on religious, less wearing of chadors (traditional Islamic dress), business relationships with men that are not predicated on gender, desire for equality, more education, and the increased use of mass media. They observe that Iranian film provides a more accurate reflection of real Iranian life than commercials.

Sadeghi Jafari's 2008 content analysis of women in children's literature showed that the depiction of women remained traditional even though the status of women had changed in reality. He surveyed 22 books for the presence of women, family roles, literacy, employment, and political-social participation and suggests that the books' authors had pre-established views of women that conformed to traditional roles. Most characters in the books were boys. Jafari concluded that the stereotypes were so clichéd and out of step with reality that the readers found that the books lacked verisimilitude or credibility.

Similarly Maghsoudi (2004) shows that despite the statistics about women in real life, women in children's books only appear in traditional roles, such as mothers, teachers, cooks, nurses and so on. Also women never have a leadership role in the books. Women are characterized by their beauty or emotion, such as being kind, pretty, or caring.



Radvarrad et al (2010) analyzed contemporary Iranian painting and noted that while male painters depict women idealistically, female painters provide more complex depictions of women, attempting to deconstruct the established images of themselves in men's minds. The female painters resist being a subject, but attempt to produce new ways to reproduce their own images as they think should be.

Shahverdi (2002) studied computer games and concluded that they are designed for boys, not girls. She notes that there is little interest in the video game industry to cater to needs of girls. She suggests that the low enrollment of women in computer science at universities may be result of girls' experience with video games, that they either have a negative experience with them or simply that video games (and by extension computers) are not for girls. Moreover she notes a societal view that identifies computers and video games with boys, not girls.

There are three notions in general media theory that can be exemplified in this study of Iranian women in IRIB commercials: the male gaze, the media as code, and the female dialectic. In her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey introduced the concept of "male gaze" to explain gender difference. She notes that the filmmaker is a man; the subject is a man; and the audience is a man. The woman is the object. In this way, even women see themselves through a "male gaze". The notion that men primarily are the creators, subjects, and consumers of media is a theme also found in the Iranian academic literature. Women are secondary.

Cook and Johnston proposed the notion of "film as code" (1974), rejecting the academic and sociological approach that compares screen images of women to women in past or present. Instead they see the media as an artificial construct which feminist criticism must decode.

Some 15 years later B. Ruby Rich argued (1990) that women are critical of how they see themselves depicted in the media. Rather than simply internalizing messages, they make a conscious dialectic, interpreting themselves in their own ways to create their own meanings.

It bears mention that there are two branches of Iranian feminist theory. One view is historical and begins with the women's liberation movement in Iran in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It holds that the Islamic revolution derailed the advancement of women, citing the return of veiling, polygamy, and stoning. It sees women's current advancement as an effort to "win back" gains that were lost in the Iranian revolution.

The other branch looks for a favorable or "dynamic" interpretation of Islam (specifically Sharia) to improve the status of women. It takes a view that Islam frees both men and women to serve God, that women need not conform to Western notion of femininity

(stereotypically as the woman as sex symbol) and that Islam can empower women to focus themselves on “meaningful” activities such as work, education, family etc. Feminist scholars in this persuasion might evidence how Muslim women outnumber Muslim men in many areas of higher education and diplomas. They might describe the traditional Muslim dress or hijab, not as confining, but liberating in that it frees women from having to devote energy to fulfilling outward feminine appearances.

### **Content analysis of women in IRIB Commercials**

For purposes of this research, a woman refers to the representation of a live female human being in video in commercial advertising on IRIB. Representation in the video commercials includes all references to women either in image, text, animation, or voice over. Television advertising is a form of communication to encourage an audience to consume a specific product or service. The commercial advertising clips and ads appear during the “Commercial Advertising Break” on IRIB TV channels 1-3. Print, radio, outdoor, and internet advertising were not included as part of this investigation.

### **Sample of Advertisements**

Advertisements were selected over four weeks at intervals designed to capture different television programming and optimal slots for advertising. The working day concludes at 17:00 (5pm), and most television is consumed between 17:00 to 00:00 (midnight). Thursday and Friday are weekend days in Iran, so timeslots were added on Thursdays from 14:00 (2pm) to 00:00 and Fridays from 09:00 until 00:00. Following is the timetable that was used.

**Table 1**

|                      | Saturday | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|----------------------|----------|--------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> week | 17-24    |        | 17-24  |         | 17-24     |          | 9-24   |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> week |          | 17-24  |        | 17-24   |           | 14-24    |        |
| 3 <sup>th</sup> week | 17-24    |        | 17-24  |         | 17-24     |          | 9-24   |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> week |          | 17-24  |        | 17-24   |           | 14-24    |        |

Schedule of time slots for collection of advertisements

After recording all the clips in the schedule, the replicated clips were removed, leaving 171 unique clips. Thereafter public service advertisements such as governmental, cultural, and environmental announcements were removed. The analysis was thus performed on the 163 remaining ads.

One limitation of this research was that clips were collected over a period of one month, not one year. Additionally the period analyzed overlapped with the 2012 UEFA European Championship for football (also called Euro 2012). This event tends to have more male viewers and may have influenced the kind of advertising shown. However it is interesting to investigate the portrayal of women in commercials during this time.

### **Analysis**

The analysis included both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative content analysis was based on a methodology by Riffe (2008). It consisted of a systematic and replicable examination of the symbols of communication which were assigned numeric values according to the categories to be studied. Statistical chi square tests were also performed with an interview/questionnaire of 43 individuals over three occasions at mid-day in a public square in Tehran. Further insight on coding and organization was provided by Shrikhande (2003) on a similar analysis of advertisements in the US.

### **Advertising Categories for Analysis**

There were 8 categories for analytical analysis of the woman or women in the advertising: whether she is a central figure in the ad or protagonist; her age; her dress (which type of Iranian dress); her occupation, the setting (where the story of the commercial takes place, such as a home, the outdoors, the street, a workplace, a fantasy location, or a setting created by animation or other fabrication); the woman's role; her expertise (whether a woman is presented as an expert on the advertised product); and the product type. Following is the schema of content analysis.

Table 2

| Central Figure | Age                   | Clothing                                  | Occupation                    | Setting        | Woman's Role        | Product Expertise | Product Type                    |
|----------------|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Man (1)        | Child under 18 (1)    | Chador (1)                                | White collar Professional (1) | Home (1)       | Wife and mother (1) | Expert (1)        | Communications (1)              |
| Woman(2)       | Young adult woman (2) | "Mantoo-Shalvar", Scarf and coat suit (2) | Clerical professional (2)     | Work (2)       | Professional (2)    | Consumer (2)      | Financial (2)                   |
| Unsure (3)     | Adult woman (3)       | Clothes for home (3)                      | Sportsman ?                   | Recreation (3) | Narrator (3)        | Unknown (3)       | Health and hygiene (3).         |
|                | Elder woman (4)       | Uniform (4)                               | Blue collar professional (4)  | Virtual (4)    | Other (4)           |                   | Automotive (4)                  |
|                | Unknown (5)           | Other (5)                                 | Other (5)                     | Other (5)      |                     |                   | Food (5)                        |
|                |                       |   |                               |                |                     |                   | Industrial and construction (6) |
|                |                       |   |                               |                |                     |                   | Education (7)                   |
|                |                       |   |                               |                |                     |                   | Home appliances (8)             |
|                |                       |   |                               |                |                     |                   | Other (9)                       |

Categories for Content Analysis

The research shows that women feature in approximately 30% of the 163 ads (about 51 ads) and overwhelmingly appear in limited roles. In three quarters of the ads, women are featured as wives and mothers.

As for the setting of the ads, women are overwhelmingly featured at home (31 ads). Six ads take place in a professional location and six in shopping locations. Four ads take place in the outdoors with the balance in other locations.

As for clothing, women were mostly featured in the outfits they can wear at home, about 26 ads. Women were featured with the chador (black veil) in 4 ads. In 16 ads, women appeared in a "Mantoo-Shalvar", the scarf-coat suit. In 6 ads, the women's apparel could not be determined.

The analysis of females by age shows that girls up to age 18 appeared in 22 ads. Female adults aged 19-30 appeared in 11 ads. Women aged 30-60 appeared in 11 ads. Women aged 60 and older appeared in 8 ads. In 5 ads, the women's age could not be determined.

The analysis of occupation shows that women are featured primarily as housewives, comprising 33 ads or two-thirds of the total. In only 7 ads are women depicted as

professionals in a professional capacity, e.g. cashier or bureaucrat. In 12 ads, the woman's occupation cannot be determined.

As for product expertise, men are more frequently featured as the experts, and they give women on advice on the products and services. About half of the time women are "passive consumers". Only in one quarter of ads (12) is women the experts.

### Statistical analysis

Some simple statistical analysis was implemented to examine the differences in the relationship of clothing and the presence of a woman as a central figure across all the advertisements and by the product types. The chosen statistic was the chi-square test because it answers the key question about the likelihood of the relationship being real in that population (Riffe et al.,2008:194). A 0.05 level of significance was selected to test for significant differences of percentages.

Table 3

| Product Type            | No woman present | Female presence | Only women featured | Woman in the main role | Women depicted as part of a family | Women in a group or crowd | Use of Narrative / Voice Over |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Communications          | 13               | 2               | 1                   | 0                      | 0                                  | 0                         | 1                             |
| Financial               | 23               | 13              | 2                   | 1                      | 2                                  | 6                         | 2                             |
| Health and Hygiene      | 14               | 15              | 4                   | 3                      | 2                                  | 4                         | 7                             |
| Automotive              | 6                | 1               | 1                   | 0                      | 0                                  | 0                         | 0                             |
| Food                    | 21               | 12              | 2                   | 3                      | 2                                  | 4                         | 4                             |
| Education               | 14               | 0               | 0                   | 0                      | 0                                  | 0                         | 1                             |
| Home appliances         | 6                | 12              | 0                   | 2                      | 3                                  | 1                         | 3                             |
| Industrial-construction | 7                | 0               | 0                   | 0                      | 0                                  | 0                         | 0                             |
| Other                   | 2                | 2               | 0                   | 0                      | 0                                  | 2                         | 0                             |
| Total                   | 106              | 57              | 10                  | 9                      | 9                                  | 17                        | 18                            |

Statistical Analysis for Categories

In categories of products, it is interesting to review the results of the study to see whether women appear frequently or not. Women appear most often (more than half of the time)

in ads for food and home appliances, perhaps not a surprising outcome. Though women appear in about half of the ads for financial services and health and hygiene, their depiction contradicts women's facility with managing these kinds of concerns for the home. Women appear in only 1 advertisement in the automotive area but don't appear in the ads at all for education or for industrial-construction products and services. While ads featuring men in automotive and industrial construction products and services might be explained by traditional male associations, we find the omission of female students most glaring because women make up more than half of Iranian students in higher education. However if the goal is to secure more students in universities, it might help to feature men more often in ads.

The independence statistic shows that in 87% of cases there is a relationship between a woman being in the advertisement and the product's category.

Table 4

**Chi-Square Tests**

|                    | Value               | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 36.484 <sup>a</sup> | 32 | .268                  |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 43.607              | 32 | .083                  |
| N of Valid Cases   | 163                 |    |                       |

a. 39 cells (86.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20.

The independence statistic shows that in 82% of cases there is relationship between the type of clothes a women wears and the product category. It is not surprising that where women are featured in a working environment that they are dressed in *mantoo-shalval*, scarf and coat suit. Women at home are featured in domestic attire, particularly with ads for home appliances.

Table 5

**Chi-Square Tests**

|                    | Value               | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 41.052 <sup>a</sup> | 32 | .131                  |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 46.594              | 32 | .046                  |
| N of Valid Cases   | 163                 |    |                       |

a. 37 cells (82.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

A questionnaire was conducted with 43 persons randomly selected in a square in Tehran. They were asked about the role of women in IRIB advertisements. They were asked to estimate how much women feature in commercials in general and how often in relation to the product types. Though the analysis is not meant to be definitive, it demonstrates anecdotally that people perceive women to be featured more commonly than they actually are.

**Table 6**

|                             | Percentage of woman included (prediction) | Percentage of main role (prediction) |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Total                       | 47  | 32                                   |
| Communication               | 43  | 38                                   |
| Financial                   | 40  | 23                                   |
| Home appliances             | 52  | 35                                   |
| Health and Hygiene          | 64  | 53                                   |
| Automotive                  | 30  | 12                                   |
| Educational                 | 41  | 18                                   |
| Industrial and Construction | 21  | 4                                    |
| Food                        | 64  | 52                                   |

Results of survey of random Iranians

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative content analysis is based on the critical analysis of messages and imagery, rather than the measurement of categories. A qualitative analysis of some advertisements was undertaken to investigate possible meaning in the advertisements.

#### **Bank-e- Keshavarzi (Agriculture Bank)**

A man's van is stopped in the Iranian countryside and will not start. The driver asks nearby female rice farmers to help push the van. The women push the car, and it starts. The driver thanks the women and offers them a ride. This commercial is unusual in that not only are women featured prominently and with physical strength, but the male is in need of help by women. Women's attire underscores their traditional and agricultural role. The man, dressed in modern clothes and driving a van, is the symbol of modernity while women, symbolic of tradition, work in the fields in old-fashioned dress. The message for the bank is that it helps society out in a friendly and traditional way, just as the farmer women help the driver (See Figure 1, images 1 and 2). To be sure, women working in the rice field are not threatening to men.

### **Famila Oil**

This product has two advertisements in which women play extras. In the first ad, the woman is a customer in a shop who buys oil from a male vendor. The rest of the ad features men producing the oil which finally makes its way to the woman in the shop through the male vendor. The woman collects the oil and leaves the shop visibly satisfied with her purchase. In this clip just there is an adult woman who does not speak (Figure 1, images 3 and 4).

### **Iran Khodro Gift Card (Automobile maker)**

Three women are depicted receiving gifts from the auto maker Iran Khodro, mostly travel accessories. These women, presumably housewives, are at home in domestic attire. Women hold 30% of drivers licenses in Iran, but the message of this ad is that women experience the automobile not as a driver or passenger, but through at home, in an elegant, relaxed setting with driving accessories (Image 5).

### **“Attack” brand Insecticide**

A woman with her little girl consults a doctor in his clinic about how to manage pests at home. The male doctor suggests an insecticide which ensures a good night’s rest while killing the bugs that infest the home. The commercial is typical example of power roles in that the man, in this case a doctor in a white coat, gives advice to a woman (Image 6).

### **Sarmayeh Bank**

The husband and father of the family are at home and receive a series of requests from family members for money. The housewife, while cooking, reminds her husband to pay a certain bill. The son reminds his father that he needs to make a payment to his uncle. The daughter asks for payment for school tuition. The message is that these tasks are simple to do from home with online banking. This ad contrasts with a typical Iranian family where such money matters are handled by the wife/mother. (Image 7).

### **Bank Saderat**

A miserable, desperate woman searches for her wallet. Another woman appears and suggests that she use a Bank Saderat bank card, which provides convenience and time-saving over cash transactions. The ad contrasts with typical Iranian women who are considered to be effective money managers at home. However the ad does feature a woman giving advice to another woman (Image 8).



Figure 1



Compiled images from IRIB advertisements

### **Portrayal of women in IRIB commercials vs. participation of women in Iranian life**

The portrayal of women in IRIB commercials, namely in traditional, subservient and monolithic roles of wife and mother, differs from real women in Iranian society who in addition to their homemaking, are employed outside the home. In the small minority of ads where women are featured in the labor force, they have secretarial or clerical positions. Women have held these kinds of positions for some years and are “non-threatening” to male power structures.

However women in Iranian society increasingly work in medicine, nursing, teaching, finance, business/entrepreneurship, and technical capacities, not to mention positions in handicraft and manufacturing. The Women and Family Socio-Cultural Council of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution offers a set of statistics about women in Iran<sup>1</sup>. These are presented in the following section.

### **Women and the Labor Force in Iran**

There is no doubt that the participation of women in Iran’s labor force is increasing, but the statistics of actually how much are a matter of some debate. In 2009, this agency reported the total employment of 21 million people in Iran, around 3.6 million, or 13 percent, were women. Women work in a variety of occupations but primarily in agriculture, manufacturing, and education. Further demographic shifts are expected as the increasing education of girls and women with college degrees enter the labor force.

Table 7

| Age              | 15-24 | 25-29 | 30-Up |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Women            | 10.1  | 24.2  | 13.5  |
| Men              | 41.4  | 81.5  | 73.9  |
| Total in country | 26.3% | 53.4% | 43%   |

Share of Men and Women in Workforce (Census, Statistical Center of Iran, 2012)<sup>2</sup>

The data shows that both men and women are have relatively low employment compared to other countries, but even more so, the rate of women’s unemployment is generally 3-4 times higher than men’s.

### **Women and Education**

According to the Ministry of Higher Education in 2014, 60.38 percent of the people registering for college entrance examinations were women<sup>3</sup>. Women’s increase as students at universities has been on the rise since 2002. Iranwomen.org notes that the country experienced a 34.58 percent increase in female candidates to universities between 1996-2009.

<sup>1</sup><http://en.zn.farhangoelm.ir/Statistics.aspx>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.amar.org.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=133>

<sup>3</sup><http://tnews.ir/news/9AE822346861.html>

It should be noted that in the Iranian government's National Vision for 2025 has the mission of increasing the rate of women in higher education. In practice this means that some degree programs are explicitly encouraged for women, for example medicine.

Iran has many regions with limited development. These areas need basic healthcare, and female healthcare workers are dispatched to these locations. Additionally some Islamic conventions favor that women, not men, provide health care to other women (e.g. gynecology, obstetrics etc). At the same time, the government's education policy limits other degree fields to women, such as mining, where the environment is considered unsuitable for female employment.

Following is data from report of the Higher Education Enrollment Bureau in 2011 showing the total enrollment of students by gender and degree programs. While the total number of students is roughly equal between men and women, women significantly outnumber men in the fields of medicine and fundamental science. However men are three times as likely as women to pursue technical and engineering degrees.

**Table 8**

| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>Men</b> | <b>Women</b> | <b>Total</b> | <b>Men</b> | <b>Women</b> |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| All fields                           | 2,299,858  | 2,136,022    | 4,435,880    | 52%        | 48%          |
| Medicine                             | 70,954     | 148,376      | 219,330      | 32%        | 68%          |
| Humanities and Social Sciences       | 804,119    | 1,124,533    | 1,928,652    | 42%        | 58%          |
| Fundamental science                  | 90,983     | 204,245      | 295,228      | 31%        | 69%          |
| Technical and Engineering            | 1,131,621  | 373,415      | 1,505,036    | 75%        | 25%          |
| Agricultures and Veterinary medicine | 114,693    | 137,311      | 252,004      | 46%        | 54%          |
| Arts                                 | 87,488     | 148,142      | 235,630      | 37%        | 63%          |

Enrollment of men and women by degree programs, 2011

**College entrance exam and selection of degree program**

Following is the enrollment in degree programs for 2014.<sup>4</sup> Women outnumber men in experimental sciences, humanities, art, and foreign languages. Men have higher enrollment only in mathematics.

<sup>4</sup><http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930201001069>

Table 9

|                       | Male    | Female  | Total     | Men | Women |
|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----|-------|
| Mathematics           | 138,230 | 85,171  | 223,401   | 62% | 38%   |
| Experimental Sciences | 179,085 | 344,921 | 524,006   | 34% | 66%   |
| Humanities            | 99,645  | 163,674 | 263,319   | 38% | 62%   |
| Art                   | 3,975   | 9,965   | 13,940    | 29% | 71%   |
| Foreign Languages     | 2,934   | 7,453   | 10,387    | 28% | 72%   |
| Total                 | 423,569 | 611,184 | 1,034,753 | 41% | 59%   |

Enrollment of men and women by degree programs, 2014

### Educational Careers

Though women are gaining in numbers as students, the number of women faculty still lags. By job title, only 1.3 percent of full professors are women and only 1.96 percent of associate professors. However in lower levels of faculty, there are more women. They make up 14.03 percent of assistant professors, 24.4 percent of lecturers, and 57.2 percent other positions. It is possible that as women move up the academic hierarchy, they will fill more full and associate professorships

Women exceed men in enrollment and degrees at universities but are not featured in any of the 14 advertisements for education. However in one ad for a preparatory program for higher education, there is narration conducted by both men and women.

Another important difference is how women are portrayed in their relation to money. There is an Iranian convention that women are the de facto keepers of the purse and the family money managers who are responsible for savings and investment. Yet the commercials depict women as inexperienced with money and in need of financial guidance from a male figure. Even food shopping, a stereotypical feminine pursuit, is portrayed as something difficult for women.

Of the 36 ads for financial services, women were depicted only in 14 ads, and they are depicted as subservient to men in financial decision making. In just 2 bank ads are women the subjects, but even in these cases, the women are in need of financial guidance.

Women are major consumers of internet and mobile service, but only featured in 1 of 15 ads for telecommunications.

Women tend to the family's needs for health and hygiene, not to mention their increasing position in Iranian society as doctors and nurses, and yet women feature in just over half

of the ads for this category. However it is inconsistent that the women depicted seem so clueless about health topics for which they are considered to go-to sources.

Already by 2008, 30 percent of all driving licenses in Iran went to women,<sup>5</sup> and the number has increased. Women also purchase cars. Women appear in 1 of the 7 automotive ads, but only to enjoy automotive accessories, not actually in the car as a driver or passenger.

Iranian women sports teams had a significant presence in international tournaments, and their wearing of hijab while they played adds to the spectacle for many audiences. However women are not featured in advertisements for driving or playing sports.

There may be some congruence for ads and reality of women and food. Women do the shopping and cooking of food and appear in 14 of 33 ads for food. However in 3 ads for Oila olive oil, there is no woman. In 2 clips of Famila olive oil, women are only part of a group. Women appear in subservient roles for Mihaan ice cream, Dorna cake and Mohsen rice. In just 2 clips (Ansi noodles), do women have a leading role.

In the 7 ads for industry and construction, women do not feature at all, but this may not be so unusual as it is a sector where women are discouraged from participation in Iran.

For home appliances, women appear in 8 of 18 clips. In 2 of the clips there is a female voiceover and women are the experts for the product. In the other 6 ads, women are featured at home with leading role in the ad and also as an expert. For example with Pars Khazar brand home appliances, women are illustrated in different roles, the grandmother clothed in the praying chador, the wife at home with her daughter.

As for setting, 60 percent of ads take place in the home, 11 percent take place in working environments, and 8 percent in the outdoors.

In 24 percent of ads women are in the position of expert and in 48 percent they are the consumer in search of solution. It is unlikely to have a real comparison because there is no formal data and statistics in this case. However, by considering that most of expertise has been proposed in food and sanitary and health products, this is arguable that if housewife cliché still prevails.

## **CONCLUSION**

One feminist interpretation of the dissonance between the ads and everyday life is that society is a form of patriarchy that must be challenged and changed. It might suggest that in Iran, men have power, and in the male-dominated society, traditional depictions of

---

<sup>5</sup><http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/75429/Police/lawenforcement> (Hamshahri News 18/02/2008)

women in television advertising are perpetuated as a means to control women. However this explanation may be too simple when taking into account the complexity of the Iranian media industry and its laws.

Another explanation may be that it is not practical to look for realistic depictions of life in these commercials. Stereotypical roles are frequently methods of commercial characterizations. Because of limited time (a commercial is just 30 seconds), it is not possible to develop a complex and “realistic” portrayals. Moreover the traditional characterizations of women might stir positive emotions associated with certain products. This explanation might hold, but when compared to other countries, advertising has evolved to reflect women’s changing roles, at least to some extent. Moreover in other media in Iran there is more symmetry between the depiction of women on screen and women themselves. This might suggest that politics at IRIB are driving the depiction of women, but that explanation doesn’t also fails when considering the fact that the IRIB features programming with complex female characterization.

Following are some other explanations which may be more likely:

1. Some of the advertisements on IRIB might not have the goal of selling products and services. It is a fact that some companies must cooperate with governmental organizations for religious and political purposes. For example some banks are required to advertise on television. In this way, the goal of the advertising is to fulfill a government requirement, not to market products and services as such.
2. The majority of the companies in IRIB television commercials receive some government subsidy to support their advertising. Hence a traditional portrayal of women favorable to the state is depicted.
3. All IRIB television advertisings must pass the Bureau of Supervisor of IRIB programs, which has the power of denial if it finds any scene improper. Undoubtedly, traditional and clichéd advertisements are less challenging and more easily approved. Given the increasingly complex role of women in society, advertisers might decide that it is easier to not feature women. This censor is particularly strict on television. The same companies advertise in other channels (web, print etc) with different themes and depictions of women. Indeed the reason why Iranian television is stricter than other channels is another area for research.
4. There may be a set of cultural and political reasons that would explain why Iranian people still accept the dissonance in the depiction of women in television commercials. Some of this might be explained by that society and community

elders and leaders prefer these traditional depictions even though they clash with women's and society's preferences at large.

It is important to note that Iranian state television, the IRIB, is only one media in the country. Though Iranians consume official information through the IRIB and its various channels, at least 40 percent of Iranian households (71 percent of families in Tehran<sup>6</sup>) have satellite dishes to consume media from other countries.<sup>7</sup> Also there is relatively high access to internet. Some 40,718,740 persons in 2013 (54.5 percent of the population<sup>8</sup>) went online.

The depiction of women in IRIB commercials differs significantly from women in everyday Iranian life and other media in Iran. It might be observed that all people in modern society tolerate a level of dissonance between media and reality. The Iranian case is interesting and worthy of further research.

---

<sup>6</sup> Data from Ali Janati, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance by <http://www.irna.ir>; March,02,2014

<sup>7</sup> Data from lecture of Ezzatollah Zarghami, Head of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting by <http://www.Irna.ir>; May, 30, 2014

<sup>8</sup><http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2199534>

## References

- Allan, K., & Coltrane, S. (1996). Gender displaying television commercials: A comparative study of television commercials in the 1950s and 1980s. *Sex Roles*, No 35, Pages 185-201.
- Bardwick, J., & Schumann, S. (1967). "Portrait of American men and women in TV Commercials". *Psychology*, No 4, Vol 4, Pages 18-23.
- Bretl, D.J., & Cantor, J. (1988). "The portrayal of men and women in U.S. television commercials: A recent content analysis and trend over 15 years". *Sex Roles*, No 18, Pages 595-609.
- Broverman, I.K., Vogel, S.R., Broverman, D.M., Clarkson, F.E., & Rosenkrantz, P.S. (1972). "Sex-role stereotypes: A current appraisal". *Journal of Social Issues*, No 28, Pages 59-78.
- Browne, B.A. (1998). "Gender stereotypes in advertising on children's television in 1990s: A cross-national analysis". *Journal of Advertising*, No 1, Pages 83-96.
- Geis, F.L., Brown, V., Jennings, J., & Porter, N. (1984), "TV commercials as achievement scripts for women", *Sex Roles*, No 10 Vol 7 and 8, Pages 513-525.
- Gould, S.J. (1987), "Gender differences in advertising response and self-consciousness variables", *Sex Roles*, No 16, Pages 215-223.
- Graig, R.S. (1992). "Women as home caregivers: Gender portrayal in OTC drug Commercials". *Journal of Drug Education*, No 22, Vol 4, Pages 303-312.
- Groesz, L. M., Levine, M. P., & Murnen, S. K. (2002), "The effect of experimental presentation of thin media images on body satisfaction: A meta-analytic review", *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, No 31, Pages 1-16.
- HaghighiNasab, Manijeh and Hedayati, Shohreh (2005), Illustration of gender roles in commercial advertising in IRIB [Barrasie tasvirsazie naghshie jensiat dar agahihaye bazarganye simaye jomhoorie eslamie Iran], *Journal of Motaleate Zanan*, Vol (3), issue 7, pp 33-50, in Persian
- Halliwell, Emma and Dittmar, Helga (2005). "The role of self-improvement and self-evaluation motives in social comparisons with idealised female bodies in the media", *Body Image*, No 2, Pages 249-261.
- Javadiyeganeh, Mohammad Reza and VarijKazemi, Abbas (2006), Content Analysis of movies after Islamic revolution for their perspective against women [Tahlile Mohtavaye



Filmhaye Sinamaei pas az enghelabe eslami dar bareh negaresh nesbat beh zanan], Journal of KetabeZanan, Vol(8), Issue (32) in Persian

Johnston, C. C. P. Cook, "The Place of Women in the Films of Raoul Walsh," in *Raoul Walsh*, ed. Phil Hardy (Colchester: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1974).

Kazemi, Abbas and Nazer Fasihi, Azadeh (2007), Reflection of women in a television commercial advertising [Baznamaei-e-zanandaryekagahi-e- tejari-e- televizioni], Journal of Pajouheshe Zanan, Vol (5), Issue 1, pp 137-153 in Persian

Lovera, Sara (2003), The Images of Women in the mass media, Bulletin of CIMAC, No. 10, Pages 5-17

Lundstorm, W.J., & Sciglimpaglia, D. (1997), "Sex role portrayals in advertising", Journal of Marketing, No 41,Pages 72-79.

Maghsoudi, Soudeh (2004), Investigation of women role in children stories [Barrasi Naghe Zandardastanhayekoodakan] , Journal of Pajouheshe Zanan, Vol (2), Issue (3), pp 41-55 in Persian

McArthur, L.Z., & Resko, B.G. (1975). "The portrayal of men and women in American television commercials". The Journal of Social Psychology, No 97, 209-220.

Milburn, S.S., Carney, D.R., & Ramirez, A.M. (2001). "Even in modern media the picture is still the same: A content analysis of clipart images". Sex Roles, Vol 44, pages 277-294.

Mollet, M. and Weir, (2005) The Effectiveness of Advertising in Persuading Women to Consider the Military as a Career Option, School of Journalism and Broadcasting, Oklahoma State University.

Parra Thompson, Carolina (2009), "Drawing on the social impact of media", Thesis for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts with specialization in Digital Media.

Radvarrad, Aazam ,Moridi, Mohammadreza, Taghizadegan, Masoumeh (2010), an analysis of women reflection in contemporary paintings in Iran [Tahlili bar baznamaeie an darnaghashiemoasere Iran], Journal of Pajouheshe Zanan, Vol (8), Issue (1), pp 125-141.

RafaatJah, Maryam (2008), A deliberation on Identity of Iranian Woman [Taamoli bar Hoviyate Zane Irani], University of Tehran Press, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition

Rich, B. Ruby. "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism. Issues in Feminist Film Criticism. Patricia Erens, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, pp. 268–287.

Riffe, Daniel, Lacy, Stephen, Fico, Frederick (2008), "Analyzing Media Messages; Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research", second edition, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, London.

Shavardi, Tahmineh (2002), Role and portray of woman in computer games [Naghshva Tasvirezandarbazihayekampiuteri], Journal of Zandar ToseehvaS iasat, No 4.

Shrikhande, Vaishali (2003), "Stereotyping Of Women In Television Advertisements, Thesis For Master In Mass Communication", Louisiana University, The Manship School Of Mass Communication.

The University of Melbourne, Faculty of Economics and Commerce (2005), Research Proposals Helpsheet.

## **Tables**

Table 1: Schedule of time slots for collection of advertisements

Tables 2: Categories for Content Analysis

Table 3: Statistical Analysis for Categories

Table 4: Chi square test 1

Table 5: Chi square test 2

Table 6: Results of survey of random Iranians

Table 7: Share of Men and Women in Workforce (Census, Statistical Center of Iran, 2012)

Table 8: Enrollment of men and women by degree programs, 2011

Table 9: Enrollment of men and women by degree programs, 2014

## **Figures**

Compiled images of IRIB commercials