

## Chapter 8

# Gender and Patriarchy in Turkish Advertising: A Semiotic Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

*The present chapter discusses a particular advertisement aired for a bank in Turkey from a semiotic perspective. Advertising as film is visual storytelling. A film has language and form, and is made up of parts that relate to one another in specific ways that affect the audience. Film techniques take on a semiotic function in the process of meaning construction. As a cultural phenomenon, advertisements can reveal hidden meanings, such as gender issues and patriarchal discourse in the case of the analysed advertisement.*

### INTRODUCTION

The impact of advertising on culture and gender has been debated and discussed for more than forty years. Today, researchers in this field are aiming to underpin specific problems within advertising and gender debate, including the notion of postfeminism, queer visibilities, and hegemonic masculinities. As a result, and considering that people are still not completely aware of problems related to gender and patriarchy, reproducing these concepts in advertising should be issues to be discussed in Turkey.

Advertising has been accepted as a type of mass media, and has an important role in socialization. Advertisements have been critically evaluated as cultural texts and as an ideological apparatus that reproduces gender roles and promotes patriarchy. The hidden messages that construct hegemonic and patriarchal meanings cannot be always easily recognized because advertisements convey them to people by implicitly telling the story.

Storytelling has been part of human culture for thousands of years, and it is a powerful and enduring means of communication (Zatwarnicka-Madura & Nowacki, 2018). Since marketers understand that buying decisions are based on emotional experiences, and that storytelling can generate positive

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emotional responses, communication is shifting from persuading consumers through the direct delivery of information to an emphasis on appealing to their emotions. This is why advertising professionals tell people a story. They aim to entice consumers' emotions by using matching stimuli to enhance persuasion effects and gain a foothold in their minds.

Advertising is a form of cultural storytelling that, inevitably, is not only shaped by society, but also shapes and affects society, legalizing undesirable facts, such as gender inequality and patriarchy. Thus, it should be discussed by both academia and marketers, not directly, but indirectly, namely by referring and implicating how gender inequality and patriarchy have been reflected in advertising.

This chapter aims to reveal the hidden meanings of advertising that supposedly support opportunities for equal education by discussing the discourse of advertising in a critical manner. In this chapter, the author considers advertising as a cultural phenomenon, and advertising texts as cultural artifacts to be read and discussed critically in order to reveal the hidden, gender-biased and patriarchal discourse of advertising. The author will resort to semiotic analysis in order to put her points across.

## **BACKGROUND**

Advertisers are in the business of changing human behavior through messages, and stories can make that happen (Sharma, 2019) because stories touch upon human emotions and make a connection unintrusively (Kissell, 2019). According to Kim (as cited in Kissell, 2019):

*People don't always react well to being told to buy a product. But, structural elements in the narratives, such as the presence of the main character in a story and their actions in the plot, enable a viewer to relate to the story in the ad, which in turn generates more positive feelings in the viewer. (para. 4)*

According to Bruner (as cited in Väre, 2014), this is due to the fact that human beings are culturally conditioned to think in narratives about their lives, to organize their experiences into a narrative form. As narrative advertising leads to narrative processing, individuals create meaning for themselves by incorporating the brand story as props in their own life story (Escalas, 2004). In addition to this, Moraru (2015) stated that "in advertising, narration is used to convey the brand or product message, position it in the minds of consumers, and, ultimately, achieve satisfactory levels of retention" (p.195). Yang (2013) found that, by triggering emotional reactions, "storytelling is more persuasive than statements or quantitative information" (p. 146).

Zatwarnicka-Madura and Nowacki (2018) stated that numerous studies on narrative advertising and storytelling show their effectiveness in influencing the audience. Research on the effectiveness of storytelling shows that its use has a positive effect on communication and behaviour, in particular on the awareness of the message conveyed by the advertisement, on the perception of quality, the attitude towards advertising, the shopping intentions, and the engagement in the content of advertising (Zatwarnicka-Madura & Nowacki, 2018).

As a part of culture industry, advertising practices are symbolically and culturally meaningful. Therefore, advertising has managed to attain culturally and symbolically constructed meanings (Nas, 2015). Advertising as a cultural text reflects a society's discourses based on social beliefs, values, customs and traditions, and life-styles (Kaya, 2017).

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