

A Semiotic Analysis of Femvertising Advertisements in Sports Marketing

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Abstract

In the sports industry and sports media, femvertising advertisements, which move women away from their traditional image and position women in a powerful position through successful female athletes, are frequently encountered in the promotion of sports products. In addition to the advertisements related to the marketing of sports products, female athletes have started to appear frequently as the face of advertisements in the promotion and advertisement of brands belonging to other sectors. The socially powerful image of women has become an important message given through female athletes in these advertisements.

This study aims to analyze femvertising advertisements used in the sports industry. The main starting point of the study is how the female image is defined in advertisements in the sports industry and the femvertising elements in the messages given by these definitions. In the study, the semiotic method was used to analyze the femvertising messages in a sports product advertisement through a sample commercial film. In this analysis; the codes, metaphors, connotations and denotations implicit in the work are addressed, analyzed and interpreted through signs. In the analyzed commercial, both social masculine stereotypes in sports and femvertising language elements used against masculine stereotypes were found. Throughout the film, elements criticizing masculine language are presented together with elements emphasizing the power of women.

It is possible to see themes such as gender equality, women's presence and success in sports against the implicit expressions attributed to women in the context of gender. In this sense, it can be said that brands that feature female athletes and position female athletes correctly in advertisements are fulfilling a social responsibility.

Keywords: Adversiting, Femvertising, Sports industry, Semiotics

Spor Pazarlamasında Femvertising Reklamlarının Göstergebilimsel Analizi

Özet

Spor endüstrisi ve spor medyasında kadını geleneksel imajından uzaklaştıran ve başarılı kadın sporcular aracılığıyla kadını güçlü bir noktada konumlandıran femvertising reklamlara, spor ürünlerinin tanıtımında sıkça rastlanmaktadır. Spor ürünlerinin pazarlanması ile ilgili reklamların yanı sıra, diğer sektörlere ait markaların tanıtım ve reklamında da kadın sporcular reklam yüzü olarak sıkça yer almaya başlamıştır. Kadının toplumsal olarak güçlü imajı, bu reklamlarda kadın sporcular aracılığıyla verilen önemli bir mesaj haline gelmiştir.

Bu çalışma spor endüstrisinde kullanılan femvertising reklamları analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Spor endüstrisi içinde yer alan reklamlarda kadın imgesinin nasıl tanımlandığı ve bu tanımlamaların verdiği mesajlarda yer alan femvertising öğeler çalışmanın temel çıkış noktasıdır. Çalışmada göstergebilimsel metot kullanılarak örnek bir reklam filmi üzerinden, spor ürünü reklamında yer alan femvertising mesajlar analiz edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu çözümlemede; yapıtta örtük olarak yer alan kodlar, metaforlar, yan anlamlar ve imalar göstergeler aracılığıyla ele alınmış, çözümlenmiş ve yorumlanmıştır. İncelenen reklam filminde, hem sporda var olan toplumsal eril kalıplara hem de eril kalıplar karşısında kullanılan femvertising dil öğelerine rastlanmıştır. Filmin bütününde eril dili eleştiren unsurlar, kadının gücüne vurgu yapan unsurlarla birlikte sunulmuştur.

Toplumsal cinsiyet bağlamında kadına atfedilmiş olan örtük ifadeler karşısında, cinsiyet eşitliği, kadının spordaki varlığı, başarısı gibi temaları reklam filminin bütününde görmek mümkündür. Bu anlamda kadın sporculara yer veren ve kadını reklamlarda doğru konumlandıran markaların, toplumsal bir sorumluluğu yerine getirdiği söylenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Femvertising, Göstergebilim, Reklamcılık, Spor endüstrisi

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of differences in cultural patterns and social values between men and women as a result of biological differences is generally defined as gender. This concept refers to the differences between the roles socially assigned to the distinction between feminine and masculine.¹ The concept of gender is a term constructed on the basis of masculinity and femininity. Socialized gender roles have created roles that leave women under the domination of men.² From the moment they come into the world, individuals are expected to adapt to the roles and behavioral patterns assigned to the male and female gender.³

Socially imposed gender stereotypes can cause pressure and stress on individuals. The effort to adapt to the stereotypes expected by society can negatively affect the psychology of both men and women. In addition, this situation may cause gender inequality. Today, even though awareness about gender equality has increased, inequalities still persist in many areas.⁴ While social norms determine the place of women in life, they also determine the place of women in business life. Gender and norms have managed to influence both the skills and goals of women in choosing a profession by offering women jobs and professions suitable for women's structure and living conditions.⁵ Social roles and stereotypes that have emerged between men and women throughout history have led to the emergence of inequalities between the sexes, and with the inclusion of women in business life, there has been an increase in the social roles attributed to women.⁶ These increases and changes in social norms have also started to change the social status of women. Women have become able to do many professions that men do. However, in some societies, women are still identified with specific professions within the limits of the roles assigned to them.⁷ For all these reasons, the sports industry has also taken on a male-dominated occupational structure, and many sports branches have been maintained in a male-dominated structure for many years. Especially in areas such as football, combat sports and wrestling, men have taken a more active role, which has led to the emergence of a gender-oriented branch understanding in sports.

The media has a great influence on the professional approach based on gender roles. The media can be effective especially on young people by producing value judgments. While the value judgments produced through the media strengthen ideological perspectives, they can have the effect of changing social relations by undertaking the task of regulating social relations. Cultural changes imposed by the media have brought many problems on gender roles.⁸ It is generally assumed that individuals identify themselves with the people and events they see in the media. The individual may have the attitude of imitating the behavior he/she sees in the advertisement in a way that society deems appropriate.⁹ In this sense, women-oriented advertisements have become important based on social changes. Femvertising ads, sometimes referred to as "women-focused", sometimes as "feminist advertising" and sometimes as "women-themed advertising", have started to be used frequently in many areas from sports to food, from clothing to cars.^{10,11,12,13} These advertisements have gained popularity in the society and have become enjoyable to watch.

Advertisements that emphasize women's abilities beyond their socially accepted duties, glorify women and position them in a powerful position are generally defined as femvertising advertisements.¹⁴ These advertisements have started to be used in many areas all over the world. The origin of the word is formed from the French word for woman and the English word for advertisement and refers to an advertising style.¹⁵ In general, it is possible to talk about an understanding of advertising that challenges the traditional female figure and stereotypical behaviors in these women-themed advertisements.¹⁶ With the impact of studies on gender equality, many businesses have started to change the male-dominated discourse in the advertisements they use in brand promotion and started to include advertisements that show women as strong by using a content that focuses on women. In these advertisements, feminist and anti-feminist messages are intertwined.¹⁷ Brands that use femvertising ads in product promotion want to position themselves in the eyes of their consumers as a culturally aware brand identity that cares about gender equality. In this way, these advertisements can be preferred with the idea of having a more sincere effect on the consumer.¹⁵

In the historical process, gender discrimination in the selection of sports branches or in competitions has been at the forefront, especially in some sports branches. Being successful in competitive sports includes elements such as determination, strength, and physical endurance. Since it is believed that men have these characteristics, the presence of women in competitive sports has not been accepted as much as men in society.¹⁸ The place of women in the sports industry is similar to the modernization process. In the historical process, sport has emerged as a field pioneered by elite men. Throughout the process, it is possible to see that women have a conditional place in sports, which is generally under a male-dominated structure. In these conditions imposed on women, there are gender roles related to moral values and aesthetics that are identified with their gender. Women should not harm these roles. At the same time, they had to act in accordance with the image of femininity.^{19, 20} Due to these gender-based conditions that have been imposed on women in sports in the historical process, women athletes have struggled to exist in sports, traditional media and sports media. For a long time, sports and the media have historically been dominated by male domination. It is possible to observe that the individuals and heroes in the news and events related to sports in the sports media are mostly men. The male-dominated structure in sports has also spread to the sports media. In this sense, it is possible to say that most of the employees working in the sports media, such as reporters and announcers, have a male-dominated structure.^{21,22}

In the historical process, the acceptance of the presence of women in sports and the great achievements of female athletes led to the acceptance of the presence of women in sports and female athletes started to be frequently featured in the sports media. Femvertising advertisements which move away from the traditional image of women, glorify women and emphasize that women are in a stronger position in society, have taken their place in the sports industry and sports media.^{14,16} These advertisements have started to be used frequently in the promotion of sports products and brands. In addition, not only in the marketing of sports products but also in the promotion and advertisement of products belonging to other sectors, female athletes have taken place

especially as the face of advertisements. In these advertisements, the socially strong and successful image of women has become an important message given through athletes. For all these reasons, this study aims to analyze femvertising advertisements used in the promotion of products and services in the sports industry. In this study, the starting point of the study is the questions of how the female image is defined in advertisements used in the sports industry and what are the femvertising messages given by these definitions. For this purpose, the study uses the semiotic method to analyze the femvertising messages given in a sports product advertisement through a sample commercial film.

2. Materials and Methods

In the study, qualitative research models were used as the research model and semiotic analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Semiotics emerged as a branch of science in the 20th century. This analysis basically refers to revealing and presenting the meanings revealed through signs.²³ In semiotics, the concept of sign is important. Individuals who are members of a certain group have their own natural language and their own hand and arm movements to communicate with each other. In addition to this, some groups have meaningful strings that have certain rules within themselves, such as alphabets, traffic signs, pictures, music and images that they have developed among themselves. All these strings are called signs.²⁴ On the basis of semiotics, the principles and differences that constitute actions are described in strings.²⁵ In the semiotic method, there are basically two different approaches in the process of making sense of signs. In these approaches, Barthes presents an analysis in the form of "plain meaning" and "connotation" of the sign in the signification process, while Saussure structured the signification process as signifier, signifier and signified.^{26,27,28} In this study, both approaches were blended and the femvertising elements and approaches in the sports product advertisement were tried to be explained with the researchers' own interpretations.

2.1. Sample of the Study

In this study, a brand in the sports industry, a sports organization and an advertisement featuring a female athlete were selected through purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling method used in qualitative studies is a widely used technique for identifying and selecting information-rich cases for the most effective use of resources. In this method, the selection of individuals and groups related to the subject is at the forefront.^{29,30} This commercial, which contains a sports element, was tried to be analyzed in terms of femvertising elements, and it was tried to reveal how femvertising elements were emphasized in the commercial. For this purpose, the section shot with national and Olympic athlete Merve Dinçel from the commercial series shot by Adidas, one of the global companies in the sports industry, with the slogan "it would be more stylish if you go" was selected by purposeful sampling method. The commercial was taken from Adidas' official social media networks and YouTube platform. The frames and speech lines in the commercial were analyzed by the authors using the semiotic method. While selecting the sample of the study, the main reasons for the purposeful selection of the commercial film are that Adidas, the advertiser, has an important place in the sports

industry on a global scale, the element used in the commercials (Paris Olympic Games) is one of the world's largest sports organizations in the sports industry, and the female actress (Merve Dinçel) playing in the commercial is a world-famous Olympic athlete. In addition, the visuals and commercial elements in the sample were taken from Adidas' official platforms, YouTube and Instagram images, which are publicly available and free of copyright. These images are publicly accessible, publicly published advertisement images.

3. Findings

This section is given under two main headings. The first one is the general summary of the commercial film and the second one is the analysis of the indicators in the commercial frames in terms of femvertising advertising. In both sections, all interpretations given in the semiotic analysis were made by the authors.

Summary of the commercial

In the commercial to be analyzed; advertiser: Adidas Turkey, advertising agency: aRthuR Istanbul, production company: Depo Film, commercial producers: Ender Sevim, Cüneyt Utkular, Melisa Divanoğlu, Öykü Aytulun, commercial director: Eralp Varda, actors: Cem Yılmaz and Merve Dinçel. This is the general information about the advertisement.³¹

In the commercial, the "Adidas Turkey" collection, which is the "Official Elegance Supplier of Team Turkey" for the 2024 Olympic Games, was introduced with a commercial film series consisting of five separate episodes and the advertising slogan "your going would be more elegant". In this study, the part of the commercial with Olympic Turkish taekwondo athlete Merve Dinçel Kavurat is discussed. It is possible to summarize the commercial in general terms as follows.

The commercial starts on a taekwondo mat in a dimly lit gym. In the first part, where Olympic athlete Merve Dinçel and actor Cem Yılmaz face each other, the male actor throws his helmet aside, saying "no need for a helmet, hit me". The female Olympic athlete kicks him in the face with a spinning kick. The player falls down hard with this blow, recovers in a few seconds and gets back up, trying to smile with an obviously pained expression saying "I had gum in my mouth". As the female athlete kicks the second kick with a confident athletic stance, the male player grabs the Olympic athlete's foot. Then, as if making a phone call to somewhere (like the Olympic Committee), he says "hello, it would be more elegant for Merve to come to Paris" and smiles bitterly. The Olympic athlete smiles with the pride and confidence of deserving to go to the Olympics. She laughs when the phone call ends. In the last frames of the movie, Cem Yılmaz, one of the actors walking towards the foreground, tries to imitate Merve Dinçel's movements and posture and bows to the camera with an athlete's stance and the commercial ends. In the commercial, the colors of the Turkish flag (red-white) stand out as the foreground colors in all frames. On the tracksuits used by the brand, the text "Turkey" stands out in all frames. Both the importance of the Olympic Games and the justified pride of Turkey's athletes qualifying for the Olympics and the athletes representing Turkey are successfully presented in the commercial by blending them with Adidas' sports products.

Figure 1. Images from commercial movie frames³¹



Semiotic analysis of advertising film frames

In this section, the frames in the film are analyzed in terms of femvertising advertising. Side meanings and messages behind the indicators will be tried to be read. In the interpretation of the messages, the authors, as commentators, gave place to their personal opinions. This section is limited to the interpretation of the authors.

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of the Advertisement in terms of Femvertising

Indicator	Signifier/ Plain meaning	Displayed/Subtext meaning
Object	A dimly lit gym and taekwondo mat	This scene begins with a mystery about the sport and the athlete in the ad
Human	In the foreground a male athlete in tracksuits with the colors of the Turkish flag, in the background a female athlete in tracksuits of the same color.	A man in the foreground, but a woman in the background, confidently stepping onto the field. This female figure suggests the power of successful female athletes in sports.
Object and Human	Sports helmet, men, women	The attitude of a man who underestimates a woman when he sees her in front of him. Throwing the helmet on his head on the ground and saying "no need for a helmet, hit me", the representation of male power against women brings to mind the display of power.
Object and Human	Woman, sneakers, woman athlete's spinning kick.	Confidence and self-confidence are also felt here. A great aesthetic and the way she knocks down a much larger man with a single move is a tribute to her intelligence, strength and athletic ability.
Human	Women, men	"I had gum in my mouth," a man gasps, trying to pick himself up from the ground. Awareness of women's strength and sporting success has not yet developed in the male perspective. The man is still trying to give the impression that I am stronger and more successful than you.
Object and Human	Women's, men's, sneakers	The Olympic athlete's flat kick, the male player catches the foot. He acknowledges both her sporting success and her physical strength and abilities. He makes a phone call to Olympic officials. Accepting the situation by saying, "It would be more elegant for Merve to come to Paris".
Human	Women and men	The woman laughs. Her joy at her success and the man's acceptance of female power in sport are visible.
Human	Women and men	The greeting of the man and woman together. Confident posture of the woman. It reflects her belief that she will succeed.

When the femvertising elements in the commercial are analyzed in detail, it is possible to say the following. It is important that a female Olympic athlete takes part in a combat sport, which is one of the important branches of sports in general and is mostly integrated with the male figure. The emphasis that the place of women in sports in Turkish society has reached a very important point is felt in the commercial. At the beginning of the movie, the male figure's approach that belittles the power and success of women is a message that men are stronger than women in terms of gender roles. In the face of this attitude, the confident stance of the female athlete, her belief that she will succeed and her self-confidence are beautifully portrayed in the commercial. At the same time, her knocking down the man with a sporty spinning kick and flat kick with great aesthetics suggests the figure of strong woman and successful woman in sports. The Olympic athlete's catching the male player's sneaker at her own neck length with her flat kick and making a phone call accepting the power of the female athlete is a message to the acceptance of the place of women in sports. After the statement "It would be more elegant for Merve to come to Paris", the female athlete's celebration of her success with her laughter can be interpreted as a reference to female behavior in gender. In the last frames, when the male and female figures greet the screen side by side, the man's uneasiness in the face of the Olympic athlete, the woman's confident stance and belief that she will succeed are passed on to the audience. In all these frames, it is possible to see femvertising messages including themes such as gender equality, women's presence in sports, success and pride in the whole commercial in the face of implicit expressions attributed to women in the context of gender.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In the analysis of the commercial film selected in the study, the semiotics method was preferred and femvertising language elements and visuals used against social masculine stereotypes were tried to be interpreted through the messages given in the commercial film. As a result of the study, both elements criticizing masculine language and elements emphasizing the power of women were found.

When we look at the phenomenon of women in sport, in almost all cultures, sport has made sense of itself with male power. When the gender elements and duties attributed to women began to differentiate in the historical process, these differences also manifested themselves in the field of sports. Thus, women have started to exist in all branches of sports all over the world and have achieved great success. Women, who started to show their presence in sports not with their gender identity but with their achievements and sporting power, took part in male-dominated sports branches (such as football and combat sports). With the social acceptance of women's success in sports, businesses in the sports industry have started to promote their brands with advertisements and films focused on female athletes. In these women-oriented advertisements, which are called femvertising advertisements, the emphasis on women athletes was presented with an egalitarian understanding and received positive feedback from the society in general. When the literature is examined in general, we come across advertisements that blend sports, female athletes and sports branches in many of the advertisements made in the field of Femvertising. Although the studies

conducted in this field are not focused on the sports industry in general, it can be said that female athletes are included in the analyzed advertising elements and that businesses are trying to increase their brand awareness in this way. In their study conducted in 2019, Bozbay et al. concluded that women-themed advertisements are recognized by the society and the names of brands that make such advertisements are remembered. They said that femvertising ads are effective in creating brand awareness.¹³

In the brand advertisement of a global business in the sports industry, a major sports organization and a successful female athlete were featured. In the advertisement, which progresses with a femvertising concept, the female figure in a sports branch other than stereotypical female roles is represented with her strengths and achievements. It is thought that this situation gives important social messages about the place of women in sports branches. Tor-Kadioğlu, in their study on the commercial film of selpak company in 2021, mentioned the importance of presenting female athletes with their achievements and emphasized that women are removed from a passive position in these advertisements. They stated that these advertisements, which show the successful and strong sides of women with a realistic approach, represent women with more accurate messages and that the female figure in the media is given in a strong way.³²

The use of female athletes or sports organizations in the advertising industry and the correct positioning of the messages given in the advertisement can create ideals based on success and power on young individuals and this can have positive effects on young individuals. In addition, the emphasis on successful female athletes can be a source of inspiration for amateur female athletes. In their study on femvertising advertisements in 2021, Kırılı and Çakır analyzed the Nike commercial film in the sports industry. In this study, they stated that the presentation of advertisements with a strong female representation creates new ideals for women. They also said that the woman who cannot reach the ideal created in the advertisement positions herself at a weak point.³³

In an effort to promote and sell their goods and services to a wider audience, businesses and marketers have developed new strategies and started to use new marketing techniques that focus on individuals' feelings of deprivation.³⁴ As a result of these approaches, many global brands have used advertisements that convey messages about women's strengths and contain feminist values as marketing tools.^{16,35} In addition, the increase in the purchasing power of women as consumers and their economic independence have been considered as an opportunity by marketers, so femvertising has started to spread all over the world with a trend that is looking for femvertising advertising for advertisers.³⁶ In addition, companies that produce sports products have entered international competition in order to brand themselves and dominate the sector. For both clubs and all businesses in the sector, the consumption trends, behavioral patterns and preferences of fans are important.³⁷ Therefore, advertising, especially by taking into account the behavioral patterns of female consumers, will make businesses stronger in the sector. The inclusion of sports organizations and female athletes in this advertising trend has an important contribution to strengthening the image of women in society. Presenting the struggle of the female athlete and the difficulties she experiences on the road to success in the advertising element and the success messages obtained at

the end can be a source of inspiration not only for the consumer who demands the advertising product, but also for all women and athletes in the sports industry. In addition, the presence of messages that struggle against gender in advertisements featuring female athletes will open a door to important and positive changes in society's view of female athletes. In this sense, it can be said that brands featuring female athletes also develop a social responsibility.

Brands and businesses that consciously prefer femvertising ads are trying to position their brand identities in the context of equality by displaying a brand identity that culturally and politically cares about gender equality. These efforts emerge as an important factor in the use of femvertising ads.^{38,15} In this context, it is important in terms of sports marketing to include amateur female athletes and professional female athletes who have gained a place with their success in major sports organizations within the brand identity. These advertisements will underline the achievements of female athletes and facilitate the existence of sports in society in integrity by moving away from a sexist structure. For this reason, the correct positioning of the messages given in advertisements featuring female athletes, as in the example examined, will reinforce these positive contributions. The spread of all branches of sports among women in society and the presence of successful female athletes in these advertisements will broaden the horizons of girls and differentiate the perspectives of families towards sports. In addition, supporting the independence of women involved in sports can help female athletes to reveal their potential in terms of their talents. When these potentials are revealed, the athlete's self-confidence in the branch in which he/she is active will increase and his/her motivation will increase, and this situation will increase his/her sportive success in a way. The increase in sporting success can contribute to the success of the country in total, success at the international level and the spread of sports at the grassroots level. The messages given by all businesses producing goods and services for the sports industry through women-oriented advertisements can attract the attention of many different audiences and groups and improve and increase the image of the business in the market. This egalitarian and positive positioning of the brand in society can increase the profitability rates of businesses and their competitiveness in the market. In order for all these positive contributions to emerge, it is important to position the female athlete and the sports branch correctly in the advertising element and to prevent it from giving a wrong message to the society

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