A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN RADIO COMMERCIALS

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Abstract

Gender representation in commercials is considered to indicate the existence of biases and stereotyping which are perpetuated through continuous exposure to the media. A content analysis of 24 hours of advertising on the Romanian radio station Kiss FM based on five categories of product representative, type of product, voice-over, arguments, credibility, and types of reward, will demonstrate the existence of gender-bias in radio commercials.

Trends in gender representation are a measure of how society views men and women and how men and women are supposed to act and relate to each other in different social situations.

Previous studies examining gender representations in television and radio commercials have demonstrated the existence of gender bias and stereotyping according to product type, arguments, credibility, reward, and psychological status of the main character.

Aim. Method and Corpus. We have aimed to study the gender role portrayals in radio commercials of a well-known Romanian radio station KissFM and for this purpose a number of 342 commercials recorded on June 20th for 12 hours (starting 11:15 pm) were content-analyzed according to five categories used as indicators of stereotyping in previous studies (Uray: 2003): arguments, credibility, product, and reward of the central figure as well as voice over gender (end-comment) in direct address.

A total of 2 hours and 50 minutes per 24 hours was dedicated to advertising but commercials were only broadcast during the interval 6:40 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., which actually represented the rough boundaries of the listening hours. The following commercials were excluded from the corpus due to gender non-relevance:

- repeats;
- self-advertising, commercials for radio and TV programs (shows, movies) because there was no product representative;

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- jobs and service announcements - did not sell a product (e.g. two repeats for university enrollment opportunities).

The remaining 58 commercials were coded according to the central figure sex and the related categories of product, arguments, credibility and reward, plus end-comment gender. Adults who had main speaking parts or the main characters who acted as product representatives in direct address, were classed as central figures.

The type of product category subdivided products into domestic (food, hygiene, home: Gillette, Borsec, Strepsils, Avon, Grefa) and non-domestic (cars, credit, newspapers, insurance). Macmenus were considered domestic products (Lovdall, 1989:719) even though fast food is often eaten outside the home.

Credibility included product "user" (appeared usually in interviews and mini-dramas) and "authority" or source of information about the product (mainly in direct address).

Arguments were sub-classified as scientific if they included factual information, and non-scientific if they included opinions or no argument. For example "natural" in the case of soda was coded under "scientific" but superlative claims as "We are the best" (Zorba Alt) as non-scientific. Likewise, promotional prices in insurance counted as informational and therefore scientific (see RCA Unita below) versus fear-arguments, which were entered as non-scientific (Asiban):

- „La Unita toate asigurările sunt câştigătoare. Primeşti pe loc bonuri de carburant..." (Unita).
- „Dacă loveşti, plăteşti. Polița RCA e mai mult decât obligatorie. E prietena ta. Asigură-te la Asiban. Cu un RCA toți suntem datori" (Asiban).

Type of reward was classified as self-enhancement (appearance, health) practical (financial benefit, time and effort-saving), social (career, advancement), and other (fun, entertainment).

A few technical aspects such as the difference between direct and indirect address have to be defined before the gender analysis proper.

Address in Radio Commercials. TV and radio commercials differ from print advertising mainly through their type of address. If a high proportion of print advertisements address the consumer directly, indirect address through secondary participants is also employed in radio and TV.

Direct address to audiences counted for 31% of the corpus and took the form of lectures of an adult male voice employing the language of "pure salesmanship" (Leech, 1966:45). In our corpus lectures by product authorities included **didactic elements, commendation, insistent directives, and semantically dense linguistic constructions** (complex NGs):

„În 2007 vom fi în Uniunea Europeană. Vreți să rezistați concurenței europene şi să rămâneți pe piață? *Gândiți-vă* că sînteți deja în întârziere... *Îndrăzniți*. *Dezvoltați-vă acum afacerea*. CEC vă oferă cu operativitate o gamă

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diversificată de credite în condiții de dobândă *avantajoasă*, comisioane *minime*, *perioadă de grație în funcție de durata creditului şi posibilitatea de plată anticipată*. *Apelează* cu încredere la serviciile noastre"

In commercials resorting to indirect address (monologue, interviews, mini-dramas) there is always a return to direct address through the end-comment.

In **interviews** the product authority is an experienced professional-tutor who speaks to the audience, although he is presumably teaching a future tyro-user about the product excellence. There is a too unnaturally abrupt transition to the tutor's direct address in the following commercial, not to consider it directly addressed to the listener/consumer rather than to the tyro character in the monologue:

Tyro: „Ce-am să fac astăzi? Hmmm... Mă uit la televizor şi joc o partidă de cărți cu vecinu', în rest, păi nu mai ştiu.... e la fel ca-n fiecare zi."

Tutor/direct address: „Dacă te-a cuprins monotonia şi ai nevoie de schimbare, vino la Club Onix. SPOOOAAAClub Onix te aşteaptă cu jocuri multi-game, ruletă şi biliard într-o ambianță selectă în fiecare zi de la 8 dimineața la 3 noaptea.... Club Onix. Distracție 100%".

A natural conversation would have been based on shorter sentences, simpler groups, ellipsis, and fragments. That this is not a natural conversation is betrayed by the **linguistic complexity** of the following constituents:

- sentence structure (two coordinated 'if clauses' dependent on an imperative main clause);
- clausal complexity: S P O O-O A A A;
- product name saturation in strategic rhematic and then thematic positions.

Monologues, interviews as well as mini-dramas are intended to function as more objective persuaders through the authenticity and credibility of real-life situations they emulate and simulate. Whilst monologues enhance credibility through subjective pertinent and therefore credible evidence, mini-dramas intend to impart 3rd person objectivity. In both these situations of indirect address however, the user or product authority speaks to audiences via another secondary character even if in a more subdued, heterogeneous way.

Radio mini-dramas or playlets were most often humorous and their main persuasive function seemed to be that of introducing the product (a) and of contributing interest appeal or entertaining through humor (b):

a)„Ieşi dragă odată afară din baie că mă grăbesc la servici. Da mai stai mult acolo că şi copilu' tre' să meargă la şcoală!

Nu pot să mă mai satur de baia asta de când am pus-o la punct cu Grefa.."

b) „- O, bună puiuț

- „Bombonico!"
- „Fifi!"

Direct female authority: „Gata cu dulcegăriile! Acum există ceva mai acrişor..." (Joe)

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However, the most frequently employed type of address in the examined radio commercials remained **the direct address specific to radio broadcasting in general**.

Results

The main findings regarding the relationships between the sex of the central figures and the other dependent variables are illustrated in the table below:

Total: N = 53 Category		**Men** **N = 39 (73.5%) !**	**Women** **n = 14 (26.5%)**
Product	Domestic	8 (20.5%)	8 (**57%**)
	Non-domestic	31 (**79.5%**)	6 (43%)
End-comment		46 (**86.7%**)	5 (**9.5%**)
	Other	2 (3.8%)	
Credibility	User	9 (23%)	7 (50%)
	Authority	30 (**77%**) !	7 (50%)
Argument	Scientific	31 (**79.5%**)	10 (**71.5**%)
	Non-scientific	8 (20.5%)	4 (28.5%)
Reward	Self-enhancement	1	3
	Practical	29 (54.7%)	11 (78.5%)
	Social	1	
	Other	8	

Table 1.Distribution of sex-dependent variables in radio commercials

Five commercials in which it was either difficult to decide who the main character was (were based on jingles) or had no adult characters (eg. Hochland had children characters and female end-comment) but well-defined end comments, were further excluded from the corpus (N = 53).

Main character. It is undeniable that Romanian radio advertising prefers male to female main characters in proportion of 73.5% versus 26.5% to endorse their products. This distribution could be explained through the prevalence of non-domestic products and represents clear evidence of gender-biased representation.

Recent studies in sex roles (Furnham: 1999) consider that a decrease from 83% to 78% of male figures in British radio commercials represents a relatively little decline in gender role stereotyping. Although we do not dispose of longitudinal data or of data from other media or radio stations for reference, compared to these results sex role stereotyping in our corpus is declining by

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5% (73.5% male characters) but still **lagging behind what would be considered an equal, non-biased gender distribution.**

According to the **product variable**, men (20.5%) are less likely than women (57%) to represent domestic products whilst in the case of non-domestic products male representation is almost double (79.5%) relative to female endorsement (43%).

Within the category of domestic products endorsed by males, men characters were used for strictly men-targeted products, e.g. Gillette, but also for products destined to general consumers irrespective of sex or age: Macmenus, medicine, soda, Cola, etc. Conversely, non-domestic products considered to be appropriately represented by women included: Mercedez Benz Clasa C, Cargus, phones (Siemens A65), newspaper promotions (Libertatea).

There were only 6 commercials where male direct address coincided with clear-cut male targeting: Gillette, motor-oil, vans, tyres, and one female direct address motivated by female targeting: Avon cosmetics. If these were further excluded, employment of male direct address and/or end-comment in **46 versus 7 female voice-overs** in the remaining fifty commercials that had equally male and female addressability, **is indicative of the strong sex bias in Romanian radio commercials.**

A strong gender bias occurred in the "**end-comment**" category where 86.7% commercials employed male characters. Our results are consistent with previous studies which found female voice-overs in TV commercials in proportion of 10% (Lovdall: 1989). Females had the last comment in the following categories of products:

- domestic: „Café Crem. Din dragoste pentru cafea";
- domestic where the main characters were children: „Hochland. Bucuria gustului";
- non-domestic where the male central character acted as authority but where employment of male end-comment would prevent derivation of additional sexual connotations such as "masculinity", "attraction": „Peugeot 307 X Line. Cum să nu te gîndeşti la **el**" and „Auto emocion" (Seat Ibiza);
- in tandems where both male and female shared the end-comments (entered as "other") as in the following commercial for medicine: Female: „(Strepsils) Primul ajutor pentru dureri de gât. Strepsils îți tratează efficient durerea. Ca să te poți bucura de următoarea cură de

  Male: „aer rece, bere rece. Strepsils. Pentru că durerea de gât apare şi vara"

  Female: „Acest medicament se eliberează şi fără prescripție…"

In the reverse situation where the female main character is represented as authority in the field of domestic products, the last comment was attributed to the man in order to deliver:

- nonrelevant information for the product: „Joe. O zi bună";
- information about place and address: „Curier rapid la 9330. Cargus. Afaceri pe roate";

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- technical details: „Feresterele PVC cu 5 camere mai ieftine decât cele cu 3 camere";
- product factual details where female future user maintains ambiguity through sexual allusions:
    - Female: „Îmi doresc să fie elegant şi sofisticat dar uşor de stăpânit, să se priceapă la toate…" „Male: Vino la magazinul +GSM din oraşul tău şi beneficiază de noul Siemens A65 la doar 669.000 lei".

In these cases the male voice functions **to reinforce the female credibility**. In other cases the male voice was associated with stereotypes:

- beer drinking: „ca să te poți bucura de… aer rece, bere rece" (Strepsils);
- sex: monologue indirect address: „Sunt un pepene roşu copt exact cât trebuie. *Caut partenere* pentru o digestie *prelungită. M-aş pune pe felie cu* o bere *blondă sau chiar cu două*…Mmm… end: comment: „Hihi! *Să vină şi o brună*";
- male as specific direct radio address par excellence in an "ad within ad" frame: (Female) „Era pornit radioul în bucătărie şi dădeau reclame când auzim: (male) ,*Cu un avans de numai 1990Euro puteți pleca acasă la volanul unei limuzine Mecedez Benz Clasa C'* la care soțu' zice...."

If the interplay male central character + female end-comment or female main character + male end-comment, wasn't uncommon (44.3%), the distribution male character + male end-comment (47.2%) versus only 3 instances of female character + female end-comment (8.3%) demonstrates the strong gender bias in this category and could reflect either the higher financial power or decision-making of the addressed male-shoppers or that the male voice with its superimposed authority, **enhances the persuasive force of directive speech acts**.

In terms of **credibility** men were more likely to be shown as "authorities" (77%) rather than "users" whereas women were equally portrayed as authorities and users (50%) within the domestic-biased product type.

There were slight differences relating the sex of the central figure to the type of **argument**: 79.5% male characters and 71.5% of the female characters brought scientific arguments in support of their persuasion to buy. Their arguments were mostly of practical nature, price considerations figuring especially high.

A significant association between the sex of the central figure and the type of **reward** was found, however. Women were more likely to show besides practicality (78.5%), self-enhancement (21.5%) whereas men included other types of reward such as fun, enjoyment:

e.g.: "Relaxează-te conducând noul Polo";

„Club Onix. Distracție sută la sută".

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Conclusions

The radio, a substantial component of many people's exposure to the media, presents its audiences with a very masculine perspective.

Empirical results prove that the young audiences of Kiss FM are exposed to commercials and also sex-role stereotyping under different categories, about 15% of their listening hours.

Our study yielded unequal gender representation in the corpus of radio commercials translated in greater use of male product representatives for non-domestic products and of female product representatives for domestic products.

Traditional **strong gender stereotyping** also exists in radio commercials in terms of frequency of apearance (73.5% male central characters), end-comments (86.7% males), authority (77% males versus 50% females) and lower gender stereotyping in the argument category (79.5% male versus 71.5% female).

Moreover, **women teach indirectly** through dialogue and interviews (a more diluted type of persuasion) and quite rarely are they attributed direct address (with female end-comment 5.1%), whilst men are projected as authorities to a larger extent and address directly in a pure language of salesmanship more often than women do.

The more authoritative, imposing and dominant attitude of **men's voice** is considered to be **appropriate for the persuasive mode of Romanian radio advertising**. Nearly 31% of the radio commercials did not include other background characters just a male character and male end-comment or just direct male address, whereas women appeared in mixed backgrounds with other women and children (1.7%) and only three woman-central character, woman-end-comment patterns were found.(5.1%).

When female end-comments are employed in a men-targeted, men-authority, men-centered advertising world, they bring additional sexual connotations that embue the product with attraction: „Would you... kiss and go with me?" (KissFM si Go Travel).

Even though she is perceived as authority in the direct address, female credibility has to be reinforced by a male voice that may not bring any further relevant information,: e.g:

Female: „Consultanții de vânzări Toyota nu vor avea niciodată secrete față de tine. Așa că dacă-ți cauți o mașină nouă, vino acum la orice showroom Toyota şi vei afla ofertele speciale...."

Male end-comment: "Today, tomorrow, Toyota".

It is significant however that under "credibility", women had equal user-type and authority credibility and they are trusted for bringing "scientific" arguments for domestic products in almost equal proportion to men for non-domestic product category. Women in a higher proportion (78.5) than men are preoccupied by practical qualities of the product (financial benefits especially), which they underline as reward.

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