

GENDER ROLES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS  
OF MALAYSIAN AND U.S. TELEVISION  
COMMERCIALS

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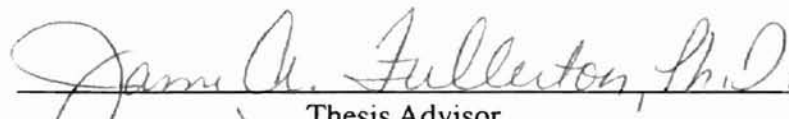
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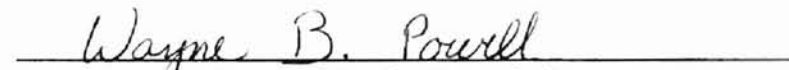
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Media, as a social communication, have enormous influence everywhere. The "magic bullet" theory tells us that today people live in a mass society with limited meaningful social contacts with each other and a deep dependency on information received from the mass media (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995), and advertising, using mass media as its vehicle, is a pervasive, powerful force shaping attitudes and behavior of people in today's world.

Advertising is a textual mirror that reveals the realities of the men's and women's lives (Stern, 1994). Besides news and entertainment, advertising forms a mutually reinforcing array of content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). They said, "In our society there are mostly products of commercially organized media, which manifest aspects of the culture" (P.30). In fact, advertising is not only a mirror that reflects the contemporary world; it also passes values to the next generation (Butler & Paisley, 1980).

Advertising images are planned to be striking and memorable (Butler & Paisley, 1980). The creativity, initiative, and attention-riveting characteristics of advertising have a quick impact upon social behavior. In addition, for a commercial to be accepted quickly by audiences, advertisers tend to make them easily identifiable and bound to the particular culture of the market (Furnham & Bitar, 1993). Therefore, we can say commercials are good sources for social values discovery.

Among all the media used in advertising, television has the most pervasive and immediate influence on the public. In the United States, more than 90 million homes, or 98% of all households have a television set, and three quarters of those have multiple sets (Comstock, 1991). In fact, a remarkable amount of television time is dedicated to advertising, and it is about 10% to 28% of television time (Furnham & Bitar, 1993).

Due to the impact of commercials on social behavior, the portrayal of men and women are an important area of study. Goffman (1976) said, "Advertisements depict for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women behave" (P.vii). Allan & Coltrane (1996) observed that people are exposed to gender depictions from a multitude of sources, and television "is the preeminent among current purveyors of popular cultural imagery" (P.185).

Much research has been published analyzing the portrayal of gender in advertising. In the 1960s, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* created an upsurge of feminism in the United States. Numerous studies originating from the U.S. have analyzed media gender positioning since the 1960s. Television, as the most powerful medium in the U.S., has been viewed as a popular research target. In the 1970s and 1980s, many provocative and insightful studies were conducted dealing with U.S. TV commercials. For example, in 1975, McArthur & Resko published a significant research paper about the portrayal of men and women in American television commercials. Erving Goffman's book *Gender Advertisement* (1976) thoroughly analyzed sex roles in visual media and is a very good example of these studies.



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During the 1990s, studies about portrayal of men and women in advertising expanded to other countries such as Canada (DeYoung & Crane, 1992), Britain (Furnham & Bitar, 1993), Japan (Sengupta, 1995), and Kenya (Mwangi, 1996).

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### **Statement of the research problem**

This research study is designed to examine how women are portrayed in Malaysian television advertising. This study will attempt to analyze the content of television commercials in the United States and Malaysia during prime time, and compare the portrayal of women in these two countries. This study will be concerned with several categories concerning how women are depicted, such as characters present, setting, primary narrator, male/female relationship roles, sexual content, sexual contact, degree of dress, and primary role. By examining how men and women are depicted with respect to these different categories, the analysis will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What is the content of Malaysian and U.S. prime time television commercials in terms of sex-role portrayal?
2. What are the similarities and differences, if any, between Malaysia and U.S. in the portrayal of gender?
3. What gender is the main target for the prime time ads in these two countries?
4. Does the portrayal of women reflect Malaysian cultural norms as described in the literature?

### **Background on Malaysia**

With the opening of new Asian markets (e.g., China, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia), interest in advertising in Asia is in full bloom (e.g., Prabhaker & Sauer, 1994; Kim, K.K., 1996; Stravens, F., 1996). Frith (1996) indicated, "Because this region contains over half the population of the world, Asian markets have become particularly attractive to multinational businesses and advertising agencies"(P,xi). However, Asia is a big area and experiencing various levels of development. Only a few of the countries, such as Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, India, Malaysia, Korea, Thailand, and Singapore are experiencing fast paced growth (Frith, 1996). Therefore, we can roughly say that economic development is an underlying issue affecting advertising in Asia.

Gender depiction in the media is no longer a ground-breaking research subject in the United States. However, in Asia, especially the Southeast, this topic is still not well explored by researchers (Laura, 1994). Before investigating and planning marketing strategies for a foreign country, it is necessary to understand and communicate with the culture. Researchers believe that cultural value orientations have an extremely pervasive influence on individual consumption behavior (McCarty, 1994). Therefore, investigation of the values of people in particular cultures is fundamental homework for marketers.

Some studies of gender portrayal in advertising has been done in Asian countries, including Japan (Sengupta, S., 1995) and Taiwan (Kim E. K. & Lee, Y. C., 1999). As the rate of female employment continues to grow in the nations of Southeast Asia, their

contribution to the development of national economics also expands. To illustrate this situation, Schutte & Ciarlante (1998) concluded that women in Southeast Asian countries are experiencing growing economic and social freedom and independence. In addition, they postulate that the influence of the West and the effects of modernization have to some extent improved the disparity of gender in society. However, the general trend of the male dominant pattern continues. In Malaysia, this tendency is even more prominent. Nevertheless, a tremendous dearth of research on this nation persist.

Woodall (1998) points out that Malaysia is one of the Asian countries that is catching up fast with the four original East Asian tiger economies (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore). Tiger economies, Koretz (1997) says, are nations demonstrating the capacity for rapid, sustained growth. Malaysia, a country that is experiencing such rapid economic growth, is attracting the eyes of the world as it opens its markets to foreign investment. Davies (1997) gives Malaysia a very good report. He says, "Since he took office in 1981, Mahathir Mohamad has transformed Malaysia from a sleepy backwater dependent on tin and rubber into an Asian tiger economy with manufactured goods comprising 80% of the country's exports" (p.48).

As a result of the developmental policies pursued in the past twenty years, the advertising industry is growing rapidly in Malaysia. For example, the Malaysian government is implementing an industrialization strategy, Vision 2020, to make Malaysia an economy based on capital-intensive, high-tech industries (Johnstone, 1997). This target caused growth in the advertising industry. In addition, under the "Vision 2020"

program, Malaysia's government is establishing an environment that is a center for education, health, and telecommunications in Asia by 2020 (Hanson, 2000). This ambitious plan will place Malaysia in a new era, and it is foreseeable that women will face challenges under these rapid societal changes.

According to Schutte & Ciarlante's (1998) report, in 1995 in some Asian nations, including Malaysia, women held almost a quarter (23 percent) of the senior corporate positions. In Malaysia, women are no longer limited to serving only as homemakers or mothers. They are now working in business and professional fields and making independent decisions. According to their higher employment rate, we can assume that they are at least more economically independent, and enjoy a higher level of education than before. As the modification of women's roles has become an inevitable trend in Malaysia, it would be fascinating to know the degree of gender role modification many Malaysian women are now encountering.

Malaysia is a polyethnic nation that is dominated by Malays. The traditional Islamic doctrine has a certain degree of influence on the media content. As Wee, Choong & Tambyah (1994) pointed out in their sex role portrayal comparison study for Malaysia and Singapore, due to the religious practices of Islam in Malaysia, the Malaysian media is relatively more conservative than Singapore. However, Deng, Jivan & Hassan (1994) suggested that Islam plays a smaller role in the Malaysian culture than in Saudi Arabia. The main factor causing the differences is that Malaysian Moslems are blended with the

diverse cultures in that multiracial environment and tend to be less severe in certain respects, one of which is the role of women in the society.

Chinese, the second largest ethnic group, has the largest buying power in Malaysia (Deng, Jivan & Hassan, 1994). Therefore, even though Chinese only make up approximately 30% of the population, when talking about advertising in Malaysia, Chinese consumers play a significant role (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998). Of the Chinese population, 12 percent practice Confucianism and 17 percent are Buddhist (Deng, Jivan & Hassan, 1994). Confucianism is well known by its male-dominant, patriarchal social structure. A Chinese saying, "A husband sings, the wife hums along" typically reflects the traditional role of gender (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998). This saying implies that the husband is the decision-maker in a family. According to Confucian idea, a woman should be always under the authority of her father while she is single. After she married, she should obey her husband; after her husband dies, she should follow her son. As a woman, she cannot be independent, her fate is always controlled by a male in her life.

Based on the religious and philosophy pattern of these two major ethnic groups in Malaysia, it could be assumed that Malaysian advertising will portray women in a more traditional and disparaging way. However, so many invisible and unpredictable factors might influence the social norms. Today television programming consists of a huge amount of advertising, which undoubtedly plays a significant role in gender perception molding in a society. Therefore, the way in which advertising portrays women may

reflect the reality of women's status in that society. This is a theory that needs to be examined for the nation of Malaysia.

### **Purpose of study**

This study attempts to present a description of Malaysian television commercials by evaluating the scope of gender portrayal. It examines stereotyping of gender depiction in TV commercials in Malaysia and compares it to gender roles in Malaysian society. Another task of this cross-cultural study is to conduct a comparative study of the United States, a Western, industrial Christian country, and Malaysia, a developing, Asian, Islamic country, to find out the differences in terms of gender portrayal in television commercials.

## **Methodology**

A comparative content analysis of Malaysian and the United States television commercials was conducted for this study. Twenty-one hours of prime time television programming for both countries was videotaped. Each country's most popular channel-- NBC (U.S.) and TV 3 (Malaysia) was selected. Commercials for both countries were coded by two different coders. An established coding scheme from other cross cultural gender analyses served as the coding instrument. The data was analyzed using the SPSS program and is presented in tables and narratives.

## **Significance of the study**

Since the 1960s, many studies were devoted to the related topics of feminism and portrayal of women in advertising. During that period, studies mainly covered U.S. advertising. Starting from the 1980s, comparative studies between the U.S. and other European countries began to emerge in the literature. Lately, researchers have conducted studies covering Asian countries, such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia, because of the potential of the Asian market and growing economy.

Wee, Choong & Tambyah (1995) argue that although there has been some substantive research done in other Asian countries, studies in the area of sex role portrayal in advertising are still considerably limited in Malaysia. They point out that studies dealing with portrayal of women are timely, as women in Malaysia begin to play a more noticeable role in helping strengthen the economy of the country. However, their



comparative study between Malaysia and Singapore is limited in that it only compares gender depiction between two Asian countries, which share similar Eastern traditions regarding the role of women.

When investigating how society depicts women in the media, understanding the culture is a fundamental requirement. Contrastive comparisons, for example, traditional to modern and Western civilization to Eastern civilization, might help readers better understand a culture with which they are not familiar. The adoration of western culture, particularly American culture, is an undeniable issue in modern Malaysian society. Western dress and consumerism favored among Asia's youth threatens traditional Asian family values (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998). And, Malaysia is no exception in facing this situation. In addition, the U.S., where women's roles are substantially elevated provides a dramatic contrast for comparison with Malaysia. Therefore, a cross-culture comparison study will provide a more effective identification of specific variables that impact to the differences in different culture. This study attempts to make this comparison between U.S. and Malaysian advertising and to fill the gap that exists in Malaysia.

The U.S. has a great influence over the world's advertising business and because of the United States is the world's advertising giant, it will be beneficial for the Malaysian advertising industry to assess its own characteristics relative to the United States. Thus, a comparison of U.S. advertising will help Malaysia catch up with contemporary advertising industry trends.

From an economic standpoint, the growing income and population of Malaysia is a profitable market for foreign companies to invest in. The 'Vision 2020' is a program which aims to boost economic growth and population growth from 19 million to 70 million people by the year 2020 (Deng, Jivan & Hassan, 1994). As advertisers seek to penetrate Malaysia's lucrative market, the demand for knowledge about its people has increased dramatically. For instance, understanding the gender positioning of this country will help advertisers in targeting their potential customer-- the decision-maker in a family. Also, advertisers will have better ideas for launching campaigns that will be more easily accepted by social norms.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations for this study is that there is limited existing literature available about Malaysia. This problem causes an unbalanced literature review between the U.S. and Malaysia. Another limitation is the lack of randomness of the sample. This is a point-in-time study which only analyzes one week of Malaysian advertising not randomly selected. U.S. and Malaysian advertising, while both prime time, were collected 13 months apart. Another limitation is that though attempts were made to quantify each characteristic coded for the judgment of the coders is subjective. This is particularly troublesome when dealing with coders and content from different cultures and in different languages.

### **Organization of the Study**

The whole thesis consists of five chapters -- Chapter 1 (Introduction), Chapter 2 (Literature review), Chapter 3 (Methodology), Chapter 4 (Findings and Analysis) and Chapter 5 (Conclusions).

In Chapter 2, an overview of relevant studies for gender depiction in advertising is presented. The literature review will cover not just the United States, but also other studies that have been done outside of the U.S. Chapter 3 introduces in detail the methodology that being used in this study. The significance of this study, research question, data collection information is also included in this chapter. For Chapter 4, an in-depth presentation of the findings from collected data is reported. Tables and relevant information are provided in this chapter, also. In the last chapter, a summary, conclusions, and recommendations are stated. The author's conclusion about the findings is revealed in Chapter 5 as well.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

From ancient times in the majority of both Eastern and Western civilizations, women have been taught that they are born only to glory in their own femininity. Historically, whenever women have been mentioned in ethnographic literature, they are devoted to childcare or other "domestic" concerns (Johnson, 1992). Friedan (1963) captured this idea in her popular book *The Feminine Mystique* when she wrote, "They gloried in their role as women, and wrote proudly on the census blank: 'Occupation: housewife'." (P.18).

A majority of the nations in today's world still use a patriarchal system, where men dominate over women in both the family and society. However, women's roles have been improving, becoming more equal in status to men-- especially in the industrialized Western world. In the late 1960s, the modern women's movement accelerated across the United States (Ruether, 1994). The movement did not immediately bring tremendous changes to women's roles, but instead women's roles changed gradually in their daily lives. Examples of this change, included the use of the title "Ms." and the increasingly use of language gender-neutrality (Rosen, 1999).

The degree of change in women's roles varies from country to country. The factors influencing these changes are varied and hard to identify. Similarities like economic

development, industrialization, and politics may trigger a women's movement in a particular nation. Young (1994), while writing the introduction for Sharma's (1994) *Today's Woman in World Religions*, noted the difficulties in recovering women's history in various religions of the world and searching for a comparative perspective. Yet, changes in women's roles are happening. If we are to understand our world, we must understand the women's movement, which affects literally half the world's population.

The surge of women seeking equal rights in education, work, and politics began in the West with Great Britain and the United States being the pioneers (Ruether, 1994). Moreover, the Western influence brings along the concept of feminism around the world (Young, 1994). In the United States, the beginnings of industrialization provided opportunities for working class and immigrant women to move out of the home and into jobs. However, they were usually working part-time job and simply had no intention of pursuing a career (Ruether, 1994). They primarily worked to help the family financially at that time. Their work outside the home was secondary to their work inside the home. Women were viewed as subordinate --their ultimate goal is to give their husband and children a clean, comfortable house.

Before the 1920s, the confinement of women in the terms of social, legal and political rights was unbreakable. U.S. women were given the right to vote and to serve as a political candidate (rights of full citizenship) in 1921 (Ruether, 1994). In addition, the post-Industrial Revolution provided women more working opportunities. When women became more economically independent, the realization of the disparity in education,

work, and legal rights, which are formed by society, fanned the flames of the women's rights movement (Ruether, 1994). By the middle of the twentieth century, women in the United States became much better educated and began to realize their inequality. They were severely restricted in their legal rights and limited in their access to many kinds of employment. For some, the sense of dissatisfaction and the yearning to break free from traditional roles materialized into action and activism. By the 1960s, American society began to pay some attention to women's issues (Ruether, 1994).

During that decade, studies which dealt with women's rights and sexism in language and image developed a systematic literary trace for all media of mass communication (Butler & Paisley, 1980). There are many factors, which led to the increased study of the portrayal of women in the mass media. One factor is that the feminist movement stirred the need to empirically demonstrate that women were negatively stereotyped in the media (Laura, 1994). Media, functioning as an information forum, have been viewed as the source of a feminist outlet. Since the 1970s, women's groups have challenged broadcasters frequent sexist representation of women and their neglect of women's issues (Zoonen, 1994).

Television, one of the most important media vehicles that provides free flow of information to the public, supposedly should portray women in a more positive and liberated role to give a positive image to the public about women (Zoonen, 1994). Academics believe television should provide more "liberating role models" mainly because television commercials are the most pervasive and "naturalistic environmental

context within which gender stereotypes may be formed, strengthened, and activated" (Lavine, Sweeney & Wagner, 1999, P.1049).

A.C. Nielsen reports that in the United States, more than 98% of Americans own televisions. In one week, during prime time from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., the public is exposed to approximately 530 commercials. However, according to research which has been done on gender positioning, television commercials generally portray women in traditional, stereotypical roles, whether that be as sexual objects or some other domestic role (e.g., Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Butler & Paisley, 1980).

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are many mass communication theories that explain the direct relationship between the negative portrayal of women on television and society's similar perception. The concerns of the women's movement about negative stereotyping in advertising and other media are important because of the role that modeling may have in forming and molding gender stereotypes (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996). According to the social learning theory, people tend to mimic and adopt behavior from the television models, who portray real people in media forums (DeFleur & Ball-rokeach, 1989). As time goes by, under constant exposure to certain type of portrayal, audiences acquire these patterns of behavior and adopt them in different degrees on a permanent basis (DeFluer & Ball-Rokeach, 1989).

George Gerbner and his associates' cultivation theory agrees with the social learning theory about the impact of televised portrayal on people's beliefs. The crux of the theory says that television content "cultivates people's beliefs"(DeFluer & Ball-Rokeach, 1989). In other words, television portrayal has a great impact on behavior by molding people's beliefs. In fact, both the social learning theory and the cultivation theory emphasizes that the public more or less absorbs knowledge and perception from the mass media, especially television. As a result, the knowledge and perceptions that they gain serve as a guide for their conduct and foster their beliefs.

Numerous advertising literature records uniformly show that the stereotyping of women's roles is a major trend in the world (McArthur & Resko, 1973; Craig, 1972). This compels researchers to concern themselves with the problem of disparity in the roles of women in reality and the mass media. Media continually depict women stereotypically often in inferior roles. For instance, males are more frequently depicted as more knowledgeable and independent, while females are portrayed as sex objects or lacking in intelligence and credibility (Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Courtney and Whipple, 1984).



Concerning the influences of negative portrayal of women in commercials, Lafky, Duffy & Berkowitz (1996) conducted a study on gender role stereotyping by using the cognitive heuristics theory. They advocated the "gendered lenses" idea that "...the process of learning about gender-appropriate behavior and observing the gendered nature of social life may lead to the development of gender-specific heuristics--or seeing the world through gendered lenses" (P.386).

The disparity of the roles of men and women in television commercials influences the way men and women perceive each other in real life. As Lovdal (1989) said, "The idea that men are active participants, knowledgeable, and authoritative, and women are not, is detrimental to the status of women." (P.718). Repeated exposure to such a perspective would spread around the nation and inevitably carry on to the next generation. Kimball (1986) stated that children who were exposed frequently to gender-stereotyping tend to have stronger sex-typed attitudes than those who do not. Consequently, no matter how much improvement women have in real society, if they are still perceived as the minority who is traditional, dependent, and unintelligent on television, they have made little real progress.

### **Review of the U.S. Gender Portrayal Studies**

Most systematic analyses of media images of women have been conducted after 1970 (Butler & Paisley, 1980). Magazines and television are the most common media analyzed. Content analysis of targets and gender positioning has also become a popular topic. Changes in the depiction of women in advertising have been viewed as a success for women's liberation and as a measure of social and advertiser acceptance of changing sex roles (Courtney & Whipple, 1983).

The claim that women are generally portrayed in traditional stereotypical roles of subservience in patriarchal societies has been supported by research since the 70s (e.g., Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Bretl & Canter, 1988; Craig, 1992). Recently, researchers have started to realize that some changes in the portrayal of men and women are taking place. In 1996, Kenneth & Scott compared TV commercials in the U.S. from the 1950s/early 1960s to the 1980s. That study explored the issue of how much change has occurred in gender images in commercials. According to their findings, the depiction of women in commercials changed significantly from the 1950s to the 1980s. Nonetheless, the depictions of men did not show any changes. Findings showed that from the 1970s, there has been improvement in the presentation of women. Women were increasingly shown in occupational roles and even in high status professions.

Zoonen's (1994) research data matched Kenneth & Scott's findings. Kenneth & Scott's findings also indicated that from the late '50s to the early '80s the percentage of women portrayed as working outside the home increased. However, this number never exceeds 25 percent. From the 1970s through the 1980s, the way that media, especially advertising, portrayed two different gender roles did change significantly (Kenneth & Scott, 1996; Zoonen, 1994). Kenneth & Scott and Zoonen indicated that the changing roles of women in society are reflected in their portrayal in advertising. To better understand gender role portrayal in the media and the current status of women in our modern and global society, a close examination of the literature is needed.

### **The 1970s U.S. Gender Studies**

In 1971, A. E. Courtney & S. W. Lockeretz conducted an analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. Their primary finding was that print advertisements very rarely showed women in working roles. The advertisements suggested that women are dependent on men and are incapable of making important decisions. Women were seldom shown far away from home by themselves or were accompanied by other women. Whenever print advertisements showed women doing outdoor activities (travel, driving, going to the bank, etc), men would be shown as company.

Three years later, in 1974, Courtney did a follow up study with T. W. Whipple and again found the previous results that gender stereotyping existed in contemporary media. Courtney and Whipple in their article "*Women in TV commercials*" unveiled that women in advertisements are traditionally placed only in a kitchen, bathroom or household setting.

J. R. Dominick & G. E. Rauch (1972) examined 1971 network TV prime time commercials to see the contrast between male and female. They coded an one week's ads period of female characters and another one-week period of male characters. The findings showed that even though the women's liberation was surging during that time, media still portrayed women in the stereotyped way where women mostly as "decorative" (sex-objects) or "useful"(housewives and mothers). In addition, women were portrayed as having a lack of ability or interest in masculine items like mechanics or machines. The role disparities between men and women were so obvious that commercials often showed men as advisors advising presumably inferior women. Men appeared in outdoor or business settings while women were presented in home settings.

In 1979, Schneider & Schneider compared Dominick & Rauch's 1971 data with commercials from 1976. They found that women were still portrayed in narrower roles than men were, and these roles were stereotypical. In considering whether there is an improvement in the role portrayal of women, Schneider & Schneider reasoned that, "Alternatively, one can ask whether the trend over time has been toward a narrowing or widening of the difference between role portrayals in TV commercials and actual roles in

the population" (P.84). In considering this question, they compared role portrayals on television with actual roles in the U.S. population, and they concluded that the changing role of women was becoming more accepted by marketers and advertisers since female characters were depicted closer to the actual roles than male characters.

L. Z. McArthur & B. G. Resko (1975) conducted a study on the portrayal of men and women in American television commercials. Their conclusions were that, numerically, more men than women were presented in television commercials, and, qualitatively, television commercials tended to portray women in a relatively unfavorable manner. Men tended to be experts and often gave instruction to women on the product being advertised. Women were usually depicted as the consumer or product user. McArthur and Resko (1975) wrote, "Less than half of the female models had their own, independent identity: 51 percent were defined in terms of their relationship to others--i.e., as a spouse, parent or girlfriend--whereas only 36 percent of the male models were defined in this way" (P218).

### **The 1980s U.S. Gender Studies**

J. R. Dominick & G. E. Rauch's (1972) findings of women being used as sex objects was again supported by Soley & Kurzbard's (1986) study 14 years later. Soley & Kurzbard conducted a systematic content analysis of sexual content for magazine commercials during 1964 and 1984. They found that women characters in magazine commercials were more likely to be portrayed as sex objects (e.g., being sexually clad,

partially clad, or even nude) than were male. They presumed that since male viewpoints dominated the advertising industry, to match with the consumers, ads tend to program content produce ads appealing to the dominated group. These findings illustrated the existence of sexism in the advertising and society.

D. J. Bretl, & J. Cantor (1988) conducted a study which content-analyzed the portrayal of men and women in U.S. television commercials during a 15-year period starting in 1971. This study somewhat reduces women's grievances. They found that over the 15-year period, gradual changes occurred in the portrayal of males and females. Men and women occurred approximately equally often as primary characters in prime-time television advertisements. Although men continued to be portrayed as having superior status, beginning in the '80s, we started to see males being presented in increasing numbers as spouses and parents, with no other apparent occupation. However, the study shows that the employment level of male and female remained stereotypical. The stereotyped employment level of female continued to be lower or in a subordinate position to men.

In 1989, Lovdal's study showed a contradiction to D. J. Bretl, & J. Cantor's (1988) findings. Lovdal aimed to examine the changes in sex-role portrayals in television commercials from the late 1970s to 1980s (about the same period analyzed in Bretl & Cantor's study). His conclusion was that women in the '80s were not depicted any differently than in the '70s. He analyzed the aspects of voice-over, product (domestic or non-domestic items), product representative, and setting. Findings showed that males

consistently dominated television voice-overs during prime-time in this ten years period. Males were more likely to be representatives of outdoor products whereas females advertised products for home use.

### **The 1990s U.S. Gender Studies**

More research on gender portrayal was completed in the 1990s. In 1992, Craig examined gender portrayals in 2,209 network television commercials. Craig stated that in all dayparts men were portrayed in stereotypical roles of authority and dominance. During weekends, men had roles giving the impression that they were trying to run away from home and family. Moreover, research found that women are more likely to be depicted in a more independent manner during daytime and primetime and in a more traditional way in sports program commercials.

The same year, M. L. Klassen, C. R. Jasper & A. M. Schwartz (1992) analyzed advertisements in three popular magazines--*Ms.*, *Playboy* and *Newsweek* to see how men and women are portrayed when pictured together. Klassen & Jasper concluded, even though a high percentage still showed women in traditional roles, the number of "equality portrayals" had increased since the early 1980s.

In 1993, Riffe, Place & Mayo analyzed game time (Sunday pro football game time), soap time and evening prime time commercials to compare the representation of women in those different targeted programs. They found out that game time, which was male targeted programming, did not show a significantly higher degree of female sexuality in

the ads. Instead, using female sexuality is a pervasive phenomenon that permeates game time, soap time and prime time commercials. Moreover, fewer female characters and speakers appeared in Sunday ads while male characters and speakers were highly represented.

Research by Jaffe & Berger in 1994 provided up-to-date information on advertisers' responses to the changes of women's roles in society. They investigated the advertising effectiveness of modern female roles on different female segments. Jaffe & Berger concluded that to match the changing role of women in the society, advertisers did respond by creating diverse modern images of women in their commercials. Their findings showed that egalitarian positioning had the highest acceptance rate, compared to both superwoman or traditional positioning.



### **Minority Portrayal in U.S. advertising**

There are some studies that deal with portrayal of women in different racial groups in the U.S., such as African, Hispanic and Asian American. In 1995, Taylor, Lee & Stern focused on the minority ethnic groups in the U.S. instead of the majority Caucasian segment. They examined nine U.S. magazines from 1993-1994. They looked at the incidence of minority models (African, Hispanic, and Asian American) in U.S. magazines. Findings showed that stereotypes of U.S. minority groups are reinforced by magazine ads, though for African American this seems to be lessening. Moreover, they found out that Hispanics are seriously underrepresented in mainstream advertising.

Two years after Taylor, Lee & Stern's minority studies were published, some publication of particular individual minority studies appeared. Taylor and Stern (1997) talked about a growing segment market in the U.S.-Asian American population. They commented that the Asian-American is a "model minority" due to the affluence, high education and work ethic of this segment. In their study, they examined the intersection of this minority group and the gender in mass media portrayals. They found out that Asian women are found to be less well represented than men. In addition, Asian women are more likely to be presented as background roles than other minorities. From commercials, we can see a strong gender imbalance being depicted for this minority group.

In 1999, Armstrong & Kendrick conducted a study about the portrayal of men and women in U.S. Spanish-language television commercials. They found that sex role

stereotypes do exist in Spanish-language television commercials. However, this stereotyping is quite similar in degree to that found in general U.S. TV commercials according to the literature. In the article, they said, " This finding could indicate that Spanish-language advertising is, to a degree, simply a "re-tread" of general market U.S. advertising and not truly a reflection of the Hispanic community" (P.13).

### **Gender Portrayal in Foreign Media**

Study of gender portrayal in the media has become a popular topic. However, most of the publications are focused on the United States. Lately, researchers have expanded their study to other countries, cultures, and media systems. For example, in 1986, Livingstone & Green examined British television commercials. This study found that in British advertisements, male depiction in advertising is mainly voice-over authority figures who occupy autonomous roles. Men usually present arguments and advertise both non-domestic and domestic products. Women rarely present arguments, take part mainly in familial roles, and generally advertise only personal or domestic products.

Furnahm & Voli (1986) found the same gender stereotypes in Italian television advertisements. They indicated that the Italian advertisers depict gender roles in the traditional way. For example, males were twice as likely to be given more credible roles and be central figures than females. Men were more likely to be used in voice-overs and were the authority users. Women were more likely than men to be with children and were mostly portrayed by themselves with no background.

During the same year, Harris & Stobart (1986) followed the lead established by Manstead & McCulloch (1981) and conducted a further examination of sex-role stereotypes in British television advertising at different times of the day. They concluded that from the visual modality standpoint, differences had been noticed between the images of men and women presented in the daytime and those presented in the evening.

Another British TV commercial study was completed in 1992, and changes of gender display were found. A. Furnham and N. Bitar (1992) carried out a study examining the portrayal of men and women in a sample of British television commercials. This study showed that although men are still playing the knowledgeable and authority roles on products, the difference between males and females was not as great as expected. Recently, some researchers believe that the disparity of male and female portrayal is experiencing some improvements. However, some of the studies still show the stereotype depiction of gender roles prevalent in most Western countries, for instance, Portugal.

One hundred five Kenyan television commercials were content-analyzed to examine the representation of men and women by Mwangi in 1996. Mwangi's study showed that stereotyping gender portrayals was also found in that nation. Women were depicted as less persuasive and independent. A small percentage of women were used as voiceovers except on ads for household products. Women were only portrayed in certain types of activities, namely, domestic, teaching, office/secretarial, and sport in the Kenyan ads. The author believed that the findings reflected the gender inequities in the society.

In 1997, a Canadian gender portrayal study was conducted by Zhou & Chen, analyzing the ten largest circulating consumer magazines of Canada in 1990. An improvement of the portrayal of women was found, although a majority still favored men. Those improved aspects of female depiction included the fact that the population of women in 1990 was over-represented in commercials as a whole, but women were still portrayed more in home setting and less in business settings. Their role of importance was about the same as that of male characters.

Traditional stereotypical gender role portrayal was also revealed in a Portuguese television advertising study (Pinto & Neto, 1998). Pinto & Neto analyzed 304 evening commercials and found that the Portuguese television commercials had a greater tendency for males to be cast as the central figures (66 percent). They conducted a brief comparison with other Western countries. In reality, women have a higher population and do most of the shopping in day-to-day life; yet, the Portuguese ads showed that men were more predominant (approximately 66 percent). The study found out that American TV favored males but at a slightly less 57 percent; Italian study and British studies showed a similar bias at about a two-thirds male predominance; another British and an Australian study showed even greater male predominance at 74 percent. Pinto & Neto (1998) concluded that "This global tendency reflects maybe that TV advertisements are faithfully representing gender imbalances in the kind of situations they depict, rather than themselves distorting the picture" (P.160).

### **Cross-cultural Research on Gender Portrayal and Media**

Generally speaking, a study of one country can only indicate whether or not a particular phenomenon exists in that country. A study between two countries, however, has the potential to suggest reasons for the phenomenon (which may be further tested), thus providing highly generalizable knowledge which can be applied cross-culturally. In other words, intercultural research results in a better understanding of and ability to effectively interact in other cultures.

As industries and interests become more globalized, such general knowledge becomes more valuable and can be applied to many other markets. For media sex role cases, a study within a country could suggest whether there is or is not strong stereotyping. A study across two countries, however, not only would identify the relative degree to which a stereotype occurs in both countries but also could identify the factors that contribute to the stereotyping by analyzing differences between the countries. Therefore, a cross-cultural study allows for the potential identification of specific variables that may cause differences in the results. The differences will be able to identify and give more room to focus on certain areas.

People believe that culture is an important term when dealing with issues of masculinity and femininity. As McCarty (1994) stated, the higher a country values masculinity, the higher the rate of differences will be shown in the way media depict sexes. Comparatively, highly masculine countries tend to portray women in less professional and technical jobs than highly feminine countries.

M.C Gilly (1986) examined sex roles in advertising over two days on one television station each in the U.S., Mexico, and Australia. The U.S. and Mexico are considered masculine-oriented and the cross-national comparison displayed that Mexico and the U.S. both have a more conservative concept in portraying women as compared to Australia. The U.S. and Mexico present only a slight difference from the traditional role portrayal for women. Overall, all three countries reflected stereotypes of male-female roles. Nonetheless, Australian advertisers have an awareness of self-regulation and tend to equalize sex roles and eliminate using the female body as a vehicle to sell products. Therefore, fewer imbalances were found in Australian TV commercials.

Wiles, Wiles & Tjernlund (1996) conducted a comparative study between the United States and Sweden. A 1994 comparative magazine content analysis study for both countries was carried out with the goal of examining gender value depiction between these two countries. According to the authors, women in the U.S. and Sweden share a high degree of progressiveness in terms of political rights, employment, and activism. Therefore, it would be a surprise not to find out that both countries have many similarities in terms of women portrayal in media. However, according to the study, U.S. magazine commercials in small degree still portray women in housework and childcare activities. In contrast, Sweden had no women characters portrayed in housework and childcare activities. Even in countries like the U.S. and Sweden, where feminism is highly respected, female and male depicts were still imbalanced in terms of professional occupation. In both nations, males had a higher percentage of being portrayed in

professional activities while women were not. In fact, U.S. advertisements had slightly higher percentage than Sweden in portrayal women in professional activities.

In 1998, Browne content analyzed U.S. and Australian television commercials to examine how children's sex roles are portrayed. According to the findings, the males predominate phenomenon happened in both countries. For example, in commercials that contained both boys and girls, boys had higher percentage of demonstrating the product or as a voiceover even in gender-neutral products. However, Australian commercials were bearing a higher sexual equality than American commercials. This rationale was supported by the fact that Australian commercials more likely to have equal male and female proportions and in the same advertisement, both genders were likely to be seen. In addition, girls were portrayed as less introverted personalities in Australian commercials than U.S. commercials.

### **Role of Women in Different Cultural Traditions**

People might assume that more developed countries show greater respect for equality and human rights. Overall, they are less traditional and less conservative. Roughly speaking, the number of developed countries in the West is greater than in the Eastern world. For instance, the United States claims to be the most technologically advanced nation in the world. The British are known for their pride in English civilization and etiquette. Italy is a relatively wealthy nation which enjoys a high standard of living. Moreover, the West, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, are the advocators of the feminist movements.

It is these modern countries which hold the concept of liberalism, freedom, and equality so dear. However, according to recent research that had been done on the commercials of these nations, the results showed a high percentage of gender stereotyping. Women are still portrayed in an inferior or less control status if compared to men. Women are depicted as a minority group that have less authority and liberation. Based on these phenomena, it will be interesting to find out how the Third World countries, especially in Southeast Asia, which are usually described as more traditional and conservative, depict sex roles.

Since the world market tends toward greater globalization, advertising has also become more prevalent globally. The growing Asian markets such as, China, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia will be attractive places for Western companies to invest and to understand.



From a feminist's standpoint, neither the Judeo-Christian heritage of the West nor the growing post-modernist ideology that is replacing it lend itself to great gender polarization. Regarding the Judeo-Christian heritage, Ruether's (1994) statement strongly supports this idea. He said that Christian churches played an ambivalent role in the progress of women's rights. Back on the 1980s, Christian clergy on one hand had the attitude that women should keep silent in public society, and patriarchy is highly respected. On the other hand, churches also played a significant role in providing access to "an enlarged leadership role and experience beyond the family" (Ruether, 1994, P.271) for women.

Yet, we still find the evidence of male-female disparity in the society through the reflection in the media. In the East, scholars conceive that some of the major religions such as-Hinduism, Taoism, and Islam have great importance in forming the gender imbalance and the formal dominance of male in the family and whole society (Karim, 1995). For example in Iran, which is an Islamic state, it would be an offense to see women having a higher status than men, and it is considered an obscenity for women to expose their body or face in public (Brooks, 1995). Even in such religions as Buddhism, where the sexist nature of the religion is still disputed--whether it is gender neutral or sexist (e.g. Gross, 1993)--there are already some scholars (e.g., Karim, 1995) holding the belief that Buddhism does play a great part of molding the gender differences in the society.

Some Islamic countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, and Malaysia hold deep gender stereotypes. In those traditional and strict Islamic countries, namely Iran, society is convinced that women are physically, psychologically, intellectually, and morally inferior (Smith, 1994). Thus, in Islamic societies, polygamy is allowed. Veiling, lack of control for marriage, no right to divorce, and social seclusion are the inequitable situation that women have encountered in some Islamic countries. Smith (1994) depicted Ayatollah Khomeini, the minister of Iran in the 1970s, comment about women and said "...women are basically a cause of disorder in society and of seduction to men, and that therefore they must be kept from full societal participation for good of the Islamic order" (P.315). Generally speaking, even though some of the Islamic countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Pakistan have a fairly high percentage of women who are highly educated and involved in professional occupations, sexual segregation still remains.

In addition to the religious aspect, which might result in gender discrimination, there are significant influences caused purely by non-religions characteristics of society. For example, Confucianism--which is more a social ideology than a religious idea--forms a great part of social values in Asian countries. Chan (1973) translated one of Confucius's humanism statements, which said, "Women and servants are most difficult to deal with. If you are familiar with them, they cease to be humble. If you keep a distance from them, they resent it" (P.47). This statement implies that Confucius believed that women are inferior to men. Asian countries who practice Confucianism ideology--such as Japan and

Korea--still have a strong patriarchal society, sex discrimination and inequality of the sexes. These socio-religious factors cripple the feminist movement, and make it difficult to advocate for women's rights in the East than the West.

### **Women's Roles in Eastern Countries**

Since the industrial revolution occurred in the West, the gaps between the rich and poor nations have grown even more evident (Kotler, 1997). Considering the modernization and the prosperity of some Western countries, these possessions urge the East to improve themselves to constrict the disparity. Some of the Asian countries are actively pursuing modernization and echoing the materialistic lifestyle of the West. For instance, Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore were strongly influenced by Western culture, especially the United States. However, the West's individualism and liberalism are not entirely welcomed by some of the Asian countries, especially the issue of feminism in the Western context, namely Islamic countries (Lewis, 1993).

The confrontation between modernization and traditional livelihood, especially the role and status of women, has been a controversial topic in many Asian countries since opening to the West. Conservative forces in the Asian countries are often afraid that traditional values will be defeated by modernization values. The ideological framework of Islamic revivalism, according to Esposito (1998), states resolutely that, "Although the Westernization of society is condemned, modernization as such is not. Science and

technology are accepted, but they are to be subordinated to Islamic belief and values in order to guard against the Westernization and secularization of Muslim society" (P.165). In the case of Islam, for example, the fidelity to traditional religion certainly results in a rejection of the principles of Western feminism. From Islamic fundamental concepts, the idea of western feminism is simply "too individualistic", and diverges from the natural way of male and female collaboration (Smith, 1994, P.323).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Western models of women's rights, liberation, and equalization gave Asian women a great impact on the concept of their status in the family and society. As Karim (1995) anticipated, the progression of the Western gender equalization and modernization phenomena provided a pessimistic vision of the future of women in Southeast Asia. At the end of 20th century, the feminist wave passed through some Asian countries like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Books and publications that advocate feminism can be easily found in those counties.

Westernization and modernization affected the lives of Asian women and slightly re-constructed the gender status in the direction of hierarchy (Young, 1994). The high proportions of women working in professional positions are a testament to the changes in women's status in Asian societies (Lewis, 1993; Sharma, 1994; Karim, 1995). These changes provide Asian women with a driving force to achieve success and achievement in individual terms. The availability of work opportunities plays an essential role for the alteration of women's status in many of the Asian countries, although women's traditional role in the family and household is still apparent (Sharma, 1994; Karim, 1995).

### **Gender and Media Research in Asia**

Obviously most of the studies concerning feminism and the media have been done in the West. As the huge wave of feminist research from the West began to reach eastward, some studies have contributed to this topic in Asia (e.g. Gross & Falk, 1980; Strange, 1981; Momsen & Kinnaird, 1993; Sharma, 1994; Karim, 1995). However, those books mainly cover the religious aspect of the gender issue; few of the existing publications examine gender portrayal in the media or advertising aspect. Frith (1996) edited a book introducing advertising in Asia, which mainly cover the communication, culture, consumption and general concept of different Asian countries' advertising industries. McDaniel (1994) made known the broadcasting systems of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore in his "Broadcasting in Malay World". However, research that directly focuses on the relationship between advertising and gender is still greatly under represented.

In the '90s, there were a small number of studies published that focused on the gender issues of advertising in Asian countries. Subir Sengupta (1995) conducted a comparison study to determine whether advertising reflects general differences between the United States and Japan concerning views on the role of women. He concluded that the effect of culture on portrayals of women in television advertisements is similar in Japan and the U.S. in many ways, such as men are the authority figures and have higher level jobs than women. In 1999, K. E Karloff & Y. C. Lee conducted a comparison study of gender roles in U.S. and Taiwanese magazine advertisements. The study showed that

Taiwanese females were portrayed less in decision-making, managerial and administrative occupations. The U.S. magazine ads seem to be more likely to portray females in such roles than Taiwanese magazines.

Wee, Choong & Tambyah (1995) compared the portrayal of both sexes in television advertising in Malaysia and Singapore. Overall, Malaysian television advertisements present more conservative and traditional images of women compared to advertisements in Singapore. In their study, Wee, Choong & Tambyah (1995) conducted a small comparison study between some Western countries and Eastern countries. They summarized that gender portrayal in foreign advertising in Australia and Sweden show a more balanced and non-traditional representation of women. Singapore and the U.S. seem to be in the middle. Mexico, Malaysia, and other countries whose societies are steeped in religious values are more likely to portray women in stereotyped ways.

### **Malaysia and Malaysian culture**

All the major world religions are practiced in Asia, for example, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and Hinduism. However, Malaysia, a country that was formed by a variety of ethnic groups -- Malay, Chinese and Hindu--are still practicing their own original religions, Islam, Buddhism and Taoism, and Hinduism in one country. The diversity among the groups is obvious. Chinese still pursue Confucian ideology or practice Buddhism and Taoism. Malays practice Islam and Hinduism is mainly embraced by East Indian people. We might conclude that this multi-racial country in fact has not reached the point of "melting pot" but just a "salad bowl", which each group is easily identifiable. Moreover, Malaysia is like a small mirror that can reflect the whole of Asia in religious terms. Therefore, Malaysia can provide an interesting and unique perspective on the general Asian view of gender.

Malaysia, located in the core of Southeast Asia, consists of two regions - Peninsular Malaysia in the west, and Sabah & Sarawak in the east. The Peninsular Malaysia has an immediate neighbor on the north, Thailand, and Singapore Island on the south. Sabah & Sarawak located at the northwestern coast of the island of Borneo, which belongs to Indonesia (Ngu, 1996).

Malaysia is a multi-racial country with a population approximately 21 million (Consular Information Sheet, 1999). The three major ethnic groups in Malaysia are Malay, Chinese and Indian. The division of the population is Malay, 58 percent; Chinese, 26 percent; and Indian, 7 percent (Consular Information Sheet, 1999). Malay is

the national and official language of the country. English is broadly used in the business field and most government offices. Mandarin is the major language among Chinese ethnic group. However, some Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew and Hainanese are also common in the Chinese society. Common Indian languages used are Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Punjabi, Hindi, Gujerati and Urdu (Strange, 1981).

Islam is a compulsory religion for Malay people; in other words, every Malay is Islamic from the first moment he or she born. Other ethnic groups, except Malay, are free to have their own religions. The major religions in Malaysia besides Islam are Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, and Christianity (Deng, Jivan & Hassan, 1994). Malaysia is a rather traditional and patriarchal society due to the religions that are practiced in the country. Generally speaking, in a patriarchal and traditional society, women are exposed to all forms of discrimination and exploitation, Malaysia, a country that practices Islam in a large proportion, is experiencing the same situation (Strange, 1981).

The fact that the female employment rate is growing has not really changed the inferior status of women in society. One reason for this is because the higher employment rate of women does not necessarily reduce the abundance of household chores, which men expect women to perform (Karim, 1995). In addition, the Western context of feminism somehow contradicts Islamic consciousness. As Nagata (1995) pointed out, the Malay government, as well as the Malay people, is attempting to adopt "a Western technocratic educational and professional culture" (P.115). However, they are



also threatening to protect their "religious charters of legitimacy" (Nagata, 1995, P.115). An example to make the above statement clear is that Muslims perceive the liberalness (e.g., as in dress) of Asian Christians--who are often linked with Western ideas of progress and modernity--as an unacceptable jeopardization of sexual morality and gender propriety (Nagata, 1995).

Research that has been devoted to Malaysian gender issue mostly is related to Islam. In 1981, Heather Strange wrote a book called "Rural Malay Women in Tradition and Transition". According to Strange, since 1980, women in Malaysia have been experiencing a great diversity in terms of education and professional occupation. She said, "There are women scholars and women who are illiterate. There are business-women and bureaucrats" (P.26). The uneven changes in the society caused the disparity among women. Yet, overall, the powerlessness and the low pay scales of women are considered the normality in the society.

In the modern Malaysia, large proportions of women are wage-earners, professionals and leaders. Yet, the media generally does not provide a true depiction of women's roles in Malaysia --who indeed contribute much to Malaysia's economy. According to a project that was conducted by a student at Universiti Sains Malaysia which compared three major Malaysian newspapers, concluded that in the early 70s, the press presented stereotyped views of women's roles (Rohana Ariffin, 1987). However, this imbalanced depiction against gender has shown some improvement today compared to the 70s. There are some women's organizations, such as--DAP Wanita Tanjung --that strives for

the equality of female rights in the society. Within the past ten years, there have been significant changes in the attitude and aspiration of women in Malaysia. However, despite these recent changes, few studies have been done and little information is available to examine this situation. The lack of information on this topic is more noticeable in area of gender portrayal in media and advertising.

### **Advertising in Malaysia**

Malaysia has some strict regulations regarding the advertising industry. For example, the government mandates that all commercials made in Malaysia must use local talent. In addition, according to the advertising code for television and radio, models in commercials should "portray good behavior acceptable to local culture and society" (MAA, 2000, P.169). For instance, there is one code that implicitly guides the degree of exposure of a woman's body. The code states that "The body of the female model should be covered until the neckline, which should not be too low. The length of a skirt worn should be below the knees. Arms may be exposed up to the edge of the shoulder but armpits cannot be exposed....." (MAA, 2000, P.170). There are many strict guidelines for the sensibilities of the female dressing issues, which have been regulated in the Malaysia advertising industry. This reveals the phenomenon that women are still in strict bondage.

In 1994, Deng, Jivan & Hassan conducted a study for advertising in Malaysia from a cultural perspective. They found out that even though Muslims comprise the majority of

citizen, Malaysia's unique heterogeneous culture doesn't encourage a strict adherence to Islamic principles. However, when multinational advertising companies try to do business in Malaysia, the Islamic religious issue and the strict regulations in Malaysia can not be ignored. As Deng, Jivan & Hassan (1994) concluded, "Consequently, when advertising in Malaysia, one must question the extent to which advertisements need to be localized to meet the values of Islamic moralism" (P.154).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, a detail of how the research was planned will be reported. A description of data collection and analysis methodology for this study will be explained. Topics such as the significance, purpose of the study, research approach, research questions, research objectives, sampling plan and data collection will also be examined.

#### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze the portrayal of gender in Malaysian television commercials and compare them, to the extent possible, to U.S. television ads. It will also attempt to relate the findings to the cultural roles of women in Malaysia. This study will also serve to benchmark Malaysian commercial content so that it can be compared to similar studies in other foreign and ethnic media.

Prime time television commercials from the United States and Malaysia were content analyzed and compared because advertising is a reflection of a nation's culture and behavior (Butler & Paisley, 1980; Stern, 1994). A comparison study on advertising's depictions of gender roles provides picture of the cross-cultural issues. A comparison study such as this furnishes a look at the differences between two nations; in this particular case, the way the United States and Malaysia depict gender in media. This

information provides researchers with better cues to conduct follow-up analyses and in-depth explanations on the factors, which seem to generate the differences.

### **Research Approach**

The research methodology for this study was quantitative content analysis. Content analysis has been defined as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952). For this study, 21 hours each of Malaysian and U.S. prime time television commercials were analyzed. Advertisements depicting, animals, cartoon figures, or central figures that are not identifiable were not included in this study. Target commercials will be product/service advertisements and public service announcements.

The social scientist, humanist, and behaviorist each place a different emphasis on the inherent cultural meanings in media content. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) explained that social scientists have typically been concerned with content to the extent that it produces effects. They wrote, "Humanists tend to take content as a starting point and work backward, to understand the culture producing it; behaviorists have traditionally taken content as a starting point and worked forward, to examine the effects external to and created by the message" (P.33). As a conclusion, regardless of the standpoint from which we observe media content, its value in dealing with culture is undeniable.

Studying media content helps us infer things about phenomena that are less open and visible: the people and organizations that produce the content (Shoemaker & Reese,

1996). By systematically evaluating the content, we summarize the findings and analyze them to get an accurate representation of the number of messages from the media. By decoding the messages, we should be able to interpret the implicit message being conveyed by the producers or organization. Researchers use the content analysis method based on the idea that we need a formal quantitative system to record the information, rather than relying simply on impressions. After we get a systematic collection of information, it is easier to draw conclusions. As was noted, content analysis has been used to study gender portrayal and sex role stereotyping in advertising (e.g. Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Kenneth & Scott, 1996).

Quantification, on the other hand, has great value in summarizing what is to be found in media content by analyzing how frequently things, attitudes, people and places appear in media content. From the content pattern, we try to understand the attitude of the media on certain issues by comparing the content with reality. For example, by comparing the percentage of women being portrayed as professionals versus the percentage of women professionals, we are able to determine the extent to which the media is misrepresenting women's societal role.

## Research Questions

There are four research questions that are being addressed in this study. First, we hope to describe the content of Malaysian and U.S. prime time television commercials in terms of sex-role portrayal. This finding can help us generalize the media's depiction of gender in both countries. Also, since television commercials can be good sources to uncover cultural values, we aim to discover the general status of women in both nations.

Secondly, in this study, we hope to examine the similarities and differences, if any, between Malaysia and the U.S. in the portrayal of gender. This comparative analysis of Malaysian and U.S. television commercials will illicit the differences or the similarities of sex-role depiction for these two nations. The purpose of this research question is to understand the different values and to generalize the gender portrayal situation in both nations. As Lee & Karloff (1999) pointed out, differences and cultural barriers among nations do exist, and a cross-cultural comparison study in advertising expression helps to identify the variedness and breakdown the communication barriers for advertisers.

Thirdly, this study attempts to find out whether males or females are the main target for prime time ads in these two countries. This should provide general indication about which gender is the decision-maker in the purchasing process and which gender has higher consumption ability within the two societies.

The next question to be addressed in this study is: Does the portrayal of women in prime time commercials reflect Malaysian cultural norms as described in the literature? Existing studies and cases have supported the theory that advertising is a mirror which

reflects contemporary gender roles in a society (e.g., Goffman, 1976; McArthur & Resko, 1975). However, we should not ignore the fact that the criteria of selecting a campaign vary from nation to nation and are affected by visible or invisible factors, for instance, political issues or religious issues. Therefore, to examine gender portrayal in the media versus the reality of gender sex-roles in the society will be a worthwhile exploration.

### **Research Objectives**

By conducting this study, a better perspective regarding sex-role depictions for Malaysian and U.S. society will be gained. There is currently a general impression that Malaysian media promotes gender disparity and stereotyping, but little data exists to corroborate this. After this study, researchers' knowledge about Malaysia and U.S. will not have to depend on just subjective perceptions but rather rely on objective facts presented by the data.



### Sampling Plan

A most popular Malaysian channel-TV 3, was selected as the sample frame for this study. According to a Malaysian Advertisers Association (MAA) report, the viewership for all the channels in Malaysia from January to June 1999 was: TV 3 (38%), TV 1 (25%), TV 2 (22%), NTV 7 (13%) and Metro Vision (2%) (MAA, 2000). The result showed that in 1999, TV 3 was Malaysia's most popular TV channel. For comparison, 21 hours of U.S. commercials broadcast in fall 1998 on NBC were analyzed. NBC was selected because it had the highest rating among U.S. viewers in prime time (Nielsen, 1998).

TV 3 is the first station in Malaysia that belongs to a privately owned commercial television station. TV 3 was founded in 1984 and has been the most popular channel since the '80s. Since that time, TV 3 has been the leader in Malaysian advertising and the most important entertainment programming channel (McDaniel, 1994). The audiences of TV 3 are national. Even the neighboring country, Singapore, receives TV 3 programs. Up until now, TV 3's prime time "Buletin Utama" maintains the top seat of the most-watched programs every week in Malaysia ([www.tv3first.htm](http://www.tv3first.htm)).

For this study, 21 hours of one week's television commercials were taped from TV3 channel during prime time (6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m.) from December 22th to 28th, 1999. Since Christmas is not a significant festival in Malaysia, the commercials during that period were not majorly influenced by the Christmas season. During the prime time period, programs on TV 3 are targeted to the two major ethnic groups in Malaysia--Malay

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and Chinese. From 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday to Sunday, Chinese episodes will be aired, which the target segment is Chinese. The Chinese episodes from Monday to Friday (6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.) use Chinese dialect--Cantonese and the shows originate from Hong Kong. From Saturday to Sunday, a Mandarin speaking show from Taiwan is broadcast.

Monday through Friday from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Malay targeted episodes are shown. Saturday and Sunday, different Malay targeted programs are released. From 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Malays targeted programs, which included news, is on the air through the whole week. Therefore, to cover the two major racial groups (Malay and Chinese) in Malaysia, this study will analyze TV 3 programming from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

## **Data Collection**

### **Intercoder Reliability**

Two female coders-- one English speaking advertising professor, and one multilingual (Malay, Chinese, Cantonese and English) advertising graduate student coded the U.S. television commercials. The Malaysian television commercials were coded by the same multilingual advertising graduate student and a multilingual (Malay, Mandarin, English and Cantonese) Malaysian Canadian undergraduate female student. Commercials for analysis are in any of three different major languages, which are Malay, Chinese, and English. Coders evaluated those television commercials separately and the inter-code reliability was calculated using the Holsti (1969) method. Data were analyzed using the SPSS program and the chi-square test was used to define the significance of data differences. Findings were reported in tables and narratives.

### Research Instrument

Armstrong and Kendrick's (1998) coding schema, a compilation from several different published studies, will be used. Sixteen items were coded for the commercials as a whole followed by up to 18 pieces of data for up to two primary male and two primary female characters in each commercial.

The compilation of the coding scheme is below.

Authors	Year of Publishing	Coding Schemes
Craig	1992	Characters present
Bretl & Cantor	1988	Setting and Primary narrator
Goffman	1976	Male/Female relationship roles
Soley & Kurzbard	1986	Sexual content, Sexual contact and Degree of dress
McArthur & Resko	1975	Primary role

Note: Primary character was defined as one who was on-camera for a minimum of three seconds or had at least one line of dialogue, this definition using the guideline set by Schneider & Schneider (1979).

### **Characters present**

Craig (1992) classified characters in commercials into certain categories. These same categories were used with slight rewording. For example, "all adults, mixed gender" became "all adults/mixed sex". Moreover, "no characters" and "all children or teens" were the additional categories for the present study. The categories are "all male adult"; "all female adult"; "all adults/ mixed sex"; "male adults with children or teens"; "female adults with children or teens"; and "mixture of ages and genders".

### **Setting**

The Bretl & Cantor (1988) categories of setting were adopted except that in this study we changed their "unknown" category to "other/unclear". The categories are "kitchen"; "bathroom"; "other room in the house"; "outdoors at home"; "outdoors away from home"; "restaurant/bar"; "business"; and "school".

### **Primary narrator**

The Bretl & Cantor (1998) "Sex of Narrator" categories were also used in the study. However, in their categories, they used "unclear" for individuals whose sex is not distinguishable. In the present study, we omitted their "unclear" and added "both". In addition, the present study also added "none" for no narrator commercial. Singing is not considered narration. The categories are "Female"; "Male"; and "Both".

### **Sexual Content, Sexual Contact and Degree of Dress**

The sexual content categories are "visual sexual images"; "verbal sexual references"; and "both". "Visual sexual images" are defined as sexually suggestive behavior between the two genders and other visual sexual images, such as a single character giving seductive glances to the camera or a model dancing in an alluring manner. In addition, visual sexual content also includes sexual contact between characters. For instance, scenes with male and female embracing or kissing each other are considered visual sexual images. Alternatively, male and female lying down and engaging in intercourse is also coded as a visual sexual image.

For "verbal sexual references" category, we borrowed Soley & Kurzbard's (1986) definition. According to Soley & Kurzbard's definition, "Verbal sexual references include mentions of nudity; love-making, breasts, except in reference to breast cancer; contraception, mentions of lifestyles suggestive of sexual activities (such as "swinging singles" or "playboy lifestyle"); and the use of words such as "voluptuous," "foxy," "playmates," and "romance". "(P.48).

Soley & Kurzbard's (1986) categories were applied to code for the presence of physical contact between male and female and the degree of dress. The original categories of Soley & Kurzbard for sexual contact were "displaying simple contact such as holding hands and "where contact was more intimate". In the present study, we break it down to four levels--"eye contact"; "holding hands"; "other contact (non-intercourse)", such as hugging and close dancing; and "intercourse". Soley & Kurzbard used Soley &

Reid's (1985) "intercourse" definition and interpreted that "Advertisements showing males and females embracing in a prone position, embracing while partially clad or nude, together in bed or depicting other bedroom scenes were coded as portraying intercourse" (P.48).

The categories of degree of dress were duplicated from Soley & Kurzbard, which were originally developed by Reid, Salmon & Soley in 1984. The categories are "demure"; "seductive"; "partially clad"; and "nude". Some changes of these categories have been made for the present study. In this study, "demure" was changed to "not sexually clad" and "seductive" became "suggestively clad". According to Soley & Kurzbard, "not sexually clad" is defined as typical dress. Outfits that open blouses and shirts that expose chest areas; tight clothing; mini-skirts and so forth are included in the "suggestively clad" category. "Partially clad" is included wearing bathing suits; showing bare shoulders; etc. "Nude" means unclothed bodies or only a towel over the shoulders, etc.

### **Primary role**

The primary role categories in this study were a little bit different from the central figure role in McArthur & Resko's (1975) categories. However, the basic idea is the same. McArthur & Resko have a broader central figure (called primary role in this study) scales on this roles coded. Their scales were "spouse"; "parent"; "homemaker"; "worker"; "professional", "real-life celebrity"; "interviewer or narrator";

"boyfriend/girlfriend", and "other". The present study narrows down these scales into "professional"; "homemaker"; "lover"; "parent"; and "other".

### **Coding sheet**

By using the above coding scheme, a standard coding sheet was established as a tool to analyze the content of every commercial. The first page of the coding sheet consists of information about the station, product, type of spot, length of spot, language, characters present, setting, male/female roles, primary narrator, sexual content, sexual contact, and apparent market target.

On the second page, information on two primary female characters is presented. On this page, categories including the primary role, degree of dress, race/ethnicity, age, roles, consumer role and role in relation to product will be provided. In the role column, different roles are displayed and are checked if any of them apply to the model. These roles are parent, responsible for home (home manager), homemaker, involved in household chores (house worker), adjuncts to other sex, autonomous individuals, advising opposite sex, professional, other employee (non-professional), lover, and other.

In the consumer role column, categories are "consumer of high-ticket item"; "consumer of sex appeal item"; "consumer of cleanliness items for home or self"; and "consumer of other item". The "consumer of high-ticket items" included expensive durable goods; for example, a washing machine, television, furniture, mobile phone, camera, automobile, etc. "Consumer of sex appeal item" is defined as any beauty



products. All packaged cleaning products like laundry detergent, kitchen cleaning detergent and cleaning item for personal use; for example, shampoo, or body shower belong to "consumer of cleanliness items for home or self" category. "Consumer of other items" includes all other items, which do not neatly fall into the aforementioned categories.

In the column of "Role in relation to product", categories are "product representative"; "product authority based on use"; "product authority, but not based on use". The same chart is presented on the third page for two primary male characters in the commercial. (A sample of the coding sheet was attached in the appendix section of this paper).

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSES

A total of 347 Malaysian and 504 U.S. prime time commercials were coded during an one-week period for this study. After the content was analyzed, the data were run statistically by SPSS and were reported. The results of the data analysis was addressed to each of the four research questions of this current study, and the findings are listed below.

The 347 Malaysian commercials yielded a total of 551 codable male and female primary characters, which resulted in a total of 15,470 judgments to be made by the coders. The same procedure was followed for the 504 U.S. commercials, from which 509 codable characters were generated resulting in a total of 17,226 judgments.

The Holsti (1969) method was used to calculate the intercoder reliability. Some discussion and agreements were made whenever coders encountered problems with vague definitions. Using the Holsti (1969) method for inter-coder reliability, an overall reliability coefficient of .964 for U.S. and .995 for Malaysia were computed.

### Research Question One

What is the content of Malaysian and U.S. prime time television commercials in terms of sex-role portrayal?

#### Paid product or service spots and PSA

Of the 347 Malaysian commercials, all were paid product or service spots and none were public service announcements (PSAs). For the U.S. commercials, most of them (99.6%, N=499) were paid product or service spots and only a few of the commercials (0.4%, N=2) were PSAs.

#### Length of the spots

The largest percentages of both Malaysian (36%, N=125) and U.S. (75%, N=367) commercials were 30-seconds in length. Commercials 20-seconds (22%, N=77) in length had the second highest frequency in Malaysian commercials. However, in the U.S., 15-second-length commercials (19%, N=92) had the second highest frequency.

#### Length of the spots

Length in Seconds	5	10	15	20	30	40
Malaysia	0%	11% (N=37)	7% (N=25)	22% (N=77)	36% (N=125)	15% (N=52)
U.S.A.	1% (N=5)	0.6% (N=3)	18.7% (N=92)	1.4% (N=7)	74.6% (N=367)	0%

### Language

Malay is the most widely spoken language in Malaysian commercials with a frequency of 57% (N=197), while Chinese (26%, N=89) is the second most widely spoken language.

In the U.S., almost all the commercials were spoken entirely in English (96%, N=483) except for a small 2%, which were spoken in both English and Spanish.

### Language

Language	English	English & Spanish	Chinese	Cantonese	Malay	Other/ None
Malaysia	10.7% (N=37)	0%	25.6% (N=89)	2% (N=7)	56.8% (N=197)	4.9% (N=17)
U.S.A.	96% (N=483)	2% (N=10)	0%	0%	0%	2% (N=10)

### **Product categories in terms of sex-role portrayal**

In Malaysia, females were more likely to appear in high-ticket item commercials compared to the males (female, 57%, N=61; male, 43%, N=45). In contrast, the U.S. favored males in high-ticket item commercials more than females (male, 65%, N=62; female, 35%, N=34). Both Malaysian and U.S. commercials tend to use female models for sex appeal item (Malaysia, 71%, N=15; U.S. 100%, N=14). However, no male model was used for sex appeal item in U.S. commercials. A high disproportion in the portrayal in females and male in cleanliness item were observed in Malaysian commercials (female, 79%, N=41; male, 21%, N=11). In the U.S., the same situation was found (female, 57%, N=8; male, 42%, N=6).

### **Product categories in terms of sex-role portrayal**

Product categories	High-ticket item	Sex appeal item	Cleanliness for home or self	Other items
Malaysian Female	20.9% (N=61)	5.1% (N=15)	14% (N=41)	59.9% (N=175)
Malaysian Male	17.4% (N=45)	2.3% (N=6)	4.2% (N=11)	76.1% (N=197)
U.S. A. Female	18.2% (N=34)	7.5% (N=14)	4.3% (N=8)	70.1% (N=131)
U.S.A. Male	25.1% (N=62)	0%	2.4% (N=6)	72.5% (N=179)

## Race

In the Malaysian ads, approximately twice as many Chinese female (61.3%, N=179) models were used compared to Malay female (38%, N=111) models. However, this phenomenon was reversed for Chinese male models (38.6%, N=100) and Malay (50.2%, N=130) male models. Overall, Chinese models (51%, N=279) had the highest population in Malaysian commercials and followed by Malay models (44%, N=241).

In the U.S., white models had the highest population (84%, N=429) and black models (11%, N=57) were the second largest group.

## Race

Race	Hispanic	White	Black	Asian American	Native American	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Unknown
Malaysian Female	0%	0.7% (N=2)	0%	0%	0%	38% (N=111)	61.3% (N=179)	0%	0%
Malaysian Male	0%	1.9% (N=5)	0.4% (N=1)	0%	0%	50.2% (N=130)	38.6% (N=100)	2.7% (N=7)	6.2% (N=16)
U.S.A. Female	3.7% (N=8)	84% (N=184)	9.6% (N=21)	2.7% (N=6)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
U.S.A. Male	0.7% (N=2)	84.5% (N=245)	12.4% (N=36)	1.7% (N=5)	0.3% (N=1)	0%	0%	0%	0.3% (N=1)

## Narrators

Male voice-over narrators dominated in both countries' commercials. In both Malaysia and U.S., more than three out of four (Malaysia, 77.5%, N=269; U.S., 76.3%, N=384) featured male-only narration or speakers. In Malaysia, 16% (N= 56) were narrated by females and less than 1% (N=2) featured both male and female voices. Almost 6% (N=20) had no voices, only images and text on screen.

In U.S., females narrated 17% (N=87) out of all the commercials. Only 2% (N=10) of the commercials featured both male and female voices. About 4% (N=22) had no voices, only images and words on screen.

**Character present in terms of sex-role portrayal**

"All adults mixed-sex" cast occupied one-third of both Malaysian and the U.S. commercials. U.S. commercials were more likely to have an "all-male" cast than Malaysian commercials (U.S., 20.6%, N=104; Malaysia, 13%, N=45). Still, "all male" casts had a higher percentage than "all female" casts in these two countries.

Also, both Malaysian (female with children, 4%, N=14; male with children, 3.7%, N=13) and U.S. (female with children, 4%, N=22; male with children, 3%, N=16) commercials had slightly higher proportion of commercials featuring females with children than male with children.

**Characters present in terms of sex-role portrayal**

Characters Mix	All male adult	All female adult	Adults mixed sex	All children	Male adult & children	Female adult & children	Mixture of ages & genders	None
Malaysian	13% (N=45)	11.8% (N=41)	28.8% (N=100)	1.7% (N=6)	3.7% (N=13)	4% (N=14)	22.2% (N=77)	14.7% (N=51)
U.S.A.	20.6% (N=104)	8.3% (N=42)	30.2% (N=152)	2.4% (N=12)	3% (N=16)	4.4% (N=22)	15.9% (N=80)	15.1% (N=76)

N= 851

## Setting

Multiple settings (Malaysia, 24.5%, N=85; U.S., 30.4%, N=153) and outdoor-away-from-home setting (Malaysia, 18.4%, N=64; U.S., 22.4%, N=113) were the most often featured scene in Malaysian and U.S. commercials. A business setting (Malaysia, 12.7%, N=44 ; U.S., 8.5%, N=43) was the third most frequent scene in both nations.

## Setting

Setting	Kitchen	Bathroom	Other room in house	Outdoors at home	Outdoors away from home	Restaurant or bar	Business Setting	School	Social	Multi-setting
Malaysia	1.2% (N=4)	0%	8.9% (N=31)	0%	18.4% (N=64)	4% (N=14)	12.7% (N=44)	0.3% (N=1)	0.9% (N=3)	24.5% (N=85)
U.S.A.	6% (N=30)	0.2% (N=1)	8.1% (N=41)	1.4% (N=7)	22.4% (N=113)	3.2% (N=16)	8.5% (N=43)	0.6% (N=3)	0.6% (N=3)	30.4% (N=153)



### Age

Characters in Malaysia were predominately younger than U.S. characters. 53% (N=155) of Malaysian female and 46.7% (N=121) of Malaysian male characters were between the age of 21-30. Female and male characters between 31-40 years old had the second highest proportion.

In the U.S., the majority of female (38%, N=83) and male (42%, N=120) models were between 31-40 years old. The second highest age proportion in U.S. was age between 21-30 (33%, N=73) for females and 41-50 (26%, N=76) for males.

### Age

Age	Under 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	Over 50
Malaysian Female	16.4% (N=48)	53.1% (N=155)	18.8% (N=55)	9.9% (N=29)	1.7% (N=5)
Malaysian Male	11.6% (N=30)	46.7% (N=121)	15.4% (N=40)	20.8% (N=54)	5.4% (N=14)
U.S.A. Female	9.6% (N=21)	33.3% (N=73)	37.9% (N=83)	16% (N=35)	3.2% (N=7)
U.S.A. Male	7.6% (N=22)	15.2% (N=44)	41.5% (N=120)	26.3% (N=76)	9.3% (N=27)

### Sexual Content

None of the Malaysian commercials was coded for sexual content, defined by Soley & Kurzbard (1986) as "advertisements containing verbal sexual references, those depicting male/female contact and portraying suggestively clad, partially clad and nude models" (P.48). Coders were instructed to record the highest level of sexual contact shown.

In the U.S., 88% (N=445) of the commercials did not feature any sexual content. 5% (N=26) visual sexual images, and 4% (N=19) were found to have verbal sexual references. In addition, 3% (N=14) of the commercials presented both visual sexual images and verbal sexual references.

### **Sexual Content**

Sexual Content	Visual sexual image	Verbal sexual references	Both	None
Malaysia	0%	0%	0%	100% (N=347)
U.S.A.	5.2% (N=26)	3.8% (N=19)	2.8% (N=14)	88.3% (N=445)

### **Sexual Contact**

Less than 1% (N=3) of all the Malaysian commercials featured sexual contact. 99% (N=344) of the commercials were coded as no sexual contact (holding hand, eye contact, and intercourse) at all.

In U.S., 91% (N=457) of the commercials had no sexual contact. The most frequently occurring highest form of contact was holding hands at 5% (N=24). The second highest form of contact was non-intercourse at 2% (N=11) and about 1% (N=6) were featured intercourse in the commercials.

### **Sexual Contact**

Sexual Contact	Eye contact	Holding hand	Non-intercourse	Intercourse	None
Malaysia	0%	0%	0.9% (N=3)	0%	99.1% (N=344)
U.S.A.	1.2% (N=6)	4.8% (N=24)	2.2% (N=11)	1.2% (N=6)	90.7% (N=457)

### **Degree of Dress**

The majority of Malaysian and U.S. commercial models were considered to be dressed in a non-provocative way. 97 % (N=284) and 99% (N=257) Malay females and males respectively were not sexually clad.

However, in the U.S., only 87.7% (N=192) of females were not sexually clad while 97.6% (N=281) of males were not sexually clad. U.S. commercials (7%, N=16) were more likely to portray women suggestively clad than Malaysian (1%, N=3) commercials.

None of the female or male model were portrayed nude in Malaysian commercials, but in the U.S., about 2 to 3% (N=6) of females and males were portrayed nude.

### **Degree of dress**

Degree of dress	Not sexually clad	Suggestively clad	Partially clad	Nude
Malaysian Female	97.3% (N=284)	1% (N=3)	1.7% (N=5)	0%
Malaysian Male	99.2% (N=257)	0%	0.8% (N=2)	0%
U.S.A. Female	87.7% (N=192)	7.3% (N=16)	2.3% (N=5)	2.7% (N=6)
U.S.A. Male	97.6% (N=281)	0.3% (N=1)	0%	2.1% (N=6)

### **Role of primary characters**

In the role of advising the other sex, females (Malaysia, 4%; U.S., 6%) had the higher proportion of being depicted as advising males. The percentages of males advising female were barely more than one percent (Malaysia, 0.8%; U.S., 0.7%) in both

Malaysian and U.S. commercials.

Female (Malaysia, 7%; U.S., 19%) was more likely to be portrayed to involved in household chores than male (Malaysia, 1%; U.S., 6%) in both nations. In the U.S., 14% of female were depicted as homemakers compared to less than 1% for males. No female was portrayed as a homemaker in Malaysian commercials and only 0.4% of males were homemaker.

U.S. commercials had a higher percentage of females (12%) and males (6%) portrayed as lovers compared to Malaysian commercials, which showed only 6% as female lovers and 4% as male lovers. Both Malaysian and U.S. commercials had a higher proportion of female (Malaysia, 15%; U.S. 18%) being depicted as parents than males (Malaysia, 13%; U.S., 6%). In addition, males were more likely to be depicted in professional role in both Malaysian (male, 46%; female, 26%) and U.S. (male, 46%; female, 22%) commercials.

**Role of primary characters**

Roles	Professional	Household Chores	Lover	Parent	Other
Malaysian Female	26% (N=76)	7.2% (N=21)	5.1% (N=15)	15.4% (N=45)	52.7% (N=154)
Malaysian Male	45.6% (N=118)	1.2% (N=3)	5% (N=13)	11.6% (N=30)	37.8% (N=98)
U.S.A. Female	21.5% (N=47)	18.7% (N=41)	11.9% (N=26)	14.2% (N=31)	40.2% (N=117)
U.S.A. Male	45.5% (N=132)	6.2% (N=18)	6.9% (N=20)	6.2% (N=18)	40.2% (N=88)

## **Research Question Two**

What are the similarities and differences, if any, between Malaysia and U.S. in the portrayal of gender?

According to the data, Malaysian and U.S. prime time commercials indeed have commonalities in their portrayal of gender. However, differences were also observed. To answer the above question, the comparison data reported show the similarities and differences between Malaysian and U.S. commercials.

### **Similarities**

Surprisingly, in contrast to the traditional stereotype, both Malaysian and U.S. prime time commercials significantly portray female models in advising roles towards the opposite sex. In the U.S., 14 out of 219 female models (6%) in one week of prime time programming played an advisory role towards males. This 6% figure is substantial when one considers that the advisory role was not assumed in any of the other directional advisory sets beyond even 1 percent, regardless of whether it be male-to-female, male-to-male, or female-to-female.

In the Malaysian commercials, which shared this same trend, the proportion was not as high as in U.S. commercials, but a 4% of female models (11 out of 292) were portrayed in the advising role.

Women have been characteristically confined to the domestic role since the

beginning of advertising history. For today, this is the same in both Malaysian and the U.S. In both nations, the casting of women as houseworkers was more than twice that of men in prime time commercials. Overall, U.S. ads were far more likely to portray females as having such household chore than Malaysian ads (U.S., 19%, N=41; Malaysian, 7%, N=21).

Approximately one-fourth of the female and male models were presented as autonomous individuals in the prime-time commercials of both countries with the autonomous individual role being coded slightly more often in U.S. commercials than in Malaysian commercials. Male models in the U.S. were more likely to be depicted as an autonomous individual than the other three segments (Malaysian females, Malaysian males, and U.S. females) in this comparison study.

Both Malaysian and U.S. commercials were more inclined to feature females as lovers than males. Compared to Malaysian female models, U.S. female models had a higher inclination to be shown as lovers. In the U.S., the percentages of female and male models who were depicted as lovers differed by a factor of 2 (female, 12%, N=26; male, 6.9%, N=20), while the difference was not that marked in Malaysian commercials (female, 5.1%, N=15; male, 5%, N=13).

The tendency to present females as parents more than males in the advertising was also observed in this study. Females were more likely than males to be the parent in both Malaysian and U.S. commercials. However, the U.S. commercials showed more stereotypic attitude. According to the data, U.S. women (14.2%, N=31) were featured

more than men (6.2%, N=18) in the parent role. Interestingly, Malaysian female and male models fairly equally (female, 15.4%, N=45; male, 11.6%, N=30) served in a parent role (women still had the higher percentage).

Such gender disparity was also found in professional role portrayal for both Malaysian and U.S. commercials. In each nation, males are predominantly the professional role in prime-time commercials. This phenomenon was more severe in the U.S. where males played professional roles more than twice as often as females (male, 43.4%, N=126; female, 18.3%, N=40).

In Malaysia, the male proportion appearing in professional roles also surpassed that of females (male, 47.9%, N=124; female, 25.7%, N=75), by almost a factor of two.

Finally, for product categories like sex appeal items and personal and home cleanliness items, both nations preferred female models to promote those products. Especially in the U.S., female models dominated the sex appeal product category while not even one male model had been used to advertise in this category.

In Malaysian commercials, female models held an indisputably unequal percentage (79%) of personal or home cleanliness roles while male had only 21%.

## Differences

Apparently, Malaysian commercials favor youth even more than their U.S. counterparts. According to the data, 155 (53%) out of 292 Malaysian female models and 121 (47%) out of 259 male models were in their 20s. In addition, 16% (N=48) of Malaysian female models and 11.6% (N=30) of male models were in their teens, attesting to the high value placed on youth in those commercials. In contrast, the age group between 31-40, which more suggests ideas of maturity, is the most predominant group in the U.S., with 37.9% (N=83) and 41.5% (N=120) representation for females and males, respectively. Female models aged 50 or over were used in barely more than 2% (N=5) of the 292 Malaysian commercials.

U.S. commercials were much alike in this aspect with only 3% (N=7) of the 219 commercials presenting older females.

In the terms of dress, U.S. commercials have a tendency to use sex appeal to market their products. For instance, U.S. commercials had 12% (N=27) of the total female models dressed either suggestively clad, partially clad, or nude, while Malaysian commercials had scarcely 3% (N=8) of female models dressing foxy. In addition, approximately 3% (N=6) of the female models were nude in U.S. commercials, and no nude women were coded in Malaysian commercials.

A difference in the portrayal of women as homemakers was found between Malaysian and U.S. commercials. Approximately one-sixth of the U.S. female models was depicted as homemakers, while none of the Malaysian female models were portrayed



in this role. However, both nations showed males as homemakers in less than 1% out of the total. The homemaker role was barely seen in Malaysian commercials but had been coded in U.S. commercials almost six times as much.

According to the data, female models had a higher frequency of selling in high-ticket items in Malaysian commercials than male models (female, 57.5%, N=61; male, 42.4%, N=45). However, more male models were used to advertise high-ticket items in U.S. commercials (male, 64.5%, N=62; female, 35.4%, N=34) the opposite of the situation in Malaysia.

### **Research Question Three**

What gender is the main target for the prime time ads in these two countries?

According to the data, Malaysian and U.S. commercials try to appeal to adult male and female consumers. Approximately one half of the Malaysian and U.S. commercials were found to be addressed to both adult male and female consumers as their apparent market targets.

The general belief is that males dominate today's economy. In this study, although half of the commercials were addressed to both sexes, males still received more attention than females. For both Malaysian and U.S. commercials, approximately one-fourth of the commercials appealed mainly to male targets and only one-sixth mainly to female targets. It is without exaggeration that today's society is still male dominated, and marketers understand this situation clearly. In addition, it is believed that when one considers the

issue in terms of decision-making, the one who has the stronger financial power has the higher tendency to be in charge. Therefore, in selecting target gender, marketers are more likely to choose the one playing the key role financially.

In the U.S., the target preference for males was even more obvious. In the U.S., the most often advertised product category was automobile (16%, N=81) and in general, automobile product usually appeals to men more than women. In Malaysia, packaging food (20%, N=68) had the highest frequency among all the product, however, durable appliance (15%, N=52) was the second highest frequency category that being advertised. From the data, male appealing product categories had the highest frequency in the commercials in the U.S. and second highest frequency in Malaysian, thus, a statement can be made that male-target oriented tendency in the commercials were observed in both countries.

In addition to the higher proportion of male-oriented commercials compared to female, male models were also far more represented than female (total male models, 290; female models, 219). In contrast, in Malaysia the population of female models was slightly higher than that of male models (female, 292; male, 259) even though male-oriented commercials there comprised a higher percentage than female-target oriented.

#### **Research Question Four**

Does the portrayal of women reflect Malaysian cultural norms as described in the literature?

Factors that have helped mold the polyethnic culture of Malaysia are various, such as politics, economy, beliefs, and religion. Malaysia is a patriarchal society, so in many aspects women are less appreciated than men. This situation, as was discussed in Chapter 2 (Literature review), is partially formed by both religious and non-religious beliefs that promote gender disparity. Overall, Malaysian cultural norms favor men more than women. In general, women are expected to be housewives and are therefore associated with duties and chores pertaining to the household and kitchen. In the larger society, women have inferior roles with less financial power and lower social status.

According to the findings in this study, Malaysian commercials indeed stereotype sex-role portrayals. And, the stereotyped depictions undoubtedly reflected Malaysian cultural norms in the aspect of women portrayal. Malaysian commercials tended to connect women with household chores and cleanliness items. In addition, less than 1 percent of Malaysian commercials contained sexual contact or any other sexual content. This phenomenon reflects the conservative Islamic relationship between males and females. Furthermore, the degree of dress in Malaysian commercials was far more conservative than that found in U.S. commercials, which also reflects the inherent conservatism of Malaysian society.

The commercials also showed that women instead of men were more likely to be

featured with children and to be portrayed as parents. This has been the most stereotypical role of women throughout history (Ruether, 1994; Butler & Paisley, 1980; Courtney & Whipple, 1974). In such patriarchal societies like Malaysia, women have been in the roles of wives and mothers who stay at home to take care of their husband and children as their main responsibilities.

Among all the women characters in the commercials, professional role was the most frequently depicted (26%, N=75). The second highest frequency role of women was depicted as a parent (15%, N=45). The third highest frequency role of women were featured as involving in household chores and lover (about 7% each). In addition, the tendency of women being portrayed in advising role were higher than men (women 4%, N=11; male, 0.8%, N=2). Encouragingly, however, today the status of women in Malaysia is improving. Women no longer only serve as wives and mothers; they are increasingly career-oriented and focused on their own personal goals as well as the demands of their family. In today's Malaysian society, women are larger contributors to the economy and women are more appreciated by the society than before. Overall, they are more independent and well-educated. Even commercials show that professional roles are no longer monopolized by men. In fact, the gender differences in professional role portrayal is no longer so extreme. The current data show that 48% of males were depicted as professional while 26% of women were likewise depicted. Yet, a disparity still exists in advertising as well as in real life.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

This study was designed to examine the gender roles in Malaysian and U.S. television commercials and the differences between these two nations in terms of sex-role portrayal. Prime time commercials (6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in Malaysia and 7:00 p.m. to 10 p.m. in U.S.) were taped throughout an entire week, totaling 21 hours for each country. The most popular television station's commercials for each country (Malaysia: Television 3; U.S.: NBC) were chosen as targets for the content analysis. After analyzing the content of 347 Malaysian and 504 U.S. prime time commercials, a comparison between these two nations was made to address to four research questions.

A coding schema developed by Armstrong and Kendrick (1998) was used as the instrument for the coding purpose. For each nation, two coders were trained to code the commercials, each working separately. A total of sixteen factors involving the commercials-as-a whole (such as whether the primary narrator was male or female) followed by 18 pieces of data for up to two primary male adult characters and two primary female adult characters were coded in each commercial.

The similarities and differences between Malaysia and the U.S. were listed. The findings showed that the two nations have greater similarities than differences. The similarities include the fact that women in both countries were depicted in an advisory

role more often than men, and women were more likely than men to be portrayed in a domestic role (housemaker, involved with household chores). Other similarities, such as the disproportionate depiction of women in traditional roles (e.g. lover and parent) compared to men, were found in both nations. Moreover, both Malaysian and U.S. commercials tended to feature men more than women in professional roles. Thus, a conclusion can be drawn by saying that the stereotypical portrayal in gender roles was found in both nations.

Despite these similarities, differences between Malaysian and U.S. commercials were observed. For instance, there was a difference in the attitude of using youth as an appeal to advertise products. Generally speaking, Malaysian commercials appreciated youth far more than U.S. commercials. We believe that this stems from the fact that traditional societies like Malaysia do not appreciate women for their intellectual abilities but rather for their youth and beauty. Therefore, to match the favor of the society, Malaysia advertisers tended to use young and pretty girls to gain attention from the viewers.

Another difference between of these two countries was the manipulation of sex appeal. The U.S., compared to Malaysian commercials, had a remarkably higher percentage of commercials featuring provocatively dressed characters, sexual content, and sexual contact.

Malaysian commercials reflected the cultural norms of that country. Malaysia is a patriarchal society in which men receive more respect than women in many aspects, such

as social status, economic power, and politics. Even though the single largest categorized female role in this study was the role of a professional, the fact that women were more likely to be featured in domestic roles is evident since most all of the other roles-- involving lovers, parents, household chores, and responsible for home-- are domestic roles. Women were more likely to serve in one of these various domestic roles than as a professional. This phenomenon in the commercials reflects the current situation in which Malaysian society favors women in domestic roles and women suit themselves with this role as well. In this Islamic society, a woman is the "queen of the household," and women are allowed to be what they want to be in society as long as they do not neglect their responsibilities to their husband, children and society (Karim, 1995).

### **Conclusions**

Malaysian society has been experiencing dramatically growth in its economy during the past ten years. The Malaysian government's ambition is to turn Malaysia into a developed country by its Vision 2020 program and the establishment of the Super Multimedia Corridor. However, a conflict has arisen between the desire to modernize and the desire to retain traditional values. For example, the Malaysian government might feel uncomfortable freely opening the society to materialism and might try to restraint suggestive advertising approaches. In this study, contradictions in the way women are portrayed in the television commercials were observed, and these observations reflected the current ambiguous role that women have been experiencing.

The uncertainties of the woman's role in Malaysian society were reflected by the commercials. On one hand, more than half of the female roles in the commercials were domestically related. On the other hand, the portion of women being portrayed in professional roles was about the same as that in the U.S. This reflects women's improving status in Malaysia, yet the stereotypical social perceptives toward women is still unbreakable.

Often the younger generation of Muslim women in Malaysia has great difficulties deciding what behavior is appropriate for them (Karim, 1995). On one hand, they have experienced the liberalism of dress and social entertainment brought along by Western feminism, while on the other, they are conscientious of the clear and conservative rules of dress and social interaction mandated by Islamic religious tradition. This tension between the demands of tradition and the new liberality of feminism is also seen in non-Muslim women, only to a slightly lesser extent. In these commercials, Malaysian characters were generally dressed in a non-provocative way. Whenever suggestively-clad and partially-clad characters did appear in the commercials, those characters were always Chinese models. For both groups, this pressure is especially felt in the social context, where their image and reputation both to elders and to peers--especially those who are potential marriage partners--hinges greatly on their conformance to traditionally-prescribed roles.

The difference between Malaysian and the U.S. commercials was the use of sex appeal. In a conservative Islamic society like Malaysia, the use of sex and sex symbols in



advertising are inappropriate. To show acts of physical intimacy such as kissing or hugging, which are often used in U.S. commercials (e.g. Uncle Sam Instant Rice, and Certs breath mints) is considered corrupting the traditional values in Malaysia. Although it is true that non-Muslim Malaysians may commonly be seen displaying affection in public, for a Muslim to do this would not only break social norms but potentially local laws as well.

The advertising codes in Malaysia have clearly drawn lines in the use of sex appeal on television. In the Advertising Code For Television and Radio Ministry of Information (2000), the category of "Unacceptable products, services and scenes", specifically lists scenes such as those of "Scenes of amorous, intimate or suggestive nature" and those that feature "kissing between adults" (P. 186). This study's findings demonstrated the strictness with which these codes were applied by the advertisers in television commercials. Among the prime time Malaysian commercials, less than 1 percent featured any sexual content or sexual contact.

According to the literature, U.S. commercials usually have a higher percentage of male characters than female (McArthur & Resko, 1975; Kenneth & Scott, 1996), and this study is consistent with that finding. In contrast, our findings showed that Malaysian commercials had a higher percentage of female characters than male. Some international studies had previously been done separately with other countries for both U.S. and Malaysian television commercials, and these concluded that each country bore gender

stereotypes to a certain extent (Gilly, 1986; Sengupta, 1995; Wee, Choong & Tambyah, 1996). This statement was also consistent with the result of this current study.

In conclusion, this study found the stereotypical gender role portrayal in both Malaysian and U.S. commercials. Malaysian prime time commercials reflect the conservative social norms of Malaysia. The differences between Malaysian and U.S. commercials are significant in terms of degree of dress and the use of sex appeal. In addition, Malaysian commercials also reflected the ambiguous social role that today Malaysian women are experiencing.

### **Recommendation**

For a future study, researching and developing a time track detailing the changes in women's roles in the past ten years is suggested. Gender role portrayal has certain degree of influence of the buying behavior. Therefore, it is important for advertisers to understand sexual norms and how these are changing. In addition, we suggest submitting data to more sophisticated statistical analysis which could reveal additional findings.

Malaysia is a polyethnic society. The differences in the gender role among three different races play a significant role in the consumer behavior patterns (Schutte & Ciarlante, 1998). A study that examines the differences in gender portrayal among the three major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) would give advertisers better ideas of how to address different target segments.

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