

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS PORTRAYED IN TURKISH TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

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Abstract: *The main objective of this study is to analyze the differences between the female and male characters portrayed in Turkish television commercials and compares images of female and male characters from different variabilities to identify differences in representation. In this context, the representation of women and men in broadcast commercials are evaluated through the lens of social cognitive theory and a content analysis of 4135 characters appearing in 2603 commercials aired during a week of prime-time programming (from Tuesday, October 30, 2012, through Monday, November 5, 2012) on 6 major Turkish television channels (TRT 1, Star, Show TV, ATV, Kanal D, and FOX TV) was conducted. The findings reaffirmed the majority of previous research's findings in Turkey and other countries. According to the findings, Turkish television commercials suggest to viewers that traditional roles and behaviors are more appropriate for women and they still use traditional and stereotypical gender roles to depict males and females.*

Keywords: *Gender Portrayals, Content Analysis, Turkish Television Commercials, Social Cognitive Theory.*

Türk Televizyon Reklamlarında Betimlenen Erkek ve Kadın Karakterlerin İçerik Analizi Yöntemiyle İncelenmesi

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Özet: Bu çalışmanın temel konusu, Türk televizyon reklamlarında betimlenen kadın ve erkek karakterler arasındaki farklılıkları analiz etmek ve kadın ve erkek karakterlerin görüntülerini çeşitli değişkenler aracılığıyla karşılaştırarak sunumları açısından ortaya çıkan farklılıkları belirlemektir. Bu kapsamda, Türk televizyon reklamlarındaki kadın ve erkek temsilleri, sosyal bilişsel teori perspektifinden değerlendirilmektedir. Araştırma çerçevesinde, bir hafta boyunca (30 Ekim 2012'den 05 Kasım 2012'ye kadar) altı ulusal televizyon kanalının (TRT 1, Star, Show TV, ATV, Kanal D ve FOX TV) primetime kuşağında yayınlanan 2603 reklamda yer alan 4135 karaktere içerik analizi uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bilgiler, Türkiye ve diğer birçok ülkede yapılmış önceki araştırmaların büyük çoğunluğunu yeniden teyit etmiştir. Elde edilen veriler kapsamında Türk televizyon reklamları izleyicilere geleneksel rol ve davranışların kadınlar için daha uygun olduğunu önermektedir, bunun sonucunda da kadın ve erkekler reklamlarda betimlenirken hâlâ geleneksel ve kalıplaşmış cinsiyet rolleri kullanılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Cinsiyet Sunumları, İçerik Analizi, Türk Televizyon Reklamları, Sosyal Bilişsel Teori.

I. INTRODUCTION

Commercials are a natural part of people's lives. Both local and national companies use different media to reach out to potential and existing costumers and consumers. Commercial television has spread worldwide since the seventies and most people are today subjected to a great quantity of television advertisements (Furnham and Mak, 1999). Television dominates the symbolic environment of modern life, and cultivates common perspectives. Documenting trends in television imagery also gives us insight into the shifting meanings of gender in popular culture. Because both scholars and advertisers agree that television commercials have some power to teach viewers beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, it is essential to identify the nature of these portrayals as they may impact the type of learning that is likely to take place. Thus, investigating gender depictions in television commercials tells us something about gender portrayal in the larger medium.

Concern with how people are portrayed in the media has existed since the beginning of all popular media. The study of gender difference portrayals in advertising has a long tradition that started in the United States and afterwards moved to many other countries (Milner and Higgs, 2004). A comparative study of research that applied McArthur and Resko's (1975) content scheme found that content analyses of television commercials, broadcasted in a span of 25 years, of the U.S., France, Denmark, Italy, Great Britain, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Australia, Kenya, and Mexico had surprisingly similar results. These studies have in common results that suggest that in a quarter of a century and across the span of ten countries, females are generally depicted at home and playing traditional submissive roles while males play a central, professional role. Females were also depicted as receivers of self-enhancing and social rewards while males were the recipients of practical and pleasurable rewards (Furnham and Mak, 1999).

Although research has mainly been conducted in developed countries and English speaking countries, there were a number of studies in Turkey, primarily content analytic studies. These studies particularly concerned about gender representation in television commercials. One of them comes from Cagli and Durukan (1989) who analyzed gender role portrayals in Turkish television advertising by contrasting samples of advertisements from 1978 to 1988. Another research has been made by Uray and Burnaz (2003). Major findings indicated that women appeared more in home/store environments, they were very rarely used as the voiceover and women and children were in the background. Furthermore, women were portrayed as younger, more frequently with some indication of marriage, often with no indication of work, in dependent roles, and forming social relationships with other characters in the advertisements (Cagli and Durukan, 1989; Karaca and Papatya, 2011; Uray and Burnaz, 2003). Despite these studies, there are still large lacking areas so a more current analysis of gender role portrayals in television advertising is necessary for a developing country such as Turkey with its unique cultural setting and its growing advertising and media industries.

In this study, we are particularly concerned with distinctions between women and men that have been particularly noticeable include the products with which these characters are associated; the settings in which the characters are typically depicted; the characters' physical appearance, including weight, attractiveness, and attire; and lastly, the characters' behavior and demographic characteristics.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A. Theoretical Framework

Television is available not only in our homes, but also on the countless mobile devices that individuals now consider essential. This significantly increases the influence that television and television commercials have on viewers. Therefore for many social scientists, the content of television programs and advertisements has been an interesting and important object of study. Furthermore Turkish people watch an abundance of television each week, exposing them to massive amounts of new content. According to The Radio Television Supreme Council (RTUK), in the fourth quarter of 2010 average daily TV viewing time per person was 5.09 hours in the week days and 5.15 hours in the weekends (Bariş, 2013). This leads to significant exposure to commercials.

From this point of view as part of this study Social Cognitive Theory helps explain the power television has on our perceptions as viewers. According to Albert Bandura's theory, television has the potential to impact viewers' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors by providing models from which viewers can learn (2001). Social Cognitive Theory supports the claim that television is an important supplier of notions of appropriate gender roles (Bandura and Bussey, 1984). The amount of time viewers are exposed to commercials cause changes in the audience's mindset and influence viewers' beliefs about sex roles, as well as attitudes about politics, violence, and other aspects of the social world. From this perspective, repeated exposure to commercial messages associating female characters with domestic products and male characters with nondomestic products may subtly influence consumers' attitudes about appropriate spheres of knowledge for women and men. Therefore this study evaluates the representation of women and men in broadcast commercials through the lens of social cognitive theory.

B. Hypotheses of the Study

Patterns of gendered representations in television commercials have an important role to strengthen our understanding of the types of social learning that may result from viewing gender imagery in prime-time commercials. However, in Turkey there is a paucity of research on how prominent identification factors such as demographic characteristics, general characteristics of the commercials and attitudinal/behavioral characteristics and physical appearance for television viewers affects gender representations.

Differences between male and female characters portrayed in television commercial in terms of the main variables used as indicators of stereotypes in previous studies of advertising. Thus, it is possible to evaluate the similarities and differences between the results of this study and those of previous ones. Based on these objectives, the main hypotheses of the study are given below.

H1: Male and female characters portrayed in Turkish television commercials differ in terms of prominent identification factors such as demographic characteristics, general characteristics of the commercials and attitudinal/behavioral characteristics and physical appearance.

H2: Male and female characters portrayed in Turkish television commercials show substantially traditional gender roles in terms of identification factors.

H3: Male and female characters portrayed in Turkish television commercials show many similarities to those found in studies done in Turkey and other Western countries.

C. Method

We performed a content analysis in this study. Content analysis is a research methodology in which specific message characteristics are systematically and objectively identified, with the purpose of making inferences about the contexts, causes, and effects of these messages (Rudy et al., 2010). The main objective of the study is to analyze the differences between the male and female characters portrayed in Turkish television advertisements.

One week of prime-time television commercials was selected from the six Turkish television channels (TRT 1, Star, Show TV, ATV, Kanal D, and FOX TV) during the period from Tuesday, October 30, 2012, through Monday, November 5, 2012. The date range was determined randomly. Primetime was defined as all programming airing between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. Primetime hours were recorded because it is peak viewership, meaning the commercials impact the highest number of viewers. The selection was based on the number of commercials aired on these channels and their audience figures. Among these six channels, TRT 1 is the state-owned channel. The others are privately owned channels.

Only national ads were included in the sample. Relating 217 brands in total 2603 television advertisements were obtained after the exclusion of local commercials, political advertisements, sports events commercials, trailers for television shows, and movie. Commercials that aired multiple times during programming were included multiple times. If commercials aired

multiple times it was important to include them multiple times in the data to accurately represent the gender portrayals that viewers see. This study aimed to document patterns in gender representations, rather than describe individual advertisements. The sample was coded by one female and one male undergraduate student in order to enhance the reliability of the analysis. It was coded mainly in a similar way.

The unit of analysis was the individual character. Male and female characters that appeared on camera speaking formed the database of this study. A maximum of three characters were accepted as being primary figures for each commercial. To avoid problems with the subjective process of identifying *primary* or *background* characters the first three human characters with a speaking part in each commercial were examined. Speaking parts were defined as a singular, discernible voice (including words and/or sounds) emanating from an identifiable character (Stern and Mastro, 2009).

D. Coding Instruments and Variables

In total, 4,135 speaking characters from 2,603 commercials were coded in the sample of prime-time broadcast television programming. The number of speaking characters is more than the number of commercials because some commercials had two or three speaking characters. Reliabilities for each variable are reported alongside their following definitions.

In this study, gender portrayal was measured through the following coding categories: demographic characteristics, general characteristics of the advertisements and attitudinal/behavioral characteristics and physical appearance.

1. Demographic Characteristics

One of demographic characteristics is gender. *Gender* was coded as either male or female. For *age*, children were excluded and characters were coded into four categories, teen (13–20 years old), young adult (21–35 years old), middle-aged adult (36–65 years old), and senior (over 65 years old). Physical cues (e.g., wrinkles, hair color) and verbal cues (e.g., “When I turned 20...”) were both used to determine the appropriate age category for each character. Next, *occupational role* addressed the type of job/position a character appeared to hold. Occupational role could be observed through the behaviors characters engaged in, as well as their title (i.e., Dr. Smith) or attire (i.e., doctor’s uniform), and could be coded as professional (character holds white-collar position,

such as a business executive, lawyer or doctor), nonprofessional (characters holds blue collar position, such as a construction worker or fast food server), or nonworker (has no clear occupation). Finally, *marital status* were coded as married, single or no indication categories. Visual markers (e.g., wedding ring) and verbal cues (e.g., “They are my parents...” “My wife/husband cook well...”) were both used to determine the marital status.

2. General Characteristics Of The Advertisements

The *type of product* advertised in the commercial in which each character was depicted was identified. Following Stern and Mastro (2009), products were grouped into home products (household items, foods, furniture, body care, etc.), away products (products usually used in places other than the home, such as travel, restaurants, cars, etc.), and both home and away products (products that are commonly used at home and away from home, such as clothing, electronics, sporting goods, alcohol, etc.). The *primary setting* of the character within each commercial was also recorded (Fullerton and Kendrick, 2000; Furnham and Mak, 1999). The five possible location categories included place of employment (place of work, such as office, construction site, playing field for professional athletes), home (inside a residential space), “outdoor” (any outdoor location, such as a park, driveway, backyard), or other inside location (any indoor location except home, such as a restaurant). Gender of *voiceovers* were grouped into male, female, either and none. The voiceover is defined as “a voice is heard but no person is visible” (Lovdal, 1989: 716) The presence or absence of *end comment* was another characteristic of the advertisements. End comment refers to the presence or absence of final summary comments at the end of the advertisements. *End comment (gender)* was grouped into male, female and mixed (Furnham et al., 2000).

3. Attitudinal/Behavioral Characteristics and Physical Appearance

Several behavioral variables were assessed for each character. First, the *primary behavior* the character engaged in during the commercial was coded into four categories, including work (paid working position either white-collar, blue-collar, or professional athlete), domestic (unpaid domestic work in the home such as doing laundry, making dinner, or washing dishes), recreation (character is engaged in recreational activity in or outside the home, such as watching television, playing sports, attending a football game), and other (any behavior that does not qualify as work, domestic, or recreational behavior). Coders recorded whether characters exhibited any *alluring behaviors*, defined as flirting, winking, puckering, batting eyelashes or sexual teasing (Coltrane

and Messineo, 2000). Aspects of characters' appearance were also addressed next. *Attractiveness*, defined as the apparent physical attractiveness of the character (Signorielli et al., 1994), was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from *very attractive* to *not at all attractive*. The *degree of dress* of characters similarly employed a 5-pointscale ranging from *conservatively clad* to *suggestively clad* (Fullerton and Kendrick, 2000; Mastro and Greenberg, 2000). *Body type* was also assessed, depicting figures ranging in body size from extremely thin to obese. The *degree of physical activity* of each character was rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*active*; extremely energetic, such as playing tennis) to 5 (*passive*; doing nothing physical at all, such as lying down.)

III. RESULTS

Overall 2,603 commercials and 4,135 characters were recorded and coded. These commercials contained 1,953 female dominant characters and 2,182 male dominant characters. Results were consistent with a great deal of past research, with the majority of actions being traditionally gendered.

Table 1. Relationship Between Gender Of The Primary Character and Demographic Characteristics

Gender of the primary character		
Variables	Women (%)	Men (%)
Age		
Teen	0.6	9.5
Young adult	77.4	49.4
Middle adult	20.4	38.9
Senior adult	1.6	2.2
Marital status		
Married	40.1	16
Single	15.1	16
No indication	44.8	68
Occupational Role		
Professional	20	43.7
Nonprofessional	2.3	8.9
Nonworker	77.7	47.4

Table 1 details the variation in gender portrayals from the point of demographic characteristics of the primary characters. As Table 1 indicates and as most past studies have found, male characters outnumbered female characters. In addition, the frequency of female and male characters in the young adult, teen, and senior adult age categories were significantly different. As expected, female characters were portrayed as younger than male characters. As prior research has also documented (Bretl and Cantor, 1988; Lovdal, 1989; Stern and Mastro, 2009), men appeared most frequently as middle-aged adults, whereas women appeared most often as young adults.

In terms of marital status and occupational role, women are more frequently portrayed as married and less likely than men to be portrayed as employed. Table 1 describes the gendered occupational roles of primary characters. Studies have consistently shown male characters to be a more commonly portrayed in professional occupations than females (Coltrane and Adams, 1997; Hong, 1997; Signorielli, 1997), whereas women are more frequently shown doing housework (Kaufman, 1999). In terms of occupation, the percentage of female characters portrayed in a professional and in a white- or blue-collar position is significantly less than the male characters depicted in similar occupations. These depictions are meaningful in terms of social role learning as such patterned portrayals in commercials collectively suggest that men are more commonplace and more competent in business roles.

Table 2. Relationship Between Gender Of The Primary Character and General Characteristics Of The Advertisements

Variables	Gender Of The Primary Character	
	Women (%)	Men (%)
Type of product		
Home	71.9	52.1
Away	10.1	28.3
Both home and away	18	19.6
Setting		
Home	50.3	21.8
Employment	10.2	23.5
Outdoor	14.5	35.6
Fictional	4.3	1.8
Other indoor location	20.7	17.3
Voiceover		
Female	16.6	2.7
Male	35.4	43.3
Mixed	0	0.6

None	0.9	0.5
End Comment		
Present	87	89.7
Absent	13	10.3
End comment (gender)		
Female	32.5	12
Male	60	77.7
Mixed	7.5	10.3

Oneway the quality of imagery of men and women in commercials has been evaluated has been in terms of the products with which different characters are affiliated. Table 2 indicates that the gender of the primary character varies with the product advertised. Accordingly, men have more often been depicted with nondomestic items, such as automobile and services (bank, insurance, etc.). Women, on the other hand, have been associated with domestic products, such as home products (cleaning, furniture, home textile, etc.), body products (clothing and personal care) and cosmetics. This might suggests that women' main tasks are to improve themselves and their homes.

The most common setting for women in commercials is the domestic residence (Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Furnham and Mak, 1999; Mazzella et al., 1992, Stern and Mastro, 2009). Similarly, men are more likely than women to be seen outside the home (Bretl and Cantor, 1988; Furnham and Mak, 1999). In this study, female characters appeared more frequently than male characters in home settings, whereas male characters appeared more frequently than female characters in outdoor or occupational settings. Overall, these analyses suggest that commercials continue to position women firmly within the private realm, a realm commonly perceived as less valuable than the public realm. Ultimately, one might expect commercial viewers to learn that suitable social roles for women are limited to the domestic sphere, whereas men are afforded a wide variety of appropriate behaviors.

As shown in Table 2, males are more likely to be voice-overs. 78.7% of all voice-overs were male, which is in agreement with prior analysis of television commercials. However, Uray and Burnaz (2003) found that advertisements were much more equal between males and females for being voice-over and their study showed only a small difference between males (58.8%) and females (52.6%). It was extremely unlikely that a male dominant character would appear in a commercial with a female voiceover; this result occurred in 2.7% of all commercials. In comparison, it was significantly more likely

that a female dominant character would appear in a commercial with a male voiceover, occurring in nearly 35.4% of commercials. There seems general agreement across all cultures that men are generally more likely to provide voice-overs than females.

In terms of the existence of an end comment, the majority of commercials were presented an end comment. In addition, the male characters who made an end comment were extremely prevalent in Turkish television commercials which is displayed in Table 2.

Table 3. Relationship Between Gender Of The Primary Character and Attitudinal/Behavioral Characteristics and Physical Appearance

Variables	Gender Of The Primary Character	
	Women (%)	Men (%)
Primary behavior		
Work	20.2	50.9
Domestic activity	35.6	2.1
Recreation	12.9	15
Other	31.2	31.9
Alluring behavior		
Present	43.8	18.9
Absent	56.1	81
Attractiveness		
(1 = most attractive 5 = least attractive)		
1	5.9	0.5
2	18.5	5.6
3	16.2	7.1
4	12.3	10.6
5	47	76.1
Degree of dress (1 = conservative 5 = suggestive)		
1	38	77.6
2	47.1	15
3	8.6	3.1
4	4	2.6
5	2.2	1.6
Body Type (1 = very thin 5 = obese)		
1	42.3	7.5
2	33.5	40.8
3	18.3	30.9
4	5.3	19.3
5	.5	1.4
Activity (1 = active, extremely energetic 5 = passive, lying down)		

1	2.7	4.9
2	8.9	22.5
3	37.8	34
4	45.7	35.2
5	4.8	3.4

Table 3 details the gendered primary behaviors of dominant characters. It documents that while working was the most performed primary behavior for males (50.9%), females were more likely to show domesticity (35.6%). Moreover, males and females were both equally likely to display recreational behavior while males were more likely to be working than females.

This study found significant differences between males and females in terms of characters' engagement in alluring behaviors. As shown in Table 3, alluring behavior was slightly existent among males, only 18.9% of males behaving in an alluring manner however, 43.8% of females exhibited alluring behavior. This is linked to the media's sexualizing of women.

Female characters identified as slightly more attractive than male characters. Table 3 reports that 5.9% female characters were rated as extremely attractive compared to only 0.5% of male characters. Furthermore, many scholars note that emphasis on women's bodies and exaggerated beauty standards are the norm in television commercials. In this study, 42.3% of female characters were portrayed as having *very thin* bodies compared to 7.5% of men depicted as having very thin bodies. Clothing (or lack thereof) has also received attention. Female characters were significantly more suggestively dressed than males. The social cognitive implications of exposure to this type of representation are fairly clear. Viewers are likely to learn that women's value is based, in large part, on their appearance and sexuality; this does not appear to be the case for men.

For both male and female characters level of activity also differed (see Table 3). Among both male and female characters, males were more active than females. In a society in which one's level of activity can be viewed as a sign of strength and power, male characters were more frequently shown strong, whereas female characters were shown weak.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study conducted surrounding how gender is portrayed in Turkish television commercials. The data reaffirmed the majority of previous research's findings in Turkey (Cagli and Durukan, 1989; Karaca and Papatya, 2011; Uray and Burnaz, 2003) and other countries such as the United States, Britain,

Australia, China, Portugal (Bretl and Cantor, 1988; Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Furnham and Mak, 1999; Hong, 1997; Mazzella et al., 1992; Neto and Pinto, 1998) that television commercials still use traditional and stereotypical gender roles to depict males and females.

Female characters are more likely to be associated with domestic products than male characters. Additionally, males are more likely to be seen outside. In the professional world, males are more likely to be seen working in professional occupations in commercials, while females are significantly more likely than men to be portrayed at home. Similarly, more females are seen exhibiting domestic behaviors, while males are more likely to be recreational than females. Furthermore, males are more physically active in commercials while females are usually seen in more passive roles. Males dominate voiceovers and end comment which supports previous research's findings. Lastly, more commercials are simply male dominated, meaning there are more men than women in the commercials regardless of their roles.

Although this study is based on similar variables, some of the findings show differences compared with Uray and Burnaz (2003). For instance, the percentage of females acting as voiceover is higher than this study. This study support the dominance of the male voice as the authoritative voice. Besides, Uray and Burnaz (2003) reported significantly more women than men as the central figures that are portrayed in Turkish television advertisements. However, more than half (52.7%) of the primary characters are men in this study and many previous studies in Turkey (Cagli and Durukan, 1989; Karaca and Papatya, 2011) and other countries (Mazzella et al., 1992; Neto and Pinto 1998; Stern and Mastro 2009). On the other hand, male characters do not outnumber female characters in all age categories. For instance, this study reveals that young adult women are represented more frequently than their same-age male counterparts.

Most of the findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the primary characters are in line with those of various other studies (Bretl and Cantor, 1988; Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Furnham and Mak, 1999; Hong, 1997; Mazzella et al., 1992; Stern ve Mastro, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that the majority of female characters are young, whereas a considerable number of men portrayed come from young to mature age groups. Gender role portrayals in Turkish television advertisements are similar to the more recent examples of American advertisements (Paek et al., 2011) in terms of most of the demographic characteristics of the primary characters.

Females are portrayed in a rather traditional gender-stereotypic fashion: they are infrequently shown, typically associated with domestic products, overwhelmingly situated in home settings, and more passive than male characters. Furthermore, female characters are slightly more attractive, thin, and suggestively dressed than males.

Finally, when considered from the perspective of social cognitive theory, Turkish television commercials suggest to viewers that traditional roles and behaviors are more appropriate for women and women are less competent and accepted in the public sphere and more closely aligned than men to the domestic realm.

This study suggests that future analyses of gender representations cannot exclude age as an important mediating variable. But it is limited by its focus on broadcast television advertisements and its exclusive attention to commercials aired during prime-time hours. And also the content analysis method used in this study has some limitation. It can only offer such speculation based on analysis of documented patterns in portrayals. Further research might expand this study by broadening this focus, as well as inquiring specifically how advertisements, through casting choices with regard to age and gender, produce images that tend to reflect and reinforce the existing and essentially patriarchal social and power structure.

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