

Feminine hygiene products advertising analysis



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Perceptions on the Idealized Image of Women in TV Ads Revisited: The Example of Sanitary Napkin Advertisements

Introduction and Methods

This study has two parts: The first part gave me a perspective and understanding about how to read and evaluate an advertisement. In this way, I could determine some criteria to decode the linguistic and non linguistic components of the sanitary napkin advertisements. I watched 35 sanitary napkin advertisements but I did not choose to make a quantitative analysis since it would be too hard to examine the data manually. Instead of this, I chose the qualitative methods. I made certain groups based on the determining characteristics of the advertisements and I evaluated only one advertisement for each group such as one for blue liquid type and one for mini drama type advertisements. My first thesis was assuming that advertisements are a part of the reproduction of discourses on womanhood by supporting the idealized images of womanhood. But as I go on watching the advertisements I also noticed that they create some stigmas about the taboo on menstruation and feminine hygiene. This is why I also included the part menstruation as embarrassment as a component of the perceptions on womanhood. In the presentation I used the expression of hidden messages by referring to the use of lingual and non linguistic components of the advertisements which are telling women something other than the features of the products and promising them things which are not directly relevant with the product itself at first sight. While doing these, I also tried to track down the transformation of advertisements since it was legally allowed to do

advertising on sanitary napkins to see what has changed since the beginning.

Advertisements Now and Then

Previously, advertisements were less complicated than they are today and there was only one goal to achieve with the simplest ways: to make people buy a certain product by explaining its specific or differentiating features. Thus, production or supply of the products was determined according to the demands of the societies. Today, we see the constant creation of new demands and increasement of the existing ones. In this new order, advertisement has become a tool to create consent for more consumption. In this way, social utility has also become the utility of the capital owners but these are presented as if they still accomodate social benefits.

Media a great power of influencing and directing the society. In advertisements, this power manifests itself through the chain of product, production and consumption. In this way, products go beyond the production processes and factories and they become a part of the media culture.

Although the basic motivation behind the advertisements is simply selling more products, there is no advertisement which only gives information about product to motivate people for buying it. Beyond this simple aim, each advertisement has a message that would be received by for potential consumers via different canals. Today we observe that the symbols and images take a precedence over the product itself most of the time.

In the science of semiotics, it is claimed that signs are open to different interpretations and they can have different meanings in different contexts.

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Thus, we receive different messages via signs and attribute them to different meaning while we communicate. We receive these signs with our many senses such as audial or visual. Saussure argues that the sign dynamic has two components: A form of the sign and its meaning, respectively, the signifier and the signified. Thus, languages which enable us to communicate through different sounds or written symbols are arbitrary and they are subjected to change in time. They are only as important as their function in the communication rather than their historical importance or features. Therefore, language is in a constant state of change which includes its reconstruction and re-analyze through the changing social relations and discourses.

According to Williamson, semiotics is composed of thing and meaning as well. The important thing here is not how a certain word or term is formed but how it is shared and found itself in the daily expressions.

Williamson takes the issue of advertisement as a determinant of culture and everyday practices. These practices are mainly there to sell products but at the same time they make properties to mean something for us. They present and promote the idea of being a certain kind of person. The language of this promotion is not a singular one; it rather changes according to different times and cultures. For instance, I observed that many brands use different advertisements for the promotion of sanitary napkins in different countries according to these countries' cultural norms and values. The portrayal of a certain ideal type is given in the advertisements but at the same time this ideal type is linked to the certain products through messages. For instance, "delikanlÄ± kÄ±zlar molped kullanÄ±r." The construction of these linkages <https://assignbuster.com/feminine-hygiene-products-advertising-analysis/>

occurs over long processes. Thus, connections are made between people and objects are made. So, we should take the sign for what it signifies, the thing becomes the symbol of a feeling. “ Material things we need are made to represent the other non- material things we need. The point of exchange between two is where meaning is produced.” (Williamson, 2000)

What an advertisement actually does is to show and give audiences an object of desire. When a product is used exclusively by women, female image and female sexuality is packed up with the product and presented to the women again. In our case, the object of desire could be manifested as youth, freedom, happiness, a good career, etc. In the advertisements, what is not shown or expressed, in other words absences are as important as what are present. For instance, advertisements can show what people actually want to be like in this way.

According to Crook, there are two main dimensions which reflect the distinction between the linguistic and the non-linguistic components of commercials that should be taken into account. These are the product- claim dimension and reward dimension. (Crook, 2004)

When product claim dimension is used, some information or claims of the producers are presented to the consumers in the form of physical outcomes and benefits. For instance, in our case of sanitary napkins, this could be dryness. There usually is a superimposed linguistic message and/ or a message which is given by a voiceover, a narrator or a mini drama with one or a few highlighted characters. The use of reward dimension targets the more emotional side of the audiences. The benefits and offers are emotional

and more abstract. For instance, in our case, this could be the promise of intimacy or modernity. As it can be deduced from this example, the benefits may not seem such related with the product itself at the first sight. The tools of non-verbal communication such as colors and music are used in these types of advertisements.

The Construction of Menstruation as Embarrassment

Menstruation is accepted, portrayed and presented as an embarrassing hygienic trouble which needs to stay hidden and covered up in the public realm, specifically from men. It is also seen as an obstruct on the way of achieving to the standardized and ideal womanhood norms as Evans also points out. " Menstruation stood in the way, as a threat to a woman's reaching the ideal of beautiful womanhood," (Evans, 1995, p. 25) All of these negative connotations helped the construction of menstruation as embarrassment for females.

As an historical inheritance, this problem is limited to the one's private sphere. Thus, offering solution to this hygienic problem can easily be considered as overruling one's privacy. Advertisers observed that there might be negative reactions occurring, as viewers evaluate these advices as a violation of their liberties and privacy. In the specific type of commercial that we are trying to explore here, the producers of the advertisements could be accused of taking the liberty of talking about a private issue because these advertisements postulate the existence of a ' problem' and describe menstruation as a barrier with discomforting symptoms which put limits on one's mental and physical actions.

Therefore, there is a message of “ You need these hygienic products to hide and relieve your embarrassment and stay pure and clean. Otherwise you would be stained and feel ashamed and dirty.” For instance, Kotex started a series of advertisement which are based on a simple question to women: “ What weird things do you do on your special days?” In the series, a famous actress took part and filmed doing weird things such as carrying a awkwardly huge bag to hide her back, getting extremely angry out of little issues or taking photos of herself to check whether there is any stains caused by her period.

The Myth of the Magical Youth and Beauty

“ With the rise of the youth culture, advertisers shifted even more from health and safety to youth and beauty. Youth and all things modern have been idealized.” (Del Saz-Rubio and Pennock-Speck, 2009) The advertisements that I watched were proving this statement since all women that took place in these advertisements were at the age of 17-25 or 30 at most. Moreover, the older women were portrayed as role models and advisers in the advertisements and they were not on the focus. Since all women are potential customers until they step into the menopause (age 45-50 on average), there should be another motive behind this choice. As another important point, there is a set of standardized beauty norms in these advertisements. For instance, there was no over weighted woman in any of the sanitary napkin advertisement I watched or analyzed. All of the women were conformed to the widely accepted body norms and standards. So, the modern woman is idealized at being young, free and normatively beautiful and the message of “ youth knows it better” is given.

Although sanitary napkins are started to produce from mid-1980s, its advertisement was not legally and culturally possible until 1920s. First, sanitary napkin advertisements started to take place in women's magazines such as Vogue in 1920s. Then, in 1970s it became legally possible for sanitary napkin brands to do advertising on television and radio. There were still a lot of written and unwritten rules: For instance, these advertisements are shown during daytime which is considered as 'women's TV time', rather than prime time hours. Moreover, it still stayed as a controversial issue and many opposed to this new situation. We can evaluate this new era as a adoption phase in which 'blue liquid' advertisements appeared in the scene. For a long time, blue liquid tests in laboratory environment are used all around the world, as well as in Turkey.

The Messages in the Sanitary Napkin Advertisements

Although the first advertisements focused on the promotion of the product by comparing the different brands such as Orkid vs. Sanitary Napkin with laboratory experiments, this method has been abandoned by many brands recently or they were started to support by some characters and mini drama scripts. The technique of placing highly imposed linguistic message has also been abandoned for the purpose of decreasing the sense of intrusion to private life and decisions directly. Instead of that, a mini drama script and some famous actresses that became public figures and whose consumption habits become trends and followed by the consumers are used.

When it comes to the spaces which are used in these advertisements are also important as one of the non-linguistic components. As I observed, the

place is chosen as ones which are most far away from the main issue. One would expect that bathrooms are used in these advertisements but instead of this, broad and bright spaces are used in interior shootings and crowded and alive urban landscapes for external shootings. The message and intention of this choice is to decrease the possible uneasiness of the viewers with the presupposition that menstruation is a disturbing issue which needs not to be talked or displayed with direct references to it. It should be softened and hidden as much as possible. Another message about the places is the emphasis on the modern and urbanized woman who is a part of the dynamic city life. For instance, Molped and Orkid gave this message and Orkid even conducted a promotion campaign with its 'özgür kadın' Nil Karabrahimgil. This image is created exclusively for the campaign and she is portrayed as a free and strong woman who is capable of having a career and children at the same time. Thus, here we see that products promise modernization, urbanization and freedom to women according to new type of ideal woman. Therefore, we see that advertisement also impose a certain life style on women by using identification techniques.