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**ATINER's Conference Paper Series
MED2012-0154**

**Analysis of Qatari Women
Opinion and Attitudes towards
Women's Satellite Programs**

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URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

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ISSN 2241-2891

7/09/2012

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
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This paper should be cited as follows:

Izzeldin Malik, S. (2012) "**Analysis of Qatari Women Opinion and Attitudes towards Women's Satellite Programs**" Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: MED2012-0154.

Analysis of Qatari Women Opinion and Attitudes towards Women's Satellite Programs

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Abstract

The main objective of the study is to monitor, classify, and evaluate Arab satellite channels broadcasting women's issues, and to explore women audience opinion about those programs. A survey was distributed to 1011 women living in the State of Qatar during the period of December, 2010-January, 2011. Results of the survey indicate that 48.8 per cent of the audiences believe that the programs focus more on beauty, fashion, and cooking. 41.4 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that the programs display issues of concern to modern women. Nearly 24 per cent of the respondents disagreed to the statement that the focus of women's satellite programs is on problems and issues that are not of interest to the Arab women in general and Qatari women in particular, as they are not keen to reflect governmental efforts in the advancement of women. Moreover, 28.7 per cent of women audiences indicated that Arab broadcast channels ignore issues of women's personal and legal rights.

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Introduction

This paper is part of a study the first to be conducted on women living in Qatar and their views on women's specialized satellite TV programs. The research was carried out in an agreement with the Women's Supreme Council for Family Affairs in the State of Qatar. The main objective of the study is to monitor, classify, and evaluate current television programs specializing in women's issues, broadcast by Arab satellite channels and to explore the opinion of women audiences on these programs. The ultimate aim was to provide a perspective to be adopted by the Supreme Council for Family Affairs to guide its strategy for the production of a television program that speaks for women by women.

Literature Review

Some of the scholarship on the early years of Arab television includes Douglas Boyd's *Broadcasting in the Arab World* (1999) and Kamalipour and Mowlana's edited volume *Mass Media in the Middle East* (1994). The two studies comprehensively delineate the institutional and regulatory frameworks of broadcasting in different Arab countries, providing a useful description of state-ownership and state censorship of media, especially televisions, during that era.

The groundbreaking work of Naomi Sakr: *'Satellite Realms'* (2001) provides a comprehensive political economy analysis of pan-Arab and national satellite stations and provides a broad analysis of the ownership structure of the new broadcasting landscape. Naomi Sakr's *Arab Television Today* (2007) includes the important changes that have taken place in the Arab television landscape in the 2000s. For instance, there has been tremendous growth of female-led and female-targeted programming, also offering a wide spectrum of representations of the 'Arab' or 'Muslim' woman. As Mernissi (2004) mentioned, "Al Jazeera is winning crowds every night through the eloquence of its news women anchors Jumana Nammour and Khadija Bin Guna, and economics expert Farah al-Baraqawi. While state-owned televisions traditionally censored their staff and denied them the right to decide freely about their programs' content and their guests, Al Jazeera's success is due precisely to the freedom its programmers and speakers enjoy, which allow them to become credible communicators" (Mernissi, 2004.) Concurrently, there has also been a growth of stations by and for women, such as the 2002-launched Lebanese Heya TV, analyzed by Dina Matar (2007).

Arab audience members are finding themselves increasingly in control over their media diets, no longer beholden to their national (didactic) TV channels. The range in ownership structure has meant that many ideological, religious, and political, flavors are available to viewers. Programming variety is wide-ranging; the most popular shows – in terms of quantity of broadcasts and audience size – are news, music videos, and reality/game show programs. Drama series, situational comedies, and feature-length or made for- TV movies exist, as well as children's programming, documentaries, and the growth of what can be loosely termed 'Islamic programming', available not only on the 'religious channels' but increasingly on secular, national, and pan-Arab channels (Echchaibi 2007; Wise 2003, 2005).

While media ethnographies of Arab audiences have been slow to develop, there are a

few scholars who have conducted in-depth studies of how Arab audiences interact with TV content, as well as how Arab TV producers imagine their social/political roles. The most notable of these are by Walter Armbrust (1996, 2000, 2006) and Lila Abu-Lughod (1993, 1995, 2005). "Abu-Lughod's multi-sited ethnography, *Dramas of Nationhood* (2005), in which she problematizes the role of the Egyptian serial drama as consumed by different sets of female audiences in Egypt was perhaps the first of its kind in providing a 'thick description' of both audience members and television producers and their problematic relationship to the imagined Egyptian nation." (Tawil-Souri, 2008, p.14110). However, research on Arab women audiences still at its infancy and there is no study that have been carried on what women many Arab countries watch, especially women in Qatar.

Development of Women and Media: The Case of Qatar

The observer of women's issues and media in the State of Qatar would notice that each has undergone substantial development on its own, while the intermingling or marriage between the two has never happened. The Qatari woman developed to exercise her right as active citizens in her society and act as a vital element within the development process of the country. She has proven her ability to participate alongside her fellow men many fields, and her participation has been especially enhanced by the encouragement of political leadership in Qatar. Women have achieved high levels of education, especially higher education that qualified many women to avail for many opportunities in the labor market. The field of education was the doorway through which women entered into the workforce. Statistics show that the number of Qatari female students in the State-run schools has risen at greater rates than the number of male students. Qatari women constitute around 70 per cent of college students' population. Workingwomen also represent a sizable ratio of 52 per cent of the total workforce at the Ministry of Education. Working women at Qatar University either as staff members or administrative personnel account for more than 50 per cent of the total workforce of the University. They number 773 out of 1169 administrative personnel and 92 out of 176 staff members.¹

On the other hand, the status of media in the State of Qatar, in the past two decades, has changed dramatically. The State has lifted controls on local newspapers in October 1995 and His Highness the Emir issued afterwards the Decree No. (5) of 1998 by which the former Ministry of Information and Culture was abolished and its authorities and duties were transferred to other departments and independent bodies in the State. On October in the same year, the State established the National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage. In early 2001, the national television began to broadcast on a satellite format, while the Qatar Radio and Television Corporation was established in May 1997. It deserves mentioning in this regard that the giant Al Jazeera Satellite Channel as an independent broadcaster is owned by the State of Qatar through Qatar Media Corporation and headquartered in Doha, Qatar. Initially Al Jazeera was launched as Arabic news and current affairs satellite television channel in 1996, Al Jazeera has since expanded into a network with several outlets, including the Internet and specialty television channels in multiple languages.

In the private sector, there are three daily newspapers in Arabic (al-Sharq, al-Rayah and al-Watan), and two private newspapers in English (The Gulf Times and The Peninsula). Two privately owned monthly magazines are published in Arabic, (Qatar al-Khair and al-Doha lil-Jamiah). These newspapers stand today as independent institutions issued by private publishing houses and modern printing presses and they have successful investments.

Research Problem

There is an assumption that political, social, and economic achievements of Qatari women, and their contribution in the areas of education, political participation, and public affairs, are not commensurate with the image reflected by the Qatari media and the Arab media in general. In addition, the media in general, and the visual media in particular, played a major role in providing mixed messages about the image of women. Sometimes the media reflects the traditional image of women (which does not exceed the limits of home management) as an ideal image of women. At other times, it represents image of Western women as a model that Arab women or women in the Arabian Gulf area should follow. Accordingly, the questions here are about what do women watch? What are the opinions of women on the programs they watch? What programs they prefer? And Why?

Research Methodology

The research adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis. In this regards, a survey questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 1011 women living in the State of Qatar to examine their views on women's television programs.

The qualitative research method, on the other hand, was applied through the conduction of personal interviews, focus groups, and group discussions with women media professionals, academics, and women audiences living in the State of Qatar. The study accomplished about 15 in depth interviews and 7 focus groups and group discussions that mainly composed of young women (20-30 years old), some of these focus groups included students from Qatar University, the only national university in the country. The process of reviewing, categorizing, analyzing, and evaluating women's satellites programs took about a year and three months (November, 2008 – March 2010).

Analysis and Discussion of Women Audiences Opinions on Women Television Programs

Most watched programs by women:

The results of the analysis of the most viewed women's satellites programs and the most favored ones by the sample of women's population has specified the following programs: *Kalaam Nawaem* Soft Talk (broadcasted by the MBC channel), *Bi sarah ahala maa Joel* Frankly Sweeter with Joel (MBC channel). *Altufah Al-Akhdar* The

Green Apple (on the MBC channel), The Eve's World channel - Gulf women (on the Dubai satellite channel), The Manal Kitchen (broadcasted by the MBC channel), The Love Biography of Dr. Beat (Dr. Fawzia Aldiria) on the Opinion channel. The analysis showed that the preference of the programs listed above by the sampled women is closely associated with the age groups represented by the surveyed women. For example, the programs that deal with beauty and body care receive more attention and preference from the younger age groups of women, especially the age group between 15 to 25 years old. The older the age of women the less the preference, where there is less interest in these type of programs among the age group of 50 years and older.

It is also noted that young and Middle-aged women prefer the program "Green Apple" broadcasts by MBC. About 30.1 per cent of women in the age group between 15 to 25 years, 24.7 per cent of women between 25 years to 35 years, and 31.3 per cent of women in the category of 35 to 45 years old had given preference to this program.

There was no significant association found between the "age" as a variable and the preference given to the Eve's World and *Kalam Nawaem* programs. It seems that different age groups of women prefer these programs. Focus group discussions suggested that the reasons behind the preference of these two programs by many women regardless of age is due to variety issues discussed in these two programs that appeal to all women of all ages. "Love Biography" program also got the interest and preference of different age groups particularly the middle- aged group of women and this is-due to the women interviewed- to the unique nature of the topics presented in this program. The program deals with many culturally tabooed issues in Arab world, especially sexual relationships and sex education. It is also due to the charisma and professionalism of the host of the program that brought a considerable attention and popularity to the program.

Reasons behind Watching Women's Arab Satellites Programs:

From the data displayed in table (1), 48.3 per cent of the surveyed women indicate that the main reason behind watching women's satellites programs is to understand the problems of others and benefit from them. About 45.9 per cent of the women's sample believe that they watch these programs because they provide them with advices and guidance, 41.2 per cent believe that they follow these programs mainly because they fill their leisure time, while almost 39 per cent of the respondents indicate that the reason for watching these programs is to help them in maintaining their beauty and elegance.

Table (1) also shows that a significant number of women watch these programs because they develop their awareness of women's rights and duties (39.5 per cent), while about 38 per cent of the women's sample indicate that they watch women's programs because they help them acquire necessary knowledge and skills to manage their own home affairs. About 30.9 per cent of the respondents believe that the programs raise their awareness of the important role they play in their communities, while a significant number of women watch these programs because they help in raising their awareness of their own rights and duties (39.5 per cent), 28 per cent believe that they watch these programs because they help them in performing their duties as wives and mothers.

51.2 per cent of the respondents believe that these programs help them to a certain extent to maintain their beauty and elegance, 50.6 per cent assert that to some extent

the programs help them acquire necessary skills to manage their family affairs, and 48.5 per cent assert that these programs provide them with needed advice and guidance sometimes. As indicated by the table, 46.3 per cent of the respondents believe that to some extent the programs provide them with topics that they can share with others; while 46.4 per cent of the surveyed women believe that the programs help them sometimes in carrying out their role as mothers and wives. The data shows also that 45.9 per cent of the respondents believe that these programs help them sometimes to make decisions related to their own personal or family affairs, 44 per cent of the respondents believe that to some extent the programs help them understand the problems of others. Almost 43 per cent of the respondents believe that these programs to some extent help develop their awareness of women's rights and duties and satisfy their leisure time. 41,8 percent reported that the programs raise their awareness of the important role they play in their communities.

On the other hand, 27.4 per cent of the respondents indicated that these programs do not raise their awareness of the roles they play in their communities, 20 per cent believe that these programs do not provide them with the information and knowledge they can share with others, 25.3 per cent indicated that the programs do not help them in the decision-making process, 25.7 per cent believe that these programs do not help them in carrying out their role as wives and mothers, 16.6 per cent believe that these programs do not help them in developing awareness of their rights and duties as women, and 15.4 per cent of the respondents believed that the programs failed in helping them to utilize their leisure times. About 11.4 per cent of the respondents reported that these programs do not help in the acquisition of skills to help them manage their family issue and only 9.7 per cent of the surveyed women believe that these programs do not help in maintaining their beauty and elegance.

Women Audience's Opinions on the Most Favorite Women's Issues and Topics:

Table (2) shows that the respondents prefer some program topics significantly. On the top of these programs are fashion and make-up which acquired the preference of 54.3 per cent of the respondents, *fiqh* or Islamic Jurisprudential issues focusing on women were preferred to a great extent by 44.9 per cent of the respondents, followed by furniture and home-decor, which favored by 43.4 per cent of the surveyed women. Issues of child rearing, cooking and food preparation were preferred by almost 40 per cent of the respondents. Issues of women education and women's work were preferred by 37.6 per cent of the surveyed women, while marital relationship and family issues were preferred by 35.4 per cent of the respondents. Other topics such as: Love and marriage, and topic of cultural and artistic creativity of women were equally rated by approximately 32 per cent of the surveyed women.

30.5 per cent of the respondents prefer programs that reflect roles played by prominent role model women in the society. Issues of personal status and legal rights of women were significantly preferred by 28.7 per cent, while pregnancy –related issues were favored by 23.4 per cent, and issues focusing on community participation of women was preferred significantly by 21.8 per cent of the respondents. On the other hand, programs reflecting successful female role models were favored moderately by 46 per cent of the women respondents, cooking and food preparation programs moderately favored by 45 per cent, and cultural and artistic issues were moderately preferred by 44.2 per cent of the respondents. Issues of women's education and women's work, personal status and legal rights of women, and the

community participation of women were moderately preferred by more than 42 per cent of the respondents. The percentages of moderate preference of the subject of marital relations and family and the subject of Islamic jurisprudence for women were close, where the first topic rated by 41.9 per cent, and the second by 41.5 per cent of the respondents. Equal percentages of moderate preference were given to the subjects of child rearing and child-care, and the subject of love and marriage (40.3 per cent), while pregnancy –related issues and childbirth topics were attributed by 38.4 per cent, fashion and make up by 35.7 per cent, and the theme of the furniture and home-decor has been moderately favored by 30.9 per cent of the respondents.

The subject of pregnancy and childbearing, were given the highest percentage of non-favored topics among others. The topic was not favored by 38.3 per cent of the respondents, followed by the community participation of women which was not favored by 36.1 per cent, and 28.7 per cent of the women sample indicated that they do not prefer personal status issues and legal rights of women. Consequently, the love and marriage was the non-favored subject for 27.1 per cent of the respondents, and nearly 23.5 per cent of the respondents indicated that they do not prefer the theme of cultural and artistic creativity of women and the theme of prominent and successful female role models in the Arab and Qatari communities. Approximately, 13 per cent of the respondents indicated that they do not prefer topics of furniture and decoration and topics of Islamic jurisprudence, and the lowest percentage of non-preference among the respondents was given to the subject of “fashion and make-up”, which was amounted to 10 per cent of the respondents.

Women audience's opinions on issues addressed by women's programs:

Table (3) shows the opinion of the sample of women surveyed in this study on the problems and issues addressed by women's satellites programs. The table indicates that almost half of the women's respondents (48.8 per cent) believe that the programs focus on the women's appearance (beauty) more than substance, 41.4 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that the programs focus on issues of importance to urban women, while 34.5 per cent of the respondents agreed that they present and address real issues faced by all women, and 33.4 per cent agreed to a large extent that the programs focus on the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers. Almost 28 per cent of the respondents agreed to a great extent that women's programs present efforts put by governmental institutions to advance women issues in their countries. The same percentage believed that the programs focus on problems that are not of interest to Arab women in general and to Qatari women in particular, while 27.1 per cent of the respondents believed to a great extent that the programs focus on recurring issues and not on new ones.

With regard to the subjects that favored moderately by the respondents, 56.2 per cent of the respondents believed that the programs focus on recurrent themes and not the new ones. 54.2 per cent agreed to some extent that the programs represent real daily life issues, 52.8 per cent partially agreed that the programs focus on the traditional roles of a woman as a wife and a mother. More than half of the sample (51.1 per cent) hold the opinion that these programs present issues of concern to urban women, 47.6 per cent believe the programs focus on problems that are of concern to Arab women in general and Qatari women in particular, and a similar proportion believes to some extent that these programs reflect the government's efforts in the advancement of women, while 38.7 per cent of the respondents agreed to some extent that the

programs overemphasis beauty -related issues of women and deemphasize issues related to women's substance (mind and soul).

Finally, table (3) indicates that nearly 24 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement that Arab satellite programs focus on women's issues that are not of interest to women live in the Arab Gulf region in general and Qatari women in particular, while 16.7 per cent disagreed that the programs focus on recurrent women's issues not on new ones. About 13.8 per cent of the respondents disagreed that the programs focus on the traditional roles of women (as a wife and a mother), 12.5 per cent of the respondents disagreed that the focus is on beauty related issues of women over substance, 11.3 per cent disagreed that the programs address real issues faced by women, while only 7.5 per cent of the respondents disagreed to the statement that the programs display issues of concern to urban women.

In-depth interviews:

The views and opinions of women were, in some instances, similar to views of women surveyed by the questionnaire. Many of the women interviewed believe that the majority of the Satellite programs focus on the traditional image and roles of women as wives and mothers. Some of the interviewees also believe that when women issues are focused on, they were hardly taken seriously on those programs in terms of in-depth of analysis. For instance, women's topics were rarely analyzed as part of the global, regional, and national processes that influence and impact women's cultural, legal, economic, societal, and political positions in their societies. Moreover, the majority of women interviewees agreed that most of the women's programs and channels focus on young women. They, as a result, call for programs that appeal to all segments of the society, especially the elderly women and women with disabilities. A focus group of young university women emphasized the absence of women's programs that educate women on legal rights.

Conclusions

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the main objective of the study is to know what programs are favored and watched by women living in Qatar and reasons behind women preferences to specific women's television programs. The research concluded that the most watched programs by women are the MBC 1 Soft talk (*Kalam Nawaim*), Frankly Sweeter (with Joel) (MBC channel). The Green Apple (on the MBC channel), The Eve's World channel - Gulf women (on the Dubai satellite channel), The Manal Kitchen (broadcasted by the MBC channel), The Love Biography of Dr. Beat (Dr. Fawzia Aldiria) on the Opinion channel. The analysis showed that the women's preference of these programs is closely associated with the age groups for the sample of women surveyed.

To answer the question about reasons behind watching women's programs by women, the survey has emphasized that women watch these programs because they raise their awareness of their won rights and responsibilities, especially on issues related to Islamic jurisprudence, and they help them in performing their gender roles as wives and mothers. On the other hand, although the women interviewed emphasized the focus of women's programs on issues of fashion and beauty but they also talked about issues that were overlooked by women's programs such as: legal issues, topics

discussing family-relations issues, and topics that appeal to more diversified audiences.

Table 1. Reasons behind Watching Women's Arab Satellites Programs

| Reasons | To a great extent | | To some extent | | Disagree | | Total | |
|---|-------------------|------|----------------|------|----------|------|-------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| They help me in doing my duties as wife and mother. | 230 | 28 | 381 | 46.4 | 221 | 25.7 | 822 | 100 |
| They help in maintaining my beauty and my elegance. | 332 | 39.2 | 434 | 51.2 | 82 | 9.7 | 848 | 100 |
| Give advices and guidance. | 390 | 45.9 | 412 | 48.5 | 48 | 5.9 | 850 | 100 |
| To fill the leisure time. | 345 | 41.2 | 364 | 43.3 | 129 | 15.4 | 838 | 100 |
| Make me feel the importance of my role in the community. | 257 | 30.9 | 348 | 41.8 | 228 | 27.4 | 833 | 100 |
| Acquire me with what I speak with others. | 282 | 33.7 | 387 | 46.3 | 167 | 20 | 836 | 100 |
| Make me understand the problems of other and benefit from them. | 410 | 48.3 | 373 | 44 | 65 | 7.7 | 848 | 100 |
| Develop awareness of women's rights and duties. | 330 | 39.5 | 367 | 43.9 | 139 | 16.6 | 836 | 100 |
| They help me in making decisions. | 242 | 28.8 | 386 | 45.9 | 213 | 25.3 | 841 | 100 |
| They help in acquiring knowledge and skills related to family and home affairs. | 321 | 38 | 427 | 50.6 | 96 | 11.4 | 844 | 100 |
| Other reasons (specify) | | | | | | | | |

Figure 1. Reasons behind Watching Women's Arab Satellites Programs

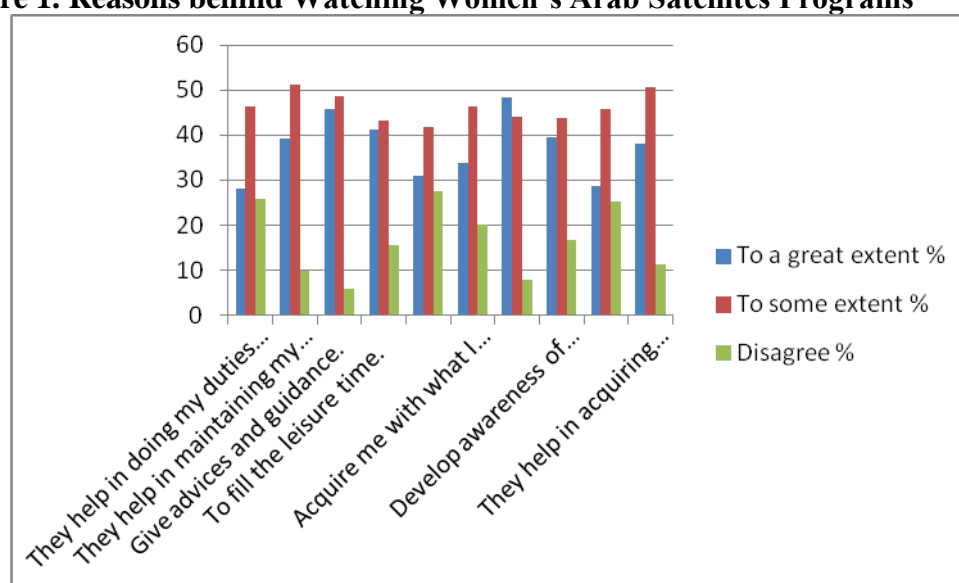


Table 2. Women Audience's Opinions on the Most Favorite Women's Issues and Topics

| Topic | To a great extent | | To some extent | | Disagree | | Total | |
|---|-------------------|------|----------------|------|----------|------|-------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Problems of pregnancy and childbearing. | 196 | 23.4 | 322 | 38.4 | 321 | 38.3 | 839 | 100 |
| Raising and educating children and taking care of them. | 333 | 39.3 | 342 | 40.3 | 173 | 20.4 | 848 | 100 |
| Cooking and preparing food. | 348 | 40.6 | 387 | 45.2 | 122 | 14.2 | 857 | 100 |
| The relation between men and women (marital relationship and family). | 303 | 35.4 | 359 | 41.9 | 194 | 22.1 | 856 | 100 |
| Furniture and decoration. | 375 | 43.4 | 371 | 30.9 | 119 | 13.8 | 856 | 100 |
| Jurisprudential issues of women (<i>Sharia Islamic</i> opinion on special topics related to women). | 386 | 44.9 | 357 | 41.5 | 116 | 13.5 | 859 | 100 |
| Education and women's work. | 320 | 37.6 | 365 | 42.9 | 166 | 19.8 | 851 | 100 |
| Fashion and make-up. | 464 | 54.3 | 305 | 35.7 | 85 | 10 | 854 | 100 |
| Prominent and successful female role models in the Gulf and Qatari communities. | 260 | 30.5 | 392 | 46 | 200 | 23.5 | 852 | 100 |
| Personal status issues and legal rights of women. | 245 | 28.7 | 364 | 42.6 | 245 | 28.7 | 854 | 100 |
| Participation of women in society (political participation and participation in economic and social development). | 183 | 21.8 | 353 | 42.1 | 303 | 36.1 | 839 | 100 |
| Love and marriage. | 277 | 32.6 | 342 | 40.3 | 230 | 27.1 | 849 | 100 |
| Cultural and artistic creativity of women. | 272 | 32.2 | 373 | 44.4 | 199 | 23.6 | 844 | 100 |

Fugue 2. Women Audience's Opinions on the Most Favorite Women's Issues and Topics

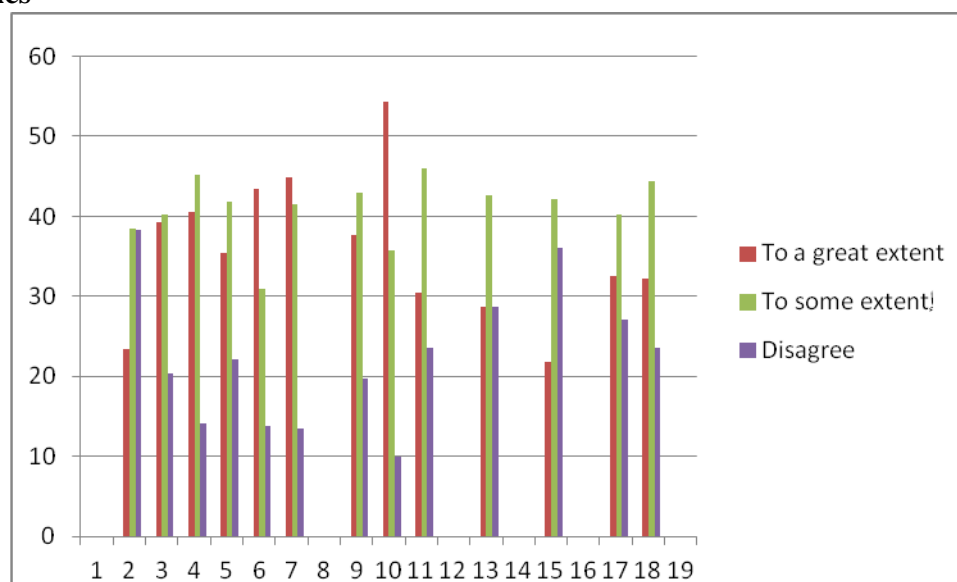
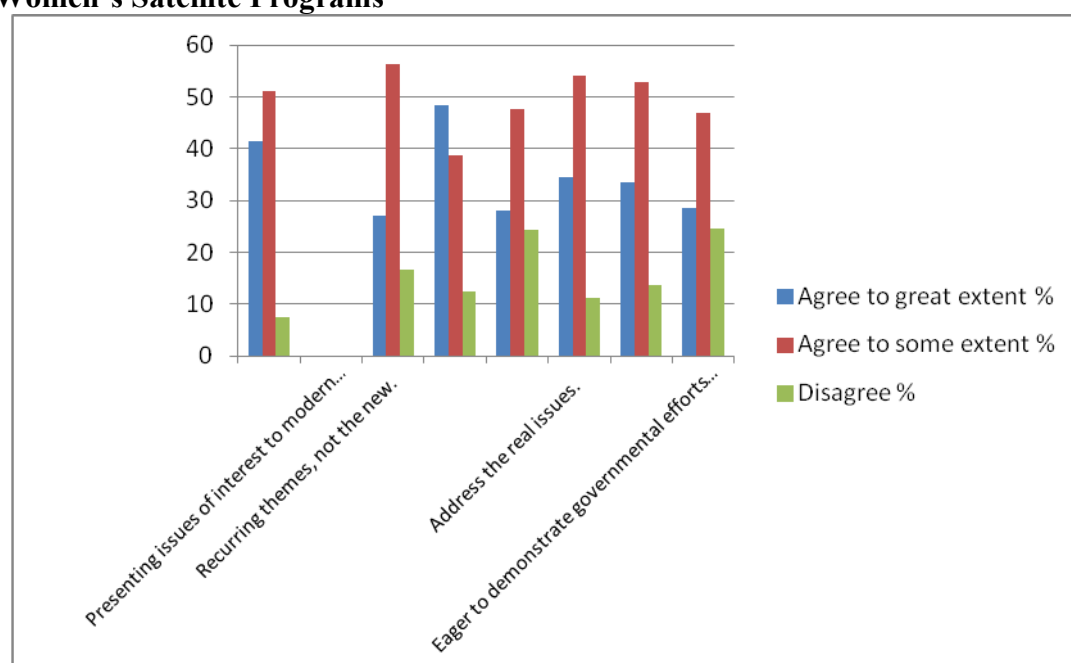


Table 3. Women Audience's Opinions on Issues and Problems Addressed by Women's Satellite Programs

| Opinion | Agree to great extent | | Agree to some extent | | Disagree | | Total | |
|--|-----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------|------|-------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Presenting issues of interest to modern women. | 358 | 41.4 | 442 | 51.1 | 65 | 7.5 | 865 | 100 |
| Recurring themes, not new. | 232 | 27.1 | 482 | 56.2 | 143 | 16.7 | 857 | 100 |
| Focusing on beauty related- issues of women over substance. | 416 | 48.4 | 330 | 38.7 | 107 | 12.5 | 853 | 100 |
| Focusing on problems that are not of interest to the Gulf women in general and Qatari women in particular. | 238 | 28.1 | 403 | 47.6 | 206 | 24.3 | 847 | 100 |
| Address the real issues. | 297 | 34.5 | 467 | 54.2 | 97 | 11.3 | 861 | 100 |
| Focusing on the traditional roles (of a wife and a mother). | 283 | 33.4 | 447 | 52.8 | 117 | 13.8 | 847 | 100 |
| Demonstrating governmental efforts in the advancement and wellbeing of women. | 242 | 28.5 | 399 | 47 | 208 | 24.5 | 849 | 100 |

Figure 3. Women Audience's Opinions on Issues and Problems Addressed by Women's Satellite Programs

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