

Pathology of “Audience Phantasm” in Media: Globalization and the Era of After Global Village

Mehdi Mohsenian-Rad (Ph.D)
Imam Sadegh University
Faculty of Culture and Communication
Tehran, Iran

Abstract

In this paper, we first overview the evolution of the *role phantasm* on the so called “people who are exposed to the media”, and discuss the differences among the chronologically developed terms such as “audience”, “receivers”, “users”, and very recently “communicatees”. We argue that the ongoing developments towards the globalization requires thinking of “people who are exposed to the media” as *active* beings, rather than *passive* beings. In fact, we believe that the key characteristic of a communicatee is indeed its independence on making decision based on its own needs. In this regard, as the information and communication technologies (ICTs) advance in the upcoming decades, the ability of being selective and the range of choices to be selected by the communicatees, severely extend and indeed turns communicatees to “selective communicatees”. By further developing this theorem, we argue that since there was a delay for the developing countries to access to the modern media technologies (i.e., delay in entering the Gutenberg and Marconi Galaxies), the current viewpoint of the media authorities in the developing countries on the “people who are exposed to the media” is still “audience”-oriented. In other words, the evolution of role phantasm from “audience” to “communicatees” is not completed yet. At the end, by considering Iran in a case study, we argue that the “audience phantasm” (i.e., illusive imagination of having “audience”, rather than “selective communicatees” by the media authorities), can result in severe damage to the local media industry in some of the developing countries. In particular, “audience phantasm” may cause the local media authorities make no effort to address the real needs of the future selective communicatees, exacerbating people’s tendency to the oversea’s media.

Keywords: Media, Audience Phantasm, Illusion of Control, Message Consumer, Communicatees, Global Village, Message Bazaar.

Section I: Audience and Inject Ional

“Audience” is a word remained from ages led to oral communications; a word that can be even found in communication literatures from 2300 before Aristotle period (1). This archaic term originally was referred to some groups of people who (before Media Era) were gathering in some (special) site for listening to a lecture, a discourse, or some discussion (2). Some general characteristics and limitations to their gathering can be added (3). With the development of the early media (e.g., newspapers), the concept of audience was generalized and included, at the first step, the book readers, the radio listeners, and the TV viewers (4). Later on, in order to make this archaic term adapted with the viewers/listeners of the early media, the adjective of “unfitted” (“heterogeneous”?) was further added to the term “audience”. Unfitted audience is defined as a diverse group of people whose interests are focused on a single subject matter (5). Thus, followed by the first media studies, this claim was brought up that the media is faces by some creatures as some kind of “fragmented” and “passive” ones that are indeed vulnerable against media’s strong stimulations (6).

This transformation was simultaneous with being designed the first Communication Process Model by *Cload Shanon* and *Warren Viewer* in 1948, a model affected by the specificity of its designers - the American Bell Phone Co. engineers - used the term of “receiver” instead of “audience” (7). After 4 years, when *Wilbur Schramm* - a well-known professor in Stanford University and the founder of department of communication studies (8) - designed the second communication model, he used the term of “destination” in his own model instead of the archaic term “audience” or “receiver”(9). However, 21 years later when Schramm revised his model, left out the term “audience” and used the term “source” for *both* sides of a communication process (10).

Besides believing in “audience”, there was also the theory of “Inject Ional” or “Magical Bullet”. According to this theory, media audiences were considered some creatures with *no will* against inject of media’s propagandas, and as if every message was simply being volleyed towards the audiences (11). This theory believed that the messages of mass media have more or less, the same effect on all audiences exposed media (12). The 1950s was a decade that during it the Inject Ional Theory, as a product of the American communication experts’ first attention to *Gubels’* functions - the Intelligence Minister in Nazi Regime Cabinet during World War II - was doubted challenged and finally rejected (13).

Section II: Formation of Audience Phantasm in Developing Countries

It is known that the undeveloped and developing countries have experienced some remarkable delay in using media (14). For instance, having been published the first newspaper in Europe in 1597, Iran was being ruled by Abass Safavid King and Islamic pulpit (*Menbar*) was indeed the most important communication device. It was 240 years before publishing the first Iranian newspaper in 1837. In fact, during that longtime, although the pulpit in Europe was being able to get this chance to recognize its different

nature from media, in Iran the pulpit continued to have its traditional function just as a single media and could even play a significant role in formation of constitutional revolution in the first 1900s (15).

The same condition was seen in most countries in the Middle East region. Even, in some of countries, like Oman, any magazine or newspaper was not being published at all since 1971 (16).

In Iran, during the short period of 38 years, from 1941 (foundation of the first Radio Center and 15 years later, foundation of the first T.V Center) to 1979 (the year in which Islamic Revolution took place) prominent background for understanding global changes, from “audience” to “receiver”, was not prepared because the media were just acting as instruments aimed to legitimize the Kingdom. However, the authorities in third world countries continued to take this theory into consideration even till 1970s. Relying upon this theory, they contained their interior political propaganda and considered the creatures faced to media as the audience of the pulpits, in other words, they suffered such a historical ignorance that I call it “audience phantasm”.

Audience phantasm is a kind of daydream that, like every other collective unconsciousness, is a normal state in consciousness, not an ill habit nor an emotional disorder (17). The followers of audience/phantasm concept, similarity theory in psychology, consider the apparent similarities between archaic precedent media, like pulpit with modern media, even modern communication technologies and suffer this continued illusion that media audience is, indeed, pulpit audience.

Psychological similarity theory claims that it is more likely the motivations are similar in some aspects are accumulated together and taken a single form in mind rather than the possibility of accumulation of those motivations are not similar; and one of motivations causing tendency to daydream is “to solve unsolved problems and contradictory feelings” (18).

The attitudes of decision makers in media realm can be likely explained through in terms of their consistence of inject ional theory can be likely explained through issue of Control Theory. This theory refers to condition in which the individual tends to believe he/she has the power controlling phenomena or affecting then, without having really such a power (19). This theory claims that individual primary successes makes this believe in them that they can truly control the situation outputs. The same condition is true for the gamblers faced to continued wining in primary stages and suffered some kind of illusion of skill and possibly get to continued lost or even lose their all properties. In fact, the imagination of control can be much more than real power for controlling any situation (20).

As an example for illusion of control, we can usually consider the healers in the nomadic tribes, who would treat the patients by reading particular prays and performing rites. In this regard, H. Matute states that the human history is full of instances when the people got the illusion of having imaginary powers such that they thought the incidents were result of their imaginary powers. However, I believe that the illusion of control still exists as an important phenomenon in the human societies. As an example, we may refer to what people see in the imaginary world in the cybernetic environments.

In (35), H. Matute reports the results of a computer-based laboratory test on 190 volunteers in 2007. Among the volunteers, 92 persons were participating in the test

through the Internet, while 98 persons were participating in the test while they were actually present in the laboratory. The test was as follows. All volunteers were using the same software. In this software, a bright blue flash would appear once in a while. In 75% of the times, the blue flash would appear every 1 second, while in 25% of the times, the blue flash would appear every 5 seconds. Although the users had no control on the appearance of the blue flash, the software was developed like a computer game environment. Half of the volunteers (group A) were told that they should try to make the appearance of the blue flash more frequently, while the other half of the volunteers (group B) were told that they should try to avoid the blue flash. Each of groups A and B were further divided into two subgroups: the first group (W) were told that they may not be able to control the appearance of the blue flash, while the second group (NW) were not told any thing in this regard. After 50 trials, each volunteer were asked whether he/she could achieve the goal. The volunteers would answer this question by giving a number between 0 (no control) and 100 (complete control). The results showed that although the second group (who did not know they may not have any control) had higher degree of illusion of control, this phenomenon was observed in all groups. No group had an average number of less than 30.

In general, one may say that the societies which are involved in controlling the media, they are looking for a control which is not really possible and seems to be more like a illusion of phantasm of control, rather than real control. An interesting example in this regard would be what happened in Iran on the issue of controlling the video recorders and tapes. Everything started when using video recorders became popular and this triggered the police forces to do various actions to avoid it. After a couple of years and realizing that it is not a possible thing to do, the government ended up in establishing hundreds of video clubs.

It seems that the consequence of decision maker's audience phantasm in the media area among developing countries and also their kind of views towards nature and function of classic media (e.g. Press, radio, TV, etc) and modern technologies (satellite, internet, etc.) can be explained in the Reactance Theory. This theory claims (that) losing freedom of selection is led to such reactions as "excitation". Laboratory researches have showed that the prohibited music and books have had more attraction for the subject. In other words, censorship pf a message causes that the audiences change their own views towards the position defended by that message, and also have more tendency to receiving the same message (21).

Section III: User and Communicatee

During the period of post-believing in Magical Bullet, a considerable mass of significant achievements about the process of communications in media has gradually been achieved. For instance, in Uses and Gratification Theory, that it's based (foundation) were formed after introducing "Communicatee Model" in 1979, The term of user was used instead of the "receiver". In the Uses and Gratification Theory, members of audiences are regarded as active consumers as media contents, not passive

operators/agents faced with the media; and, in fact, media consumers are paid more attention than media “message”. The media consumers are used for consumption, and their consumption is as a part of variable of a special duration in the process of communication and its effects. According to this theory, a user is an active and a goal directed creature, which is extensively responsible for media selection, a selection is relied on his own communicative needs. In this theory, media are just one of the ways for meeting our needs (22). Other researches have showed that although an active, goal directed and selector individual in the face of media, is an independent person, he/she is an active member of a group interacting with themselves and also with others (23). It was also revealed that they are formed rather around a special message than a special sender [e.g. there is not any visual audience, for example, Tehran or Masqat T.V, but there is a consumer for special TV programme broadcasting accidentally from Tehran or Masqat. In other words, an sender, from status and ability perspective, is only one effective factor in building of audiences and, at the lower level, a message [e.g. “what says” is more important than “who says”(24). One of the recent terms for audience, is the term of “Communicatee”; a term that gives some weight equal to “Communicator” or sender as audience. Communication experts believe about new term of communicatee that while using the communicatee term we consider conditions in which some information is transmitted through a communication line from communicatee (25).

A communicatee is an active but social creature, whose decisions is subjected to his individual and social characteristics. For instance, it has been revealed that some part of communicatee judgment about the content of media may be subjected to this fact that one judges by what group and – in other words- what anchor whom he is depended to. “Anchor” is a word related to “social Judgment Theory”. This theory is concentrated on how individuals judge about something, and shows that how individuals assess desirability of a message based on their own complicated inner anchors. If he recognizes that on of 5 weights is 10 kilos, he will assess other weights through weight proportion affected by lifting the anchor weight (that is 10 kilos). Among the tests confirming this theory, one is “cold & heat recognition test”. If a participant who is faced with 3 pots containing three cold, tepid and warm water is requested to put his right hand in to the warm water pot, and the left hand in to the cold water pot, and keeps them in to pots for a while, and then put simultaneously both hands in to tepid water pot, it is obvious every hands will have a different cold and heat senses or feeling depended on their judgment is relied on what anchor (26).

Another characteristics of the communicatee is that he is a goal directed creature based on his own characteristics, even on some explanation, may change the meaning of gained messages in his mind. Such a phenomenon is explained well by “Cognition Dissonance”. Many studies showed that whenever the communicatee is exposed some cognitive elements in which no possible support for his previous own and other cognitive elements is seen, he avoiding cognition dissonance, possibly turns to such methods as “distorting” or misusing information (27) or, Information-Integration Theory has showed that how message receivers use their own accumulated information as a means of forming their views and prejudices and also functioning positively or negatively toward a special object or phenomenon. At the stage of accumulating and organizing information,

if they faced with information supporting their views, they label them positive valance and if does not support them, they call them negative valance information. In this operation, they use standards; one of them is information weight. This weight is not stable at all, thus there are some individual that are related to how much the information – in their own views – is real or unreal, they give them necessary weight. The more is information weight, the more is the effect on the weight allocator views (28).

Section IV: The Consequences of Audience Phantasm among Developing Countries Such as Iran

Audience phantasmer (experts of audience phantasm) are not merely responsible for knowing what audience wants, but they regard their own responsibility to determined what the audience have to want. Thus, this function has two consequences:

1. Dissatisfaction of audience phantasmic communicative production, and
2. Searching for different messages (29).

Just before development of TV broadcasting satellites, border regions residents were searching for different messaged in neighboring country's senders (30). Having been developed the satellite, a third motivation has been also added that it maybe call "desire to cultural analogy" (31).

In general, those research reports showing that the Iranian national TV has not be successful on satisfies the communicatees' needs rarely appear in publications of the governmental research centers. Although, it is still possible to find a few evidences in this regard among the current reports. For example, the TV & Radio Research Center revealed in a report in 2004 that 37% of the Iranian youth told that the TV programs are not satisfy their needs and desire (36).

About the claim of unreality of scenes in Iranian TV, we can refer that in all serials produced by Iranian TV, women and girls are Islamic veiled, while we know that it is not the same in real life. But about TV dejection in Iran one can correlates it to another object, and it is simultaneously using 2 chronology (e.g. solar and lunar calendar); A phenomenon that not only intensifies TV programs unhappiness compared with other country's TV program in the world, but also makes different the TV content from real life atmosphere. The following model that has been designed by the term of congratulation and morning days in 2006/1385 shows clearly that Iranian TV viewer was successively faced on day with TV performers happy behavior. These behaviors sometimes caused/prepared an artificial atmosphere that could, in turn, suggest this belief that Iranian TV glob is different from the real world.

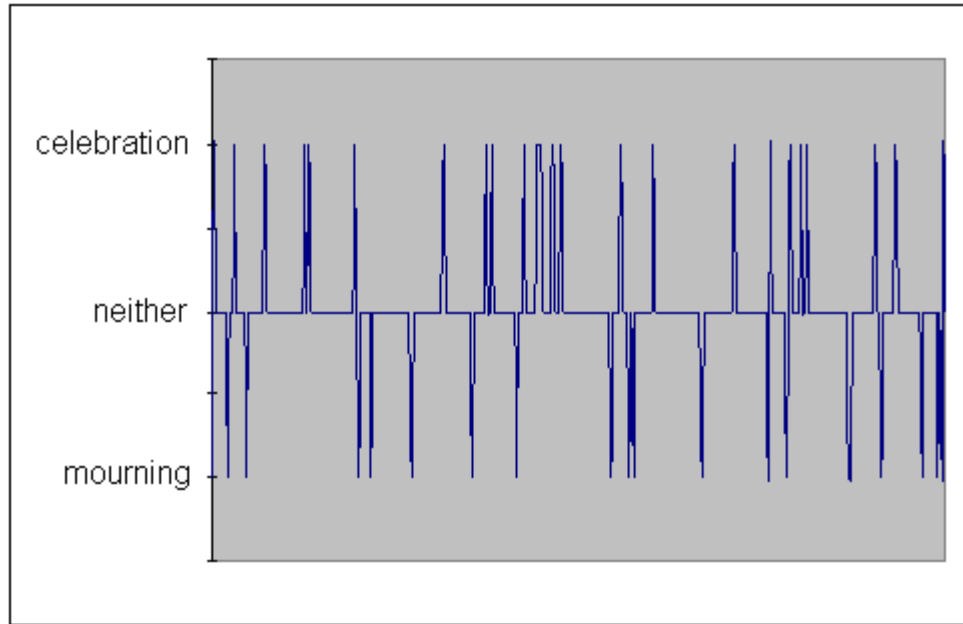


Fig. 2. The diagram of happy/sad faces for the TV showmen due to the alternation of celebration and mourning events during the year of 2005.

Section V: Selector Communicatee in Post Global Village

One of the projections about communicatee’s role as an active and goal directed consumer in the future, is Message Bazaar Theory. This theory believes that with developing stock technologies and shifting information and improving artificial intelligence, the age of post global village will come in which communicatee will gain an even upper status, because the more important share of gate keeping discarded in White communicative model – a share was always in under communicator monopoly – will be transmitted to communicatee (32); This fact in turn, is affected by his “selection” ability; a phenomenon that Katz call it as communicatee’s initiative to relate his understood needs to what media present (33). For this reason, Message Bazaar Theory discusses about “selector communicatee” whose selection will be a selection based on his communicative needs. He/ she, in a message bazaar there is a mass of messages from different origins under his/her selection, at the first stage, searches dynamically and then select them. A significant note is that the structure of message bazaar is similar to the architecture of traditional bazaars. In those bazaare, the distance between customer and the cell of both sides of bazaars has not been subjected to bigness and smallness of the cells. In other words, there is no difference between the access distance for selection from such a global TV broadcaster as C.N.N, and no difference from the access distance of local TV. At the same time, it is always possible that a communicatee, even at the traditional bazaars, mechanically turns in to communicator.

Whenever for a comprehensive study, of the dynamic web of a message bazaar and trace this phenomenon from the perspective of the cell – like media are positioned both

sides of a traditional bazaar, we will see that every dynamic communicatee, according to their most variable needs, will consume a special message in a common form from a special origin.

In order to comprehend this phenomenon more clearly, if we imagine every selector communicatee as a colorful glass that every moment according to, it is correlated or co-selected with what colors of other communicatees in the world the media will see hundreds of big and small colorful circles that their colors are some synthesis of overlapping colors of communicatees in the same collection. They will occupy the space of global communicatee sphere in the age of media and pre-global village was known with the term of “mass” (34)

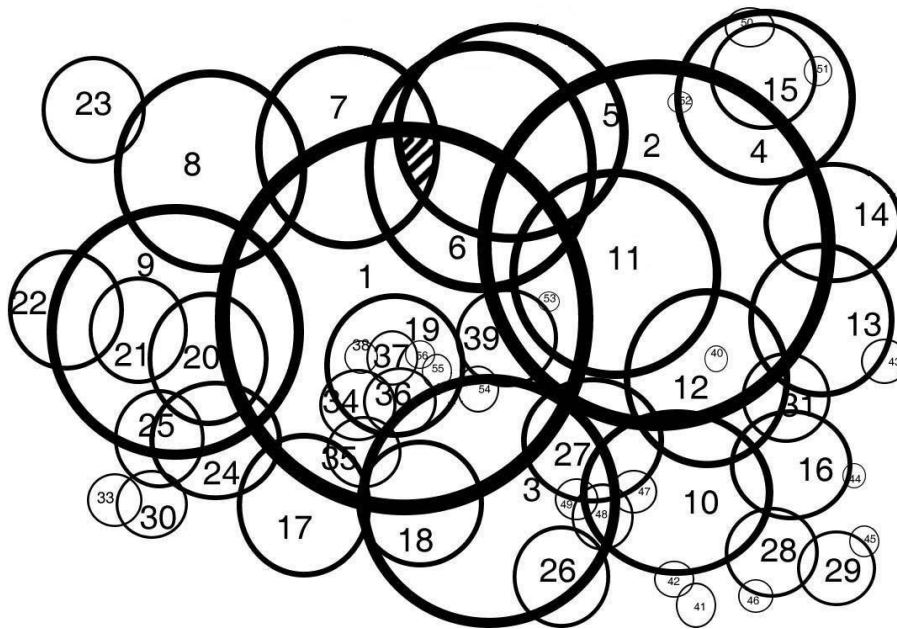


Fig. 2. Selector Communicatees instead of Mass in Post Global Village

Section VI: Mechanisms for Exiting from chaos in Global Village and it’s resulted Message Bazaar

1. In explaining the media function, instead of believing theory of Inject Ional and Magical Bullet – about both national and external media – and in fact instead of believing such an origin that Individuals in the face of media are obedient and humiliated creatures, we must accept the origin of the being a selector Individual and the origin of his process of communication; and using systematic analysis, consider the ICT as a collection of transaction elements in life of the contemporary human and try to divulge systematic reaction to pressures caused by environmental changes, beside the surviving and gaining national goals, considering some courses like Open System in System Theory.

2. Since it is not possible to use traditional supervising the external media but with a tendency to inside, to increase the ability of internal medias against external waves, it is important to finish the state monopoly of media and replace take caring methods (function of mother toward their children) to executive methods (function of military officials on scouting towers).
3. To recognize the global message bazaar and it's mechanism codes, we must take an intellectual and unemotional way and within this way find the executive policies to compete in these bazaars base on internal consumer's needs.
4. National media specially media under government management, must try to replace horizontal communication methods to vertical communication methods.
5. It is necessary for state media to being changed to some kind of means for three parted discussion for government, nation and the elite and instead of sloping the information to media (mainly in form of propaganda) they increase the possibility of access for the elites and media to pure data. In fact, instead of being speaker of government for media, they considered as data processor. The elites are such individuals that – for their hard mental education- not necessarily for academic education – have some favorable elements for origin of nature, wide mental perspectives and high ability like bravery, dauntlessness, assistance and moral of scarify their personal interesting for public interesting (35) (**Batomor, 1990, p.p.77,9**). Such individuals that Qeraan describes them as scholars and wise persons that have characteristic of “fear” and are very respectful for God.
6. To meet the audience's need, they use scientific methods of communicative deliberation for community needs, instead of power – based position within apparently peaceful behaviors.
7. They must consider the characteristics of modern media and communicative reality of contemporary world for making media rules.
8. It must be possible for internal media communicatees to recognize their local culture and values.
9. National audiences must try to be aware of Cultural Interference in building and function of message global bazaar and it's forming elements (Iranian vegetable and traditional chemists believed that eating together of such foods as melon and honey is not good, because it causes to some digestive problems that was called “Interference”. It is important to learn for Muslim countries that some media productions of west communities with their value system will cause to some problems that can be called cultural interference. In fact, instead of such a question that what do media do to us?, we must question that how can we do as a selector individual with media? And how avoid it's miss cultural interferences?

Taking care of bad results of “cultural Interference” is merely possible by increasing the collective mind. A thing that many of governments during the history, informing or not, did not accept to pay its expense.

Section VII: Conclusion

Audience, as a passive and unwell creature who is subjective and very effective, is a heritage from discourse – oriented ages in which the pulpit had some kind of monopoly. With the appearance of modern media in the developed countries, it was gradually revealed that thinking of creature/individual faced to media is not really appropriate. Therefore, new terms entered in to media study jargon. However, in many undeveloped and developing countries, it is still believed in having the aforementioned passive and unwell creature, to be refereed to as “audience”. In these countries, audience phantasm is produced by three main factors:

1. Delay in having the modern media as rivers of the ancient media.
2. Continuing the have state monopoly in controlling the media as well as strict monitoring of non-state media,
3. Lack of recognizing the real function of new media in the age of the Global Village besides not being institutionalization the culture of future projection.

Meanwhile, it seems that the upcoming changes within the next two decades in ICT will indeed transform the consumer under supervising to a message receiver.

References

- (1) Rhys, Robert (1946) *Rehtorica, In the Worlds of Aristotle*, (W.D. Ross). Oxford University Press. P. 6
- (2) Gill, David (2005= 1384 AH) *Communication Alphabet (Translators: Tarjomeh Ramin Karimian, Mehran Mohajer wa Mohamad Nabawi)*, Tehran: Resane Study and Research Center, P. 232
- (3) Sullivan, Tim O' and John Hartley, Danny Saunders, Martin Montgomery and John iske (1994) *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies. Second Edition*. London: Sage. P.19
- (4) Gill, 2005, p.232
- (5) Saroukhanie, Bagher (1991= 1370 AH) *amadi bar Dairatolmaref Oloom Ejtemaie*. Tehran: Etelaat Publisher. P.49
- (6) Sullivan, 1994, P.19

- (7) Mohsenian-Rad, Mehdi (1990= 1369 AH) *Communicology*. P.377
- (8) Schramm, W. (2002) *Zendegi wa Andisheh Pishtazan Elm Ertebatat*. Wiraish Steven Schaffee. Tarjomeh Gholamreza Azari. Tehran: Rasa
- (9) Mohsenian-Rad, 1990, p383
- (10) Gill, 2005, p232
- (11) Talebinejad, Mohamed Reza (1989= 1368 HA) *Psychology of Communication*. Tehran: Nashre Daneshgahi Publisher,. P.352
- (12)) Saroukhanie, 1991, P.387
- (13) Berger, 1987, P.769
- (14) Alber, Pear and Ferand Trou (1984= 1363 AH) *Tarikh Matbooat Jahan*. Tarjomeh Dr. Hooshang Farkhojasteh. Tehran: Pasargad. P.16
- (15) Mohsenian-Rad, Mehdi (2005= 1384 AH) *Iran in 4 Communication Galaxies*., Tehran: Soroosh. Publisher, PP. 997-1010
- (16) Al - Deen, Hana S. Noor (1994) *Oman*. In *Mass Media in the Middle East. A Comprehensive Handbook* . Edited by Yahya R. Kamalipour and Hamid Mowlana. London: Greenwood Press. , P. 194
- (17) Atkinson, Rita L, Richard S. Atkinson and Ernest Hilgard. (1988= 1367Ah) *Zamineh Rawanshenasi*. Tarjomeh Dr. Mohamad Taghie Barahani. Tehran: Entesharat Roshd. P. 305
- (18) Irvanie, Mahmood wa Mohamad Karim Khoda Panahi (1992= 1371 AH) *Rawanshenasi Ehsas wa Edrak*. Tehran: SAMT publisher. P.152
- (19) Vyse, Stuart A. (1997). *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition*. Oxford University Press US
- (20) Karimie, 2001, p101
- (21) Ibid 107
- (22) Littlejohn, Stephen W. and Karen A. Foss (2005) *Theories of Human Communication*. Eight Edition. Thomson and Wdsworth. P.286
- (23) Sullivan., 1994, p.20
- (24) Beck, Andrew and Peter Bennett (2002) *Communication Studies: The Essential Introduction*. London: Routledge. P.97
- (25) www.patentstorm.us/patents/6845247-claims.html - 20k
- (26) Littlejohn, 2005, p.70
- (27) Ibid. P.77
- (28) Ibid. P.74
- (29) Shahabie, Mahmood (2003. AH) *Angizehai Estefadeh az Vidio dar miaan Jawanan Tehrani*. Nameh Pajoohesh Farhangi. No. 5. Vol. 7. P.93
- (30) Hosseinpour, Hojat (1999= 1378 AH) *Baresie Mizaan wa Elalle Bahremandie Daneshaamoozaan Dokhtar wa Pesare Dabirestaanhai Shadegaan az Televisionhai Broomarzi wa Daroonmarzi*. Paaiannameh Kaarshenasi Arshad Oloom Ertebaataat.

Daneshgah Alaameh Tabaatabaie. Ostaad Rahnamaa Dr. Naiem Badiiei. Ostad Moshawer Dr Mehdi Mohsenian Rad.PP. 121 -127

(31) Jahangardie,Mojtaba (2007= 1386 AH) Televisionhai Mahwarehai Farsi Zaban dar Iran. Raftarha, Angizeha wa Maani Tamashai Televisionhai Farsi zaban dar bin Mokhateban Tehrani. Paaiaannameh Karshenasi Arshad Motaleat Farhangi. Daneshkadeh Allameh Tabatabai. Ostad Rahnama Dr. Shahabi. Moshawer Dr. Mohsenian Rad. P. 351

(32) Mohsenian Rad, 1990, p.426

(33) Nikou, Minoo(2002) Shenaakhte Mokhaatab Television ba Rooikarde Estefadeh wa Rezamandi. Tehran: Soroosh P.5

(34) Mohsenian Rad, 2005, p.1797

(35) H. Matute, M. A. Vadillo, S. Vegas, and F. Blanco (2007), "Illusion of Control in Internet Users and College Students", Cyber psychology & Behavior, Vol. 10, November 2007.

(36) B. Roostaian, "Iranian Youth's consumption of TV in Tehran and its comparison with their consumption of other media", Iran TV & Radio Research Center (2001 = 1380 AH).