

Ethical Evaluation of the Use of Women in Advertisements

Imran Aslan
 Selçuk University, Turkey
 Sedat Şimşe
 Selçuk University, Turkey

Abstract

Advertisements that offer consumers both lifestyle and behavior show women in forms. How should consumers' physical appearance be said in advertisements. The woman must be beautiful, well-groomed and thin in advertisements. If a fat, ugly or not well-groomed woman is in the advertisement, she changes thanks to the product. Thus, it is thought that consumers who take beautiful women in advertisements as role models will use the product by trying to be like them. The constant beautiful and attractive role of the woman revealed the problem of her commodification in advertisements. This causes ethical violations. Although the target consumers are not fellows, women appear as sexual objects in different product groups. It is common for women to be used in an admirable position other than the roles of housewife, employee, mother or spouse. Accordingly, advertisements can be divided into advertisements with or without sexual content. Women also attract attention in advertisements with or without sexual content. However, women are seen more in advertisements that emphasize sexuality.

This study aims to reveal which tabloid magazine advertisements are using women, in which role women are involved in these advertisements, and whether sexuality is used or not. For this purpose, content analysis was performed on 119 advertisements published in magazines and the data were evaluated in the SPSS program. As a result, it is concluded that sexuality is used in the advertisements involving women.

Keywords: Advertisement, Ethics, Women in advertisement, Gender, Sexuality.

Introduction

Duties attributed to woman in society are generally reflected in the same way in advertisements. But what is different is that woman has to be cared, perfect and devoted in every way. In addition to being a means that directs her fellow beings, woman also confronts the audience as a commodity used to increase the interest of the opposite sex to the advertisement. Ethical problems begin here. In general, in advertisements, a woman is a good wife, a caring mother, an obedient daughter-in-law, a meticulous host, a person who should be a model for her fellow beings physically. The woman's body and femininity are featured in advertisements as an attractive force.

The fact that woman takes part in advertisements with emphasis on sexuality creates the perception that woman can only exist with their body. At the same time,

the stereotyping of woman by showing her in ideal size may cause all women feel the necessity to be at the same size. For this reason, it is not ethical, as well. Woman appears not only in advertisements for her target audience, but also in advertisements for men. While advertising promises woman that she will be beautiful and cared using the product, it promises the man to be with a beautiful and cared woman in case of using the product.

Advertisement

Advertising is persuasive messages designed to sell a product or service. More broadly, it is the announcement of information about the qualities of goods and services through the means of communication (Mutlu 1998, 286). In today's intense competition environment, advertising is important for businesses to consolidate their position in the market, to have a certain position in the brain and heart of the consumer, and to establish a healthy functioning communication with their consumers (Elden 2014, 15).

In the advertisement, the message in the form of words, pictures, sounds, images and icons is transmitted to the target audience through various channels to create an intended effect. The most obvious feature of advertising communication is that the intended effects are generally aimed at mobilizing the target audience in relation to a brand (Tosun 2010, 271).

The features of advertising can be listed as follows: 1. Advertising is an element in marketing communication. 2. Advertising is made for a certain fee. 3. Advertising is a collection of messages flowing from the advertiser to the consumer. 4. Advertising is mass communication. 5. The advertiser, institution, organization is apparent. 6. With the help of advertisement, the consumer is tried to be informed and persuaded. 7. Advertising messages contain goods, services, promises, rewards, and solutions to problems. 8. Advertising works in coordination with the other elements of marketing communication to reach the marketing targets determined in line with the marketing strategy determined by the business (Topsümer and Elden 2015, 16)

Advertising is now being functionalized as the most important tool of the promotion business. Within the framework of this duty imposed on them, the advertisements aim to direct their wishes and desires to consume more in a way that will penetrate the emotional worlds of individuals on the basis of consumption activity. In this way, people are encouraged to possess consumption objects permanently, to demand more and more than they

possess and their financial means allow. While doing this, it is inevitable that the advertisements will add meaning to the product or service that they advertise, add visual material and create an image and a meaning code at this point. Through advertisements, manufacturers or service providers present signs and symbols to the consumer by associating them with images to create a product image that motivates consumers. Thus, internalization of new identities in society is tried to be provided (Latif and Karkış 2018, 119).

Woman in Ads

Advertising has economical and ideological two key functions. While the first of these functions contributes to the free market economy by introducing consumer goods to the public; second one contributes to the functioning, dissemination and (re)production of social values and behaviors by determining the role-models for woman and man (Demir 2006, 286). The continuity of the system and the dominant ideology is ensured through various tools in all areas of social life. In general terms, media and media tools impose the dominant ideology over the idealized personalities and their lives to the audience or readers and enable the individual to evaluate himself in those standards, to keep the individuals within the framework of the ideology or to become ideal. Mass media, especially television, has important functions in the process of changing and transforming society. They are very successful in influencing people. When analyzed in terms of gender, it adopts the patriarchal ideology, the dominant ideology, and shapes the way the society perceives women (Latif and Karkış 2018, 116).

When we look at the advertisements, we do not see ugly woman. They are very beautiful, very cared and absolutely thin. The prototype woman is transmitted as a female who is attractive, beautiful and always aware of this. The woman portrayed as ugly in advertisements should immediately get rid of this situation, lose weight if she is fat, use the products required, have wonderful hair, smooth skin and stop aging (Şenkal 2016, 96).

Ads offer women the ideal world that they need to have. Instead of ugly, uncared, old women, beautiful women with the help of products and who cook well are depicted. Women who want to be like their fellow beings in this desired world think that they will get rid of their problems buying the product. Woman must always be a good wife, a good mother, clean, cared, caring, attractive and beautiful. All these meanings attributed to woman are also expected from woman in society. Because when woman is fat or uncared, she will be pressured in the society because of not using the product that will solve her problems. There are creams to become youthful, beauty centers to lose weight, shampoos for well-cared hair. Woman has to look good to her fellow beings and men.

The social system assigns women and men different roles. This role distinction by gender makes people half by restricting them. Even the expression of emotions is divided into two; expressing anger and hatred is

assigned to man, expressing love and compassion is to woman (Demir 2006, 289).

Mass media always sees women as an active consumer community. Television, in particular, reinforces the secondary position of women by producing sexist stereotypes. In addition, by giving women the facts in line with their experiences, they give messages that tell them that they are on the right road and serve to maintain the patriarchal system by ensuring that they get pleasure from these texts (Demir 2006, 291).

Ethics and Woman in Advertising

Basic characteristics of ethical behaviors and principles can be listed as follows (Chamber of Electrical Engineers 2012, 27):

- Ethics is a historical, social and dynamic process of societies based on various factors, including social, political, economic and cultural factors. Unlike legal rules, principles and rules created within the framework of ethics are formed by social reactions, not laws. Sanction against the violation of ethical values consists of reactions developed by the society as well.
- Ethics is in direct relation and interaction with all processes within the economic, social, political and cultural structure of the society. For this reason, ethics cannot be considered as independent categories by being reduced to certain behavior patterns.
- Ethical values are not prepared moral prescriptions; they cannot be created, imported or exported depending on the individual and group authority. However, through inter-communal relations, it passes from society to society and becomes valid as much as it is internalized and in time, they are included in the culture of the society.

Advertising ethics; can be defined as the evaluations and questionings made on the basis of the public sector actors and general society for the production of the advertising products created in accordance with the general moral rules, personality rights, the prevention of unfair competition and the protection of consumer rights principles. These principles can be shaped by various institutions in certain laws and regulations and they also depend on the own initiative and conscience of the advertising agency, the advertiser and advertising media, in short the professional principles the advertiser will create (Elden and Ulukök 2006, 2-3). In the context of ethical violations in advertisements, the topics such as deceptive and misleading message content, the use of the female body as a commodity, unfair competition, harming the physical and mental development of children and young people, encouraging consumption are discussed. Among these, the exploitation of the female body is the most common violation.

It is possible to examine ethical problems in advertising in two general categories: ethical dilemmas and ethical errors. The ethical dilemma is

an area in which those who criticize and support the advertisement are constantly discussing and have not yet reached consensus. The most classic example of this is whether tobacco companies are given ad permission for their products. If these companies are permitted, the behavior that harms human health is supported, and if not allowed, the company's freedom to sell and express a legal product will be violated. According to the general view, ethical dilemmas are generally expressed as the conflict between the rights of two or more groups. An ethical error occurs when individuals who adopt ethical principles make unethical decisions. However, this situation should not be confused with ethical dilemma. Because in ethical error, there is deliberate misinformation in the transmission of the message. Any business showing a product's feature that exists in its competitors' as a unique feature can be exemplified (Aktuğlu 2006, 9).

Violations of ethical practices in advertisements, is because advertisers, agencies and the media, described as the "unholy triad", do not want to take responsibility. Although ethical violations are discussed at the academic level, consumers most affected by the practice are not considered enough. Understanding consumers is important for both practical and theoretical reasons. Because the consumer, being influenced directly from the advertisement, both purchases the product and sees the lifestyle and he/she is influenced indirectly watching the advertisement (Mostafa 2011, 43).

The use of woman in advertisements comes to mind with sexuality. Changes in marketing, the competitive environment have pushed brands to differentiate. Physical properties loaded on the products are not sufficient. The advantage is lost in a short time as the competitors can easily imitate the newly obtained physical features. For this reason, brands started to turn to psychological benefits while positioning their products. Sexuality is also one of the tactics used. By using sexuality in the advertisements of the products, consumers are offered promises such that they will be sexier, happier and appreciated by purchasing the advertised product. High impact of sexuality has increased the usage area in advertisements (Elden and Bakır 2010, 157). When we look at the advertisements, the reason of using sexuality can be attracting attention, creating an image and differentiating. However, when the dose of sexuality is high, the female body can prevent the product. The audience can talk about the word or image of sexual content in the advertisement instead of the product.

Women are used by advertisers in two ways. 1. The target audience of the ads are women. 2. They use women to impress and persuade others. Such use can be considered as exploitation or abuse in a way. It is aimed for the audience to consubstantiate with the woman they see in the advertisement (Barokas 1994, 147). Displaying women in advertisements with sexual content may also cause the society to look at women in this way.

Even in advertisements whose target audience is male, the female body is easily exhibited. In this way,

the easy presentation of the woman is against the cultural values. In Islamic religion, it is not true that women's body lines are evident and her body is clearly displayed. This thought is also an accepted opinion in Turkish society.

Findings and Interpretations

Aim

This study aims to reveal which tabloid magazine advertisements are using women, in which role women are involved in these advertisements, and whether sexuality is used or not.

Method

In this study, content analysis is performed on the Turkish tabloid magazines which has been published in January 2020 in Turkey.

Population and Sample

The population of the study is formed of all the tabloid magazines published in January 2020 in Turkey. With the purposeful sample selection, a total of 119 advertisements in 9 tabloid magazines were found suitable for the study. These magazines are Alem, Şamdan, Elle, Mag, Marie Claire, Cosmopolitan, All, Women's Shine, and Klass.

Limitations

Only examining tabloid magazines published in Turkey in January 2020 is the limitation of this study. Categorically, other kind of magazines are excluded from the research.

Research Questions

1. 1.Are there any sexual expressions with the use women in the tabloid magazines?
2. 2.What sexual connotation are women shown in the tabloid magazine advertisements?
3. 3.What role do women take in the tabloid magazine advertisements?

	Frequency	Percentage
Clothing	26	21,8
Household goods	15	12,6
Hotel	14	11,8
Medical products	10	8,4
Jewelry	7	5,9
Bank	6	5
Cosmetics	5	4,2
Self-care	5	4,2
Travel	5	4,2
Accessory	5	4,2
Shopping Mall	5	4,2
Kitchenware	4	3,4
Cafe-restaurant	3	2,5
Nourishment	3	2,5
Construction	2	1,7
Tv Channel	2	1,7
Telecommunication	1	,8
Magazine	1	,8
Total	119	100

Table 1. Product Service Group

According to Table 1, the distribution of advertisements in tabloid magazines by product service group is as follows: Clothing with 21.8%, household goods with 12.6%, hotel with 11.8%, medical products with 8.4%, and jewelry advertisements with 5.9% are seen in magazines.

	Frequency	Percentage
Woman	65	53,8
None	40	33,6
Man	4	3,4
Woman and man	7	5,9
Woman and child	3	2,5
Woman, man and child	1	,8
Total	119	100

Table 2. Use of Gender

When examining Table 2, it is seen that women are included in 53.8% of the advertisements in tabloid magazines. While the rate of the advertisements in which men and women are used together is 5.9%, and the rate in which women and children are used is 2.5%.

	Frequency	Percentage
None	77	64,7
Available	42	35,3
Total	119	100

Table 3. Use of Sexual Expression

According to Table 3, 64.7% of advertisements in tabloid magazines do not contain any sexual expression. Sexual expression takes place in 35.3% of the advertisements.

	Frequency	Percentage
None	77	64,7
Breast	16	13,4
Lips	7	5,9
Legs	6	5
Whole body	5	4,2
Back	3	2,5
Neck	2	1,7
Belly	2	1,7
Eyes and gaze	1	,8
Total	119	100

Table 4. Sexual Connotation Factor

Considering Table 4, the ratio of advertisements without sexual connotation is 64.7%. In the advertisements, sexual connotation is made by showing breasts with 13.4%, by showing lips with 5.9% and by showing legs with 5%.

	Frequency	Percentage
None	45	37,8
Dekorative object	30	25,2
User of the product	29	24,4
Celebrity	9	7,6
Mother	3	2,5
Bussiness woman	2	1,7
House wife	1	,8
Total	119	100

Table 5. Role of the Woman

According to Table 5, the advertisements, in which the woman has no explicit role, constitute 37.8% of the total. The ratio of advertisements in which women are used as decorative objects is 25.2%, while it is 24.4% in the role of product user. With 7.6% women are shown as celebrities, with 2.5% they are in the role of mother, with 1.7% in the role of business woman, and with 0,8 in the role of housewife.

			Sexual Expression		Total
			Available	None	
Use of Gender	Woman	Count	40	24	64
		Use of gender	62,5%	37,5%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	95,2%	31,2%	53,8%
	Man	Count	0	4	4
		Use of gender	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	0,0%	5,2%	3,4%
	None	Count	0	40	40
		Use of gender	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	0,0%	51,9%	33,6%
	Woman and child	Count	0	3	3
		Use of gender	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	0,0%	3,9%	2,5%
	Woman and Man	Count	2	5	7
		Use of gender	28,6%	71,4%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	4,8%	6,5%	5,9%
	Woman, man and child	Count	0	1	1
		Use of gender	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		Sexual expression	0,0%	1,3%	0,8%
Total	Count	42	77	119	
	Use of gender	35,3%	64,7%	100,0%	
	Sexual expression	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	

Table 6. Use of Sexuality by Gender

According to Table 6, 62.5% of the advertisements used women includes sexual expression. Use of sexuality is not included in 37.5% of these advertisements. Sexual expressions were found in 28.6% of the advertisements in which men and women were used together, and sexual expressions were not found in 71.4%. No sexuality was used in any of the advertisements involving men. Similarly, sexual expressions were not included in the advertisements with the use of women and children, as well as women, children and men.

Conclusion

In addition to informing about the product they are promoting, advertisements add value to the product,

as well. A shampoo does not only solve the dandruff problem of the hair, but also promises a help to be charming for the opposite sex by making it fuller and shiny. While the advertisements appeal to different types of audiences, they also want the viewer to identify with the advertisement character by inspiring them inside. When the audience dreams of being like the character in the ad and modeling him/her, it will be easier to make viewer to use the product. The consumer does not only purchase that product, but also thinks that it will meet the desire for happiness, attractiveness, appreciation and success offered in advertising.

The most important finding of the study is that sexual expression is included in 62.5% of the advertisements that use the image of women. In contrast, no sexual

expression was found in any of the advertisements with the use of men. However, in the advertisements where the men were used with the women, sexual expression is seen with a rate of 28.6%. It can be understood that, except for the advertisements where women are used with children, the majority of other advertisements include sexual expressions with the use of women.

Another remarkable finding of the study is the use of women as decorative objects with 25.2% rate in advertisements involving women. Women are featured in advertisements like a knickknackery. The closest outcome to this result is the role product user at 24.4%. In sectors such as clothing, jewelry or cosmetics, women are included in the advertisement with the role of product user, since it is aimed to increase the admiration by showing the product on the women.

In the study, the use of body parts of women was examined and it was found that breasts were used as the most common sexual connotation factor with 13.4%. This result is followed by the use of lips and legs. Breasts, lips and legs are the most noticeable erogenous zones.

The use of women in advertisements against ethical values is not always accepted in terms of society, and also it never should be. In advertisements, women should not appear in a role that serves her husband by only cooking and cleaning or just as an adornment; they should also take part in the roles that reveal their value in society, as well. Today, with the women contribution to modernization and their involvement in every field of business life, the use of women in advertisements should change with this social transformation. In advertisements, the woman should be stripped of an image that is only a sexual object in the shadow of the man, whose entire life consists of cleaning and housework. The social and individual value given to women should be reflected in advertisements and all mass media.

Bibliography

- Aktuğlu, Işıl K. 2006. "Tüketicinin Bilgilendirilmesi Sürecinde Reklam Etiği." in *Küresel İletişim Dergisi* 2: 1-20.
- Barokas, Safiye K. 1994. *Reklam ve Kadın*. İstanbul: Türkiye Gazeteciler Cemiyeti.
- Demir, Nesrin K. 2006. "Kültürel Değişimlerin Reklamlarda Kadın ve Erkek Rol-Modellerine Yansımaları." In *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 16(1): 283-304.
- Elden, Müge. 2014. *Reklam Yazarılığı*. İstanbul: İletişim.
- Elden, Müge., and Bakır, Uğur. 2010. *Reklam Çekicilikleri: Cinsellik, Mizah, Korku*. İstanbul: İletişim.
- Elden, Müge., and Ulukök, Özkan. 2006. "Çocuklara Yönelik Reklamlarda Denetim ve Etik." in *Küresel İletişim Dergisi* 2: 1-22.
- Elektrik Mühendisleri Odası. 2012. *Etik, Kodlanan Etik ve Pratiği*, Ankara.
- Latif, Özge B., and Karkış, Özlem İ. 2018. "Sosyal Medya Reklamları Üzerinden Kadının Toplumdaki Konumlandırılmasına İlişkin Bir İçerik Analizi." in *Avrasya Sosyal ve Ekonomi Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5(10): 114-34.
- Mohamed, Mostafa M. 2011. "An Investigation of Egyptian Consumers' Attitudes Toward Ethical Issues in Advertising." in *Journal of Promotion Management* 17(1): 42-60.

Mutlu, Erol. 1998. *İletişim Sözlüğü*. Ankara: Ark.

Şenkal, Yelda. 2016. "Feminist Kuramlar Bağlamında Reklamda Kadın İmgesine Bakış." in *ABMYO Dergisi* 42: 91-114.

Topsümer, Füsün., and Elden, Müge. 2015. *Reklamcılık: Kavramlar, Kararlar, Kurumlar*. İstanbul: İletişim.

Tosun, Nurhan B. 2010. *İletişim Temelli Marka Yönetimi*. İstanbul: Beta.