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Perception Differences Towards TV Commercials: A Gender Comparison in Iran

Dr. Farzaneh Yarahmadi.

Assistant Professor, College of Business , University of Buraimi, P.O.BOX:890 PC: 512 Buraimi, Sultanate of Oman.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the gender perception differences towards TV commercials in Iran. The basic purpose was to ascertain the discriminative capability of four adjectives (informative, appealing, amusing, and irritating) on 40 Iranian TV commercials. A total number of 299 respondents from Tehran and Qum participated in this study. Statistical analysis using "t"-test was used to ascertain the discriminative power of the four advertising adjectives. The study indicates that in general there are gender perception differences towards TV commercials in Iran. Some differences were found on the male viewers for some products, including feminine hygiene. Carrying this type of study will enable the advertising agencies to understand the pulse of male and female TV commercials viewers and how they perceived specific TV commercials. Although, this study did not examine the list of synonym and antonym adjectives of advertising, knowledge of this perception in different segments of society will help the industry and advertising agencies in the development of creative strategy and media planning for targeting specific gender groups.

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising in this era of modernity has gained profound recognition and importance all over the world as an indispensable tool of business. It is needless to say that on account of establishment of small scale as well as large scale of industrial units all over the globe and production of thousands of goods and services the importance of advertising has increased in the corporate world today. According to Yaakop *et al*. (2012), advertisements that are successful in delivering its messages to its audiences can help to promote and build awareness on the company's offerings and advertisers are increasingly relying on various modes of interactive technology to advertise and promote their products and services.

Hamdan (1991) defines advertising as "a dissemination of any message particularly through mass media, paid by business or any other institution that wishes to increase the profitability than those targeted by these messages will behave or believe as the advertisers' desire them to behave or to believe".

Advertising plays an important role in peoples' lives either directly or indirectly, in particular the broadcasting media. Television commercials are enlisted with a staggering array of sensory and sensual rich images and computer graphic – all designed to elicit and emotional response in viewer that both grabs their attention and helps communicate the advertising message (Bruzzone and Tallyn, 1997).

Over the last 10 years, it has been said that TV consumption has been decreasing, losing out to the development of the internet around the world. However, supported by data from EurodataTV Worldwide, Braun and Callay (2009) argued that television viewing has actually increased since the popularization of the internet. Distribution, equipment and enhanced contents are key drivers for this growth, whilst cross-fertilization between media also contributes to the trend (Braun and Callay, 2009).

Television advertising has been characteristic as a familiar and trusted medium of communication and played an important role in people's lives by bringing information and entertainment into living rooms. It has contributed to shaping our social and culture understanding of the world, provided us with a forum of shared experiences and defining historical moments, and continually raised issues of construction of media discourses (Losifidis, 2007). Television being one of the most influencing media has been a topic of study by numerous researchers.

Viewers differ in the degree to which they are negative or positive about television advertising (Chittithaworn *et al*., 2011). Kover *et al*. (1995)

Corresponding Author: Dr. Farzaneh Yarahmadi, College of Business, University of Buraimi, P.O.BOX:890 PC: 512 Buraimi, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: +968-91376171 E-mail: dr.farzaneh.y@gmail.com

found that the most important characteristic of creative and effective advertising was that it elicited positive feelings in the viewers related to their self-image.

Measuring audience perceptions for TV commercials has become even more important with the emergence of video technologies where the viewer have the option of mechanical zipping. However, this is not possible for TV. Another reason for measuring audience perception is the question of clutter, i.e., placing a number of advertisements one after the other. Most of the TV commercials appear in clutter before or between the popular serials and there is a strong possibility of irritation on part of the viewers when their popular programmes are interrupted by the intrusion of commercials. If a negative attitude is developed because of these reasons towards the commercials then the purpose of airing them will become self-defeating and their effectiveness will decrease substantially. One possible offshoot of negative feelings towards the commercials may because in the form of public support for stringent government regulations.

The objectives of the present study are to measure the perception of Iranian male and female audience on TV commercials. This study measure the perception of the viewers in terms of four adjectives i.e. amusing, irritating, appealing and informative. This study also seek to understand the viewer's reaction towards TV commercials.

Literature Review:

The Definition Committee of the American Marketing Association (1948) states that "advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation of ideas, good or service by an identified sponsor" (Graham, 1993). Advertising is believed to have influenced and manipulated consumer's everyday lives (Packard, 1957). Before embarking about the role of advertising in marketing, we should get a basic impression of what advertising is.

Advertising is bringing a product (or service) to the attention of potential and current customers. Advertising is typically done with signs, brochures, TV commercials, direct mailings or e-mail messages, personal contact, to name a few (McNamara, 2004). Past studies have adopted ad recognition and ad (brand) recall tests to quantify effectiveness of their ads (Thiyagarajan and Shanthi, 2011; Shanthi and Thiyagarajan, 2012). Kodjamanis and Angelopoulos (2013) explored the extent to which advertising generates purchasing intentions, and influence consumers' buying habits. Their study concluded that brands should invest in the social communication aspects as an advertising mechanism.

The cultivation theory in particular assert that television influence personal values as well as societal perceptions, as dominant program content becomes assimilated into personal value structures over time and it has been used in several research to understand how television influence individuals (O' Guinn and Shrum 1997; Shrum *et al*., 2005; Bindah and Othman 2011).

Historically, the systematic study of attitude toward advertising in general has been rooted in the work of Bauer and Greyser (1968). Bauer and Greyser's work demonstrated that attitudes toward advertising in general consist of two belief dimensions, economic and social effects, and found that attitudes are normally based on consumers' beliefs. In order to be purposeful, advertisement appeals should bring out association with the feeling and physiological motives of the viewers or prospective consumer (Bansal and Taneja, 2005). Nevertheless, the ability of advertisement in influencing potential buyers' emotions and behaviors will be dependent upon their *perceptions* and *attitudes*. People's attitudes vary and are influenced by their perception (Bansal and Taneja, 2005). In the case of television advertising, certain individuals may possess negative attitude towards it whereas others may have positive ones. Therefore, understanding viewers' attitude towards advertising particularly via the television media is important to marketers (Bansal and Taneja, 2005).

There are many studies on public opinion about the advertising broadcasted by television stations As a first view, it should be pointed out that results of such analysis do not always coincide. For instance, Moriarty and Duncan (1991) found that only 7% of total TV viewers pay commercials total attention. But others discovered that interest on advertising depends on its adaptation to audience profiles (Gal-Or *et al*., 2006; Esteban and Hernandez, 2007).

Although scholars have spent over half a century studying and discussing advertising appeals, it would seem that a consensus has still not been reached with regard to the definition of what an appeal is and what are the parameters of its functions (Okazaki *et al*., 2010). In the marketing literature, advertising appeals were already being brought under the spotlight as early as the 1940s. Dichter's (1949) initial discussion of the difficulties associated in interpreting the meaning of an advertising appeal still remains valid in highlighting the difficulty that researchers have experienced in defining the concept of an appeal. Miller (1950) equated an appeal to a 'drive', which was further segmented into two levels: primary (e.g., hunger, thirst), or secondary (e.g., pride, ambition and desire for money).

Hovland *et al*. (1965) refers to an advertising appeal as a message element designed to promote a behavioural response by the receiver. According to Kotler and Armstrong (1991: p. 416) "An appeal is the basic idea that advertisers want to communicate to the audience - the basic reason why the audience should act". Beetles and Harris (2005) refer to the 'gaze theory', maintaining that the definition of an advertising appeal should reference the spectator, since the kind of response achieved may be different

to that originally intended by the advertiser depending on who views the advertisement. However, when the spectators come from different cultures, the specificity and the meanings assigned to similar messages can be very different (Aaker and Williams, 1998; Williams and La Ferle, 2004). Some researchers (e.g., Javalgi, *et al*., 1994) have tried to differentiate between content appeal and visual communication appeal.

Depending on the purpose, numerous studies have used broad dichotomous classifications of advertising appeals: these include emotional versus rational (de Pelsmacker and Geuens, 1997), altruistic versus benefit (Bennett and Kottasz, 2001), functional versus emotional (Lee and O'Connor, 2003), cognitive versus affective (Lohtia, *et al*., 2003) egoistic versus altruistic (Schneider and Johnson, 1995) image versus claim (Shrum, 1989), informational versus emotional (So, 2004), individualistic versus collectivistic (Teng and Laroche, 2006), positive versus negative (MacInnis and Stayman, 1993) and thinking versus feeling (Golden and Johnson, 1983), to name a few. In this study an appeal is viewed as a 'message element', in its broadest sense, which seeks to create a specific response from the recipient.

There is also a lack of consistency across the advertising media. Some studies, based on the content analysis of television advertisements, use a broad classification scheme of informational versus transformational (Marshall and Roberts, 2008). While this scheme is clearly analogous to the emotional versus rational scheme, usually employed in print advertising classifications, the different terminology leads to confusion and prevents comparisons. Similar issues were apparent in studies investigating advertisement appeals on the Internet: e.g., Tuten, *et al*. (1999) used intrinsic versus extrinsic classification to differentiate advertisements that used cues through message content versus those that used cues such as colour and sound. Such a classification scheme was s not commonly found on the other advertising channels.

According to Aaker and Bruzzone (1985), researchers have argued that an increased in irritation level can lead to a reduction in the effectiveness of all advertising. Another reason to study irritation is because of its possible impact upon the effectiveness of commercials (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985). A study by Fritz (1979) measured the relationship between advertising effectiveness and the levels of irritation possessed by the advertisements. In the study, a set of television commercials was first assigned to an empirically-derived irritation continuum. Subjects were exposed to the commercials and claim-recall measures were taken immediately after exposure and 48 hours later. The results indicated that both highly irritating and relatively pleasant advertising messages generated higher claim recall than did advertising which was neutral in the dimension. In Aaker and Bruzzone (1985) study, sixteen copy characteristics or advertising approaches that appeared to either increase or decrease irritation emerged from a study of 524 television commercials. The results also showed how irritation levels varied by product class and by socioeconomic level.

Humor has also been investigated for its effects and its impact on the human being (Veatch, 1998). Over the last century humor theories have been developed and researchers are getting more insight in the basics of humor. However, no final theory has been developed so far and researchers are still trying to figure out what the best way is to explain humor. Although there is no final understanding of humor yet, there has been found that humor is a way to communicate and persuade and therefore a good tool to use in advertisements.

Speck (1991) found that humorous advertisements outperform non-humorous advertisements on attention. According to Eisend (2009), a humorous advertisement can elicit a positive attitude towards the advertisement, elicit a positive attitude towards the brand and it can increase purchase intentions. Research has shown that humor in advertisements increases attention (e.g. ,Weinberger and Gulas, 1992).

Sternthal and Craig (1973) suggested that humor is characterized in terms of the stimulus properties and that humor in advertisements might be determined when the advertisement makes use of pun, joke, understatement and other humor devices (Sternthal and Craig, 1973). A humor device can be seen as the type or technique of humor that is used to make an advertisement 'humorous'.

Chan (2011) has proposed a combination of the humor approach of Sternthal and Craig (1973); the humor devices or typology of Kelly and Solomon (1975) and the typology of Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004). Chan (2011) proposed the following humor devices: (a) puns, (b) understatement/exaggeration, (c) ludicrous, (d) satire/irony, (e) comic, (f) jokes/nonsense, and (g) others.

Alden *et al*. (1993) found that humorous appeals are the same in Germany, Thailand, South Korea and the United States and that humor in advertisements is based on incongruity resolution. However, the researchers claimed that international humorous advertisements differ in their content and the way information was presented.

Lee and Lim (2008) showed that it is possible to predict the humor effectiveness in a television advertisement under various cultural orientations. Their study was based on two Hofstede dimensions: individualism – collectivism (1) and uncertainty avoidance (2) and one of their conclusions was that in collectivistic cultures, advertisements are liked better when the humor devices are based on arousal safety. According to Eisend (2011), attention towards an advertisement leads to a more positive attitude towards the advertisement. If the

advertisement is considered humorous, the attitude towards the advertisement will be positive.

Finally, informative advertising is considered to be a merit good unlike a persuasive one that is mostly associated with a bad (Gerasymenko, 2012). Gerasymenko (2012) investigated the role of informative advertising in creation and augment of market power as well as the ability of an advertiser to maximize the value of its economic rent in Ukraine. Using the blind tests the author the quality and the prices of the range of advertised goods were compared and a low level of correlation between the variables was found. In the study, informative advertising served a function of informing consumers inefficiently.

Elpers, *et al*. (2003) study demonstrated the positive effects of moment-to-moment entertainment and the negative effects of moment-to-moment information value on consumers' likelihood to continue watching during a television commercial. A notable finding of their study is that both the entertainment and the information value had a strong multiplicative effect on the probability to stop viewing. A high EV (Entertainment Value) ensures that consumers continue viewing the commercial, and a high IV (Information Value) induces consumers to stop viewing. Consumers who stop viewing a 30-second TV commercial after a few seconds may still have been exposed long enough to the brand and to the key message to learn about the brand. However, there was evidence that stopping TV commercials before their natural end erodes their effectiveness in terms of lower brand recall and recognition.

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses of this study are developed as follows:

H1 There is significant gender differences in the perception of TV commercials by Iranian viewers on the informative adjectives of TV commercials.

H2 There is significant gender differences in the perception of TV commercials by Iranian viewers on the appealing adjectives of TV commercials.

H3 There is significant gender differences in the perception of TV commercials by Iranian viewers on the amusing adjectives of TV commercials.

H4 There is significant gender differences in the perception of TV commercials by Iranian viewers on the irritating adjectives of TV commercials.

Methodology:

The basic purpose was to ascertain the reliability and discriminative capability of four adjectives (informative, appealing, amusing, and irritating) on 40 popular Iranian TV commercials on the perception of their viewers. In the development of the perception, researcher uses "t"-test to ascertain the discriminative power of the adjectives. However, due to certain practical difficulties they used a less stringent method for this purpose. These 40 Iranian commercials along with their questionnaire were shown to six management teachers, on account of their theoretical and practical insight in the field. In the light of the objectives, the teachers were requested to carefully go through these commercials and critically evaluate each questionnaire.

The researcher had surveyed various studies in this area and found one research instrument most suitable for the purpose of the present study, which was developed by Khan and Khan (2002). Researcher have preferred the direct self-report measurement techniques i.e. Likert scale, because it is assumed that the direct scales are superior to the indirect scales in terms of reliability and validity (Lemon, 1973; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981; Stevens, 1966). The use of Likert type scale also allows inclusion of large number of diverse statements believed to be necessary to comprehensively measure all types of constructs.

As a result, it has been considered that the Likert scale is the most popular form of attitude scales (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2002). In this study a four-adjectives of reaction "informative", "appealing", "amusing" and "irritating" was used, to measure the perception of viewers towards TV commercials.

In order to facilitate proper understanding of the questionnaire, 40 commercials were shown one after each other to the respondents and they were given a questionnaire which contain all the commercials along with five scale point of their like or their dislike on four adjectives for every commercial. The commercials were all based in Iran and were in Persian language.

All these commercials were grouped under the following product categories: Textiles and Garments; Cosmetics and personal care products; Medicinal and health care products; Foods/snacks and soft drinks; Toothpaste etc. Toiletries; Consumer durables.

After the questionnaire was developed, the next research dimension was to administer it to a representative sample of the population in Iran. As it was difficult to administer the questionnaire to the entire national populations, therefore, the selections of cities were largely based on the convenience sampling method.

Table 1.illustrates the sample drawn from Iran. The researcher keeping the viability as well as easy approachability decided to draw samples from two Iranian cities i.e. Tehran and Qum. Qum was chosen because it is a lively industrial centre owing in part to its proximity to Tehran. The researcher randomly selected 1000 telephone numbers and could succeed in contacting 550 respondents, 204 agreed to cooperate, and only 154 respondents visited the place where the TV commercials were to be screened thus they also filled up the questionnaire.

For each sitting, the researcher invited 50 persons to explain the purpose of the study. The researcher selected 500 telephone numbers and contacted 320 respondents from Qum, out of which

145 respondents agreed and gave appointment to visit and fill up the perceptual questionnaire. The researcher succeeded in collecting 120 respondents hailing from Qum.. The breakup of the total Iranian sample comprises of 299 respondents representting male and female respondents.

Table 1: Breakup of Sample from Iran: Tehran and Qum

City	Selected Sample size	Contacted Sample	Agreed Sample	Final Sample
Tehran	1000	550	204	154
Qum	500	320	189	145
Total	1500	870	393	299

In order to measure the perceptions of TV viewers for both the sample, the entire list of 40 commercials with brand names was prepared and the respondents viewed the TV commercials on a video. These commercials were placed randomly in the questionnaire. After viewing the commercials the respondents were asked to rate each commercial on a five point rating scale for each of the four adjectives i.e. amusing, irritating, appealing and informative.

The respondents were asked to rate each commercial for each adjective on a 5-point Likert scale with (1) "extremely", to (5) "not at all". Next the scores of each respondent were added up and a mean score of each respondent was calculated for each adjective for a particular commercial. The mean score of each TV commercial representing each adjective was calculated in terms of male and female respondents. Based on the nature of the data, a T-test analysis was performed to identify if there were any statistical significant differences between gender among the four advertising adjectives based on the TV commercials viewing by respondents.

Analysis of Data:

The overall result of the t-test analysis shows that this study is well constructed and it is well represented as reflected in the variables selected. All the hypotheses of this study were supported. Table 2, summarizes the t-test analysis and indicated that among 40 TV commercials, eleven (11) TV commercials had statistical significant differences between Iranians' male and female perception on the following four adjectives.

- As far as the informative adjective is concerned, statistical significant differences on two commercials were found, i.e., "Pager " and "Payman" with their "t" scores of (3.70) and (2.16) respectively. Female tended to be more influenced by the informative adjectives approach of television commercials.
- As far as the appealing adjective is concerned, there were some statistically significant differences in the perception between male and female viewers. Generally, females tended to be more influenced by the appealing adjectives approach of television commercials.

Table 2: Gender Differences on the Perception of TV Commercials

Adjective	Ads with significant differences	Mean Scores		
		Male	Female	"t" Value
Informative	Pager (Cheep)	2.96	3.35	-3.70
	Payman (Cookies)	1.82	2.15	-2.16
Appealing	LG (TV)	2.72	3.13	-2.26
	Pager (Cheep)	2.87	2.63	2.00
	Pegah (Ice Cream)	1.95	2.23	-2.27
	Aleet (Non Sticking)	2.17	2.57	-2.48
Amusing	Heza Daneh (Tomato Puri)	2.67	2.33	2.49
	Geelan (Shampoo)	2.65	2.33	2.21
	Pager (Cheep)	3.05	2.63	2.53
Irritating	Daryan Dasht (Tomato puri)	3.5	3.07	2.41
	Ardakan (Material)	2.52	2.78	-2.03

- As far as the amusing adjective is concerned, male tended to be more amused by the following television commercials "Tomato Puri", "Shampoo", and "Cheep" in comparison to females.
- For irritating adjective, significant statistical differences were found on two commercials which are "Daryan dasht" and "Ardakan." Male tended to find "Tomato Puri" commercial more irritating compared to females, whereas male tended to find "Ardakan"commercials more irritating compared to females.

Findings and Conclusion:

The main purpose of the present study was to find out any significant differences between male and female in Iran based on the different advertising adjectives. Television advertising in general is evaluated differently not only by people of different age, income and education level but also in terms of gender attitude towards TV advertising.

In this study, gender perception towards TV commercials contents varies. For example, female respondents showed more interest towards feminine advertising and male respondents showed more interest towards masculine advertising. In general people would dislike TV advertising if they find it irrelevant to their needs or self-images. In this study, it was found that in most TV commercials there were significant differences between male and female perception towards the four advertising adjectives.

Carrying this type of study will enable the advertising agencies to understand the pulse of male and female TV commercials viewers and how they perceived specific TV commercials. Knowledge of this perception in different segments of society will help the industry and advertising agencies in the development of creative strategy and media planning for targeting specific gender groups.

In general, since there is no consistency in adjectives, this study did not examine the list of synonym and antonym adjectives of advertising. Because viewers differ in the degree to which they are negative or positive about television advertising, it could impact on how respondents interpret the meaning of advertising adjectives which may change their perception towards viewing TV commercials. Future studies could be conducted in different cities in Iran where cultural diversification is more prominent and broader area of the advertising adjectives could be examine.

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