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REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN DEODORANT ADVERTISEMENTS; A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF AXE PRINT ADVERTISING

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ÖZ

Advertisements give us clues to understand the role of gender in societies and social life; because in advertising of all kinds of products, advertisements are not pure communication forms but ideological texts that interpellate individuals as subjects. Besides the promotion of the products, certain lifestyles and identities are offered to the consumers through advertisements. In today's consumer society, advertising contributes significantly to the establishment of dualistic gender roles and the propagation of sexual identities. It is common for advertising campaigns to invoke gender identity through the use of stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity. This study aims to explore the cultural construction of femininity regarding the usage of language and images as ideological apparatuses in the advertisements. It analyses how advertising imagery builds and maintains conceptions of masculinity, by reflecting upon representation, consumption, and identity. In the beginning, the article takes an overview at the brand and the campaign, and then it goes on to examine the visual representations of the female body in the advertisement at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth. This analysis bases on the Roland Barthes's semiological approach. As a result of the semiotic analysis, it is seen that Axe-3 ad reproduces several myths such as the myth of patriarchal society, the myth of the modern woman and the myth of being sporty and thin.

Keywords: Gender, advertisements, semiological analysis, print ads, myth, ideology.

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Introduction

Advertising plays a key role in propagating dualistic gender roles and prescribing sexual identities as a means of consumption. It is common for advertising campaigns to invoke gender identity through the use of stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity. Advertisers portray masculine activities like shaving, driving fast cars, eating large meals, smoking, and drinking alcohol in opposition to feminine activities like applying makeup, cooking light meals, washing clothes, and decorating homes. It is important to understand that the constrıuction of femininity is different from that of masculinity. This means that The relationship between masculinity and femininity is semiotically and irrevocably interconnected and inextricable (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004).

Gender identity is pervasive in individuals' social worlds and consumerism is fundamentally gendered (Bristor and Fischer 1993, 519). The products are designed for girls or boys from the very beginning, and gender segmentation is understood by consumers as young as two and three years old. So, there is a practice of normative sexual dualism in marketing communication and market segmentation that genders almost all products. In spite of this, consumer desire is regularly attributed agency, leading to an active choice toward gendered products. Consumer behavior is categorized as lifestyle marketing based on how people like to spend their leisure time, and how they spend their disposable income (Solomon, 1999). In other words, the choices consumers make about clothing, hairstyle, piercings, and sexual products all contribute to the construction of their sexuality, lifestyle, and identity (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004).

Although women's position varies from country to country and even within the same country from region to region, they are nowhere near equal to men. This inequality is due to gender discrimination. The majority of women face the same discrimination. As we observe the situation in Turkey, we realize that most woman do not even question the situation.

Traditional views of gender roles and relations have been maintained in Turkey along with changes in women's status inside and outside the home. In the latter years of the Ottoman Empire, when women were permitted to work as teachers, officers, and workers in factories, these changes began (Çilli et al, 2006).However, women's status in Turkey continued to be complex and multifaced in 1990s. Traditional value systems elevate gender segregation in the workplace and in other public spaces as a social ideal, despite the government's guarantee of equal employment and pay for women. (Kaya, 2014). Even urban, educated, professional women are confronted by their husbands' adherence to traditional and religious views about gender roles.

This study analyzes the cultural construction of femininity by looking at the female body and its visual representations in Axe deodorant advertisement. The article analyses how advertising imagery builds and maintains conceptions of masculinity, by reflecting upon representation, consumption, and identity. First, it takes a glance on the brand and the campaign, and then starts to examine the selected printed deodorant advertisement. This analysis bases on the Roland Barthes's semiological approach.

The Brand and the "Axe 3" Campaign

Deodorant is one of the handy cosmetic products that used by many people, young and old, to remove the smell of sweat. The purpose of this product is to remove body odors that may occur on hot summer days or during brisk activities. The main function of the deodorant is to suppress the odors that may occur there by applying it to the points where sweat glands affect the body. Suppressing odors for a while saves time for individuals and allows them to complete their brisk activities without interrupting them. For this reason, deodorant is one of the cosmetic products that are frequently used in daily life.

Unilever's Axe deodorant is primarily marketed to males aged 15 to 30. With a positioning that is aspirational to the target segment, the brand portrays cool, trendy, and confident. Having the girls flock to the Axe user as portrayed in the story is a very desirable outcome. At a more subtle level, the Axe Effect also acts on the confidence levels of the user. The very act of being associated with the brand serves to boost the ego. As a result of this so-called effect, women are supposed to flock to men who spray themselves with Axe deodorant. In other words, Axe appears to act as an aphrodisiac for the females.

AXE deodorant found new product concept and communications strategy in order to increase consumption of its product. They created "AXE 3", a combination of two already-existing AXE deodorants mixed into a third fragrance. To convey this innovation, a campaign is developed where "mixed fragrances" corresponded to "mixed women." The idea was to show men the power of mix and matching women with different tastes and preferences. In terms of marketing, this campaign is a smartly prepared one. It is an intelligent way to sell two cans of the product instead of one and a very good example of how to integrate product and communication concepts. As a result, the campaign reached high levels of awareness and

engagement. Usage in grams increased by 50% for the hybrid product and the product's life cycle reduced by 10 days due to the increased usage. Market share went up 2% with 10% incremental turnover (Psfk, 2008).

The campaign has many sections in various media; here we will focus on the printed ads. Based on the same idea, three characters have been created and three different ads have been made with them. First one is the schoolgirl plus skier, second is the executive plus volley player and the last one is the psychologist plus swimmer. As it can clearly be seen, all the girls are either businesswoman or student, doing things which require intelligence, additionally they are associated with sports, namely, they have intelligence plus fit bodies. We will concentrate on the executive plus volley player in detail and make a semiotic analysis of the printed advertisement with Barthes's method.



Picture 1: Axe 3 advertising campaign printed advertisements

The Denoted Image

When the ad is seen, firstly the eye captures the woman who is in the very center of the frame and the light flash behind her. On one hand she is wearing a white shirt, black jacket, a black belt, black shoes. She tied her hair behind and wearing eyeglasses and a silver watch, which are very usual clothes and accessories for a businesswoman. She also carries a briefcase. She is wearing make-up, visibly a red lipstick. There are business towers behind her, so she looks like as if she has clocked out and coming from one of these buildings.



Picture 2: Axe 3 Print ad; executive plus volley player

On the other hand, she has knee guards and elbow guards, and black shorts. She is also dressed like a volley player and walking to and staring directly at the audience. She has tied her shirt under her breasts in a way to show her belly. Her skin is shining, her breasts and belly is open which is not usual either for a businesswoman or for a volley player. To understand why she is wearing like that, here, the linguistic message (which is placed just above her head) plays an anchorage role. It is understood from the body copy that the woman is both an executive and a volley player. However, this doesn't make it natural the way she has worn and the scene is still very artificial. The purpose is to show the audience her mixed features which make her an object to look at. Thus, we see a very desirable, sexy businesswoman and a slim, fit sportswoman at the same time.

When it comes to other elements on the page; black and warm colors like yellow and orange are dominant on the image. Extraordinarily, the building on the left is not straight; it is skewed, but the woman is extraordinary, too. There is a second light behind her; a linear yellow light. It looks like it is coming from cars passing behind her. That is to say, the whole composition is not stable but very lively, the woman is active, she is walking (she has just crossed the street), the cars are passing, the lights on the windows are also a sign of the life and activity in the towers.

The Linguistic Messages

Before examining the linguistic messages, it is proper to start with the brand name and the logo. The name "Axe" itself gives not simply the name of the brand but also, by both its meaning and assonance, that of masculinity. This is an additional signified, so it is both denotational and connotational. When it comes to the logo, the way it is designed is very masculine with its sans serif letters with their sharp and smooth edges and the grey color. Thus, it is very easy to say that, it is for the male target group only by seeing the logo. On the advertising image, it is small but easily readable on the brand Axe 3.

The first literal message the eye captures is the one in the middle, on the top of the page; "Executive + Volley Player". It is bigger than the others and it is written with capital letters. This makes us understand that why the girl is wearing like that. The second linguistic message is the slogan: "It's good to mix." It is written with capital letters as well, and it is essential because it gives the main idea of the campaign. We see the copy lastly because it is on the bottom of the page and in miniscule letters: "Mix Axe 1 with Axe 2 and create the new Axe 3. Combinable Fragrances." Finally, tis message is promising the audience that they can find a woman like her by mixing these two Axes because the females get irresistibly drawn to the males implying that Axe 3 acts like a nasal aphrodisiac.

The Connotations

At this level, the advertisement has many signifieds (Table 1). It is proper to start with the woman figure since she is the leading element of the ad. First of all, she looks like she has clocked out, coming out from one of the business towers behind her. She is carrying a briefcase. So, her first attribute is being an executive. The idea that the scene represented is a businesswoman getting off work. She is important, independent, and strong. Her eyeglasses are a symbol of work and business, too; she may be reading a lot since the eyeglasses are regarded as a sign of sedulity because most of the hardworking people wear them. In the same manner, the business towers behind her are signifying her importance and her business. The buildings are large and tall, they signify that she is working at a big corporate, not a small one. There are many people working for her. So, she is doing important things, she is an important person. Contrary to the idea of getting of work, she doesn't look tired and she is not wearing like a typical businesswoman, because of the mixture of her clothes.

Table 1: Sign analysis of Axe 3 print ad

Signifier	**Signified (Denotation / Connotation)**	
Woman figure	Woman in appearance of manager and volleyball player	**Denotation:** An unusually mixed-dressed woman **Connotation:** Mixed features; beauty, charm and success.
Business towers	Tall towers with light inside	**Denotation:** Business life **Connotation:** Work, importance, standing on one's feet, movement.
Product image and Company logo	Featured company logo	**Denotation:** Company logo, axe name meaning: axe as a tool **Connotation:** Masculinity
Flash light burst	Light reflection	**Denotation:** Sunlight or camera flash **Connotation:** Attractiveness, sexiness and power
Horizontal light	A long thin beam of light	**Denotation:** The light created by car headlights on the go **Connotation:** movement, activity
Night	Dark environment	**Denotation:** Part of a day **Connotation:** Dream, beauty, sex, eternity

Her second attribute, being a volley player explains her slim body. She is tall and on her ideal weight thanks to the volleyball. Thus, she is proudly showing her body. However, the way the woman is shown is far from a natural scene, it is very strange until the reader sees the literal message: "Executive + Volley Player". It strongly implies that this woman has mixed features in contrast to most of other females. She is beautiful, intelligent, and successful, a woman with mixed qualifications. Her opened body and shining skin are very enticing since the purpose of the ad is to draw attention to her and promise the man that they can reach a woman like her by using Axe 3, which is obtained by mixing Axe 1 and Axe 2. As a result, the signified is a modern woman. She has a career; successful at her job, besides she is beautiful, slim and fit thanks to the sports. It can be said that these attributes are very desirable for many men.

Another sign on the ad is the light flash behind the woman, which is signifying the warmness, sexiness and power. It could be considered as the reflection of the sun if it was not a scene from night. It is a signifier of the woman's power and brilliance. Additionally, the fact that the scene has arranged at night is not a coincidence, it is intentional because of the connotations of night such as dream, mystery, sex and indefiniteness etc. The dark scene makes the woman sexier and more mysterious. Likewise, the dominant black and warm colors signify sexiness and hotness. All the lights and sparkles on the page are the signs of the female's power and prodigiousness. Consequently, the woman is not the only sexy object in the ad; the whole atmosphere is designed very hot and sexy with its colors, lights and the actions. When the image is considered with all its elements together, the message is very clear: a woman like her is very hard to find but not impossible, she can be reached with using these mixed fragrances.

What this Axe advert explicitly does is to identify the female with the deodorant; "terrific scent brings a terrific woman". It implies that it is very hard to obtain a woman like her. Because it is considered in the society that most of the women are either beautiful or smart; the ones who is beautiful is considered as generally not intelligent, likewise the ones who are intelligent and successful (and have a career) are mostly considered as charmless and/or boring, hence only this wonderful scent helps them to get a mixed woman.

Codings found in the Axe 3 printed ad are given with tese binary oppositions; attractive-sloppy, beautiful-ugly, extraordinary-ordinary, striking-usual, strong-weak, smart-stupid, active-passive, energetic-static, and hot-cold (Table 2).

Table 2: Binary oppositions in Axe 3 print ad

Attractive	sloppy
Beautiful	Ugly
Extraordinary	Ordinary
Striking	Usual
Strong	Weak
Smart	stupid
Active	Passive
Energetic	Stable
Hot	Cold

Myths That Axe-3 Ads Reproduce

Unlike many other ads which use the woman image, this ad carries out the presentation of woman figure as a desire object very explicitly. In this context, by establishing an identity between the product and the woman, the ad places the woman like a product that man could get her like any other product. The extraordinary case here is that this ad (and the whole campaign) is imposing that this type of woman -who is successful and beautiful at the same time- is almost impossible to find and could only be accessed by using this miracle deodorant.

For female audience on the other hand, this ad teaches the woman how they should look and what should they do to attract the male's attention: "If you want to be desired, you should look like this." Woman, as an object being looked at, presenting her femininity, and if we look again to all the three ads of this campaign, none of the women is on the go in contrast with their sportswear or business suit, but it is taken it for granted.

As a result of the semiotic analysis, it can be seen that Axe-3 ad reproduces several myths such as:

1- The myth of patriarchal society; the woman should be desirable for men.
2- The myth of the modern woman; the criterions are beauty, intelligence, sexiness to be desirable.
3- The women are either beautiful or smart; the notion that women generally do not possess both of these qualities.
4- The myth of thin woman; the women should do sports and have beautiful bodies.

To examine the myths of this advertising with Barthes's method, the meaning, form and concept should be defined. On the plane of language, the meaning of the picture is A young, beautiful businesswoman (and sportswoman) is clocked out and walking forward. It signifies a desirable woman presenting her body as an object for male's attention. As Barthes said, "the signifier can be looked at, in myth, from two points of view: as the final term of the linguistic system (meaning), or as the first term of the mythical system (form). When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind … history evaporates" (Barthes, 1991: 152). In this advertising what evaporates by the form is the history of the patriarchal society and of the modern woman. The concept has distorted the meaning. "The intention of myth is frozen, purified, naturalized, and made absent by the literal sense" (Barthes, 1991: 122). The female has to be beautiful to be desirable for male. The concept is naturalized.

When focusing on mythical signifier as on an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, the woman who is showing her body for male attention is not a symbol but less an alibi: she is the very presence of patriarchal society and modernity. Barthes (1991) states that myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear. The myth exists from the precise moment when patriarchal society and the norms of

modern woman achieve this natural state. "Myth is speech justified in excess" as Barthes said (1991: 129). The connotative sign system reveals a female complicity to male domination, in relationship to the form of communication implying the meaning of myth: men are defined as active agents by what they do, and women are defined by their subordination to men.

Today, women's role is shaped by a patriarchal point of view. Male-dominated culture has an attribution which pushes women to have some compulsory roles. Woman body is established by the advertising images according to the dominant ideals. Adopted by the dominant patriarchal culture, the women who have grown in this background adopt this role without questioning it. From the very young ages women are taught to be beautiful, to study and have a job. Thus, in our society an ideal woman type is constituted; she is young and fit, she has shiny skin, long ledges, vigorous looking. This type of woman is infusing and reproducing by the advertisings and normalized under these ideologies. In "Axe 3 Mixed Fragrances" campaign, the intelligibility is added to the triangle of sports, health and beauty. According to Barthes (1991: 139), "These normalized forms attract little attention, by the very fact of their extension, in which their origin is easily lost."

Under this male-dominated discourse, some woman types like "slim, young, beautiful etc." have been created. Advertising images successfully impose women to look young, thin and elegant, as criterions of attractiveness and also reputability. In the consumer society, the ideal type of woman which is created by the ads is monotype; young and slim. "Other is a scandal which threatens the essence. Any otherness is reduced to sameness (Barthes, 1991: 152)." Through the press, the news and literature, it slowly becomes the very norm as dreamed, tough not actually lived. Axe 3 printed advertising series successfully reproduces these values in these advertising images and this kind of ads are great tools for reproducing and exhibiting these degenerating values to consumption of society. The whole west is in this male dominated ideology. The press, movies, theatre, literature, rituals, Justice, diplomacy and everything in everyday life depend on the representation that the ruling class has and offers us about the relations between man and the world. Barthes (1991) likens the function of myth to the cuttlefish squirting ink to protect itself; He states that it constantly obscures until it fixates this world into an object which can be forever possessed.

Conclusion

In "Axe 3 Mixed Fragrances" campaign, all three women are associated with sports. A woman who is doing sports is thought as having a smooth and taut body. This is because sports remind women to lose weight and to be slim and being slim reminds them to be healthy and beautiful. They have been taught that they will have an athletic body free from fat by doing sports. By the way, the advertising suggests the women to be robust and appealing and to lead a happy life with high qualities. Thus, the women's self-confidence and self-esteem will increase. However, "There is no fixity in mythical concepts" as Barthes said. If it is considered in the case of the norms of the beautiful woman for example considering Turkey, in the past being fat was being beautiful. Thin women were considered as unhealthy and unattractive back then. Today, it is just the opposite.

To sum up, on one hand, the Axe ads are infusing woman the obligation of being beautiful and successful in order to be attracted by men; on the other hand, it is infusing to men that finding a woman who is both smart and sexy is very difficult. It hints at that; this ideal woman is normally very hard to find, but not impossible. Thus, she can only be achieved by mixing these two deodorants. In other words, it implies that the woman is either beautiful or smart; a woman cannot be attractive, intelligent and have a career at the same time. The ones who are successful at their jobs are generally thought as boring, unattractive, fat etc. Likewise, the ones who are beautiful and sexy usually considered as not intelligent and unsuccessful.

Consequently, the campaign examined in this research imposes women the duty of being beautiful and successful. This fact is normalized by the myths by expressions like health, beauty, slimness, intelligence etc. This is a prohibition for woman against inventing herself. Not all the women have to be beautiful and/or intelligent. However, the main function of myth is to naturalize a concept or a belief. When creating an ideology, myth tries not to show or hide the truth, but to deviate from reality. Thus, a modernized, consumption-oriented women myth has been formed. By maintaining this myth, the perspective of the women is being shaped. Advertising images are setup under the impact of dominant ideologies, and it is clearly seen how important role they have, for the spread of consumption culture.

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DEODORANT REKLAMLARINDA CİNSİYET TEMSİLİ: AXE-3 REKLAMININ GÖSTERGEBİLİMSEL ANALİZİ

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ÖZ

Reklamlar toplumsal cinsiyetin toplumlardaki rolünü anlamamız için bize ipuçları vermektedir; çünkü her türlü ürünün reklamında reklamlar salt iletişim biçimleri değil, bireyleri özneler olarak konumlandıran ideolojik metinlerdir. Ürünlerin tanıtımının yanı sıra belirli yaşam tarzları ve kimlikler de reklamlar aracılığıyla tüketicilere sunulmaktadır. Günümüz tüketim toplumunda reklam, ikili cinsiyet rollerinin kurulmasına ve cinsel kimliklerin yayılmasına önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunur. Reklam kampanyalarının, erkeklik ve kadınlığın basmakalıp ikonografisini kullanarak cinsiyet kimliğine başvurması oldukça yaygındır. Bu araştırma, reklamlarda ideolojik aygıtlar olarak dil ve imgelerin kullanımına ilişkin olarak kadınlığın kültürel inşasını araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Reklam görüntülerinin temsil, tüketim ve kimlik üzerinden erkeklik kavramlarını nasıl oluşturduğu ve sürdürdüğü analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmada, başlangıçta marka ve kampanya hakkında bir genel bakış sunulmuş daha sonra reklamda kadın bedeninin görsel temsilleri düz anlam, yan anlam ve mit düzeylerinde incelenmiştir. Bu analiz, Roland Barthes'ın göstergebilimsel yaklaşımına dayanmaktadır. Yapılan göstergebilimsel analiz sonucunda Axe-3 reklamının ataerkil toplum miti, modern kadın miti, sportif ve zayıf olma miti gibi birçok miti yeniden ürettiği görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet, basılı reklamlar, göstergebilimsel analiz, mit, ideoloji