

## ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMAN BODY PORTRAYALS IN ADVERTISING: A COMPARISON IN TERMS OF FEMINISM LEVELS OF FEMALE CONSUMERS

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### ABSTRACT

*Sexually objectified advertising states the portrayals of female/male sexual characteristics in advertising. Today, especially female sexual characteristics are sometimes portrayed as decorative objects relatedly or unrelatedly with the product to increase the consumption. The aim of the study is to determine how the female consumers' feminist identities affect their evaluation of woman body portrayals in advertising. The study's sample includes 110 female college students and convenience sampling method was used. In the study, Kruskal-Wallis test was performed. The analysis results show that the feminist identities create no statistically differences on the attitudes, and in general, the overall attitudes towards the objectification of women in ads were found to be negative.*

**Keywords:** Woman Objectification in Advertising, Woman Body Portrayals, Feminist Identities, Sexist Consumption

## REKLAMLARDAKİ KADIN BEDENİ GÖSTERİM BİÇİMLERİNE OLAN TUTUMLAR: KADIN TÜKETİCİLERİN FEMİNİZM SEVİYELERİ AÇISINDAN BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMA

### ÖZET

*Cinsel yönden nesnelleştirme reklamcılıkta, kadın/erkek cinsiyet özelliklerinin kullanılması anlamına gelmektedir. Günümüzde, özellikle kadınların cinsiyet özellikleri tüketimi artırmak için ürünle bağlantılı veya bağlantısız bir şekilde dekoratif bir obje olarak kullanılmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, kadın tüketicilerin feminist kimliklerinin, reklamlardaki kadın bedeni gösterimlerini değerlendirmeleri üzerinde etkisi olup olmadığını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Araştırmanın örneklemini, kolayda örnekleme yöntemiyle belirlenen 110 kız üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada, Kruskal-Wallis testi kullanılmıştır. Analiz sonuçları, feminist kimliklerin tutumlar üzerinde istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık oluşturmadığını, genel anlamda katılımcıların kadın bedeninin reklamlarda nesnelleştirilmesine olumsuz tutum gösterdikleri ortaya çıkmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Reklamlarda Kadınların Nesnelleştirilmesi, Kadın Bedeni Gösterim Biçimleri, Feminist Kimlikler, Cinsiyetçi Tüketim

## **1. Introduction**

In today's commodified consumption society, it seems that consumption is a goal, and to achieve this goal, "body" is used as a tool. In other words, in today's marketing world, it seems that both female and male body portrayals are used in advertising in order to draw attention and to increase consumption. Especially female body portrayals as sex objects and objectification of female body accordingly are often preferred in advertising. Besides, the sex characteristics are the important segmentation variables in consumer behavior, today's consumption culture practices especially use female body characteristics as promotional tools to increase consumption in sexually objectified advertising (Bati, 2010).

Woman body portrayals, in other words objectification of body bring about the usage of woman as a subject/meta to sell a product, which makes woman body as a decorative object. In other words, if a woman's body is used unrelatedly with the product being marketed, it means that the woman is used as a decorative object in the advertising (Reichert et al., 2007). Woman body portrayals as decorative objects may irritate female consumers, so the consumers can develop negative attitudes towards brand (Whipple & Courtney, 1985).

Women's feminist (FEM) point of views/ feminist identities can also affect their reactions towards sexist advertising. Henderson-King & Stewart (1997) found that women's sensitiveness towards sexist advertising is related to their feminist identities. In addition, Lavine et al. (1999) found that women who defined themselves as "feminists" developed more negative reactions towards sexist advertising than the women who defined themselves as "non feminists".

Sexually objectified advertising tries to draw attention of not only male consumers but also female consumers. Here, it is important to determine what the female consumers' reactions towards woman body portrayals in ads and purchasing intentions of female consumers towards the subject products/brands. In the light of these issues, the aim of the study is to determine the possible effects of feminist identities of women on their attitudes towards woman body portrayals in ads.

## **2. Literature Review**

It seems that most of the researches about sexually objectified advertising are mainly focused on print advertising. For instance; Belkaoui & Belkaoui (1976) investigated and compared the changing gender roles and stereotypes of women in print advertising published in 1958, 1970 and in 1972, and determined that women were portrayed as less dominant, less self-confident and foolish than men depicted in the print advertising. Besides, Soley & Kurzbard (1986) investigated and compared the sexual portrayals of women in print advertising published in 1964 and 1984 and found that over the years, the sexual portrayals of women became more apparent in print advertising. Also, they realised that female models' body portrayals were more apparent and women were used more than male models in print advertising over the years. On the other hand, LaTour & Henthorne (1994) examined the ethical judgements of consumers towards sexual appeals in print advertising, and found that regardless of gender, all consumers did not well-receive the sexual portrayals in advertising. In addition, Bati (2010) investigated women body portrayals as a rhetorical instrument and used contextual analysis on the magazines including *Esquire*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Bazaar*, and *Hülya*. He benefited from the Gender Ads Project web site in order to categorise the women body portrayals in the magazines and identified 21 categories. He came to the conclusion that women body portrayals were frequently made as "a decorative object", directly as "a sex object", and in a way "unrelated to the product" in the advertising.

There are also some researches investigating the effects of sexually body portrayals in advertising on purchasing intentions and behaviors of consumers in the literature. For instance; Gould (1994) searched for whether the sexually body portrayals in advertising could prompt to consumers to buy products that they did not need. He found that the sexual appeal in advertising became effective when it was related to the product, and the sexual appeal reduced the effectiveness of the advertising when it was not related to the product. Besides, he found that the female consumers became dissatisfied with their bodies when they compared themselves with the sexual appeals in advertising. On the other hand, Harker et al. (2005) investigated the collective attitudes towards sexually objectified portrayals in billboard ads. They used Arnott's (1972) female autonomy inventory and determined there was a significant relationship between feminist conscious and the attitudes towards those ads by contrast with the results of the study of Ford and LaTour (1996). Milner & Collins (2000) investigated television ads in some countries that they determined as feminine and masculine according to Hofstede's framework and found that in television ads in feminine countries, women-men relationships were apparently shown more than they were shown in masculine countries. On the other hand, as Reichert et al. (2007) found that media literacy and gender effects had significant effects on cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral responses of consumers towards the sexually objectified ads, Zimmerman & Dahlberg (2008) focused on young female attitudes towards sexually objectified ads and found that the young females found these ads less offensive than the young females in 1991, and the ads had a little effects on their purchasing intentions.

There are also some studies investigating the reactions of female consumers on female body portrayals in advertising. For instance Bower (2001) indicated that female consumers became dissatisfied with their bodies as they compared themselves with the highly attractive women in advertising, and that would reduce the effectiveness of the advertising. On the other hand, Peck & Loken (2004) indicated that highly attractive female and male portrayals in advertising could cause a disease on consumers, and they claimed that the pure reality such as fat model portrayals would increase the effectiveness of the advertising on consumers.

### **3. Methodology**

This study is a descriptive research designed to figure out the effects of feminist identities of women on the attitudes towards woman body portrayals in ads. The study's population comprises of female students studying in faculty of economics and administrative science of a public university in Turkey. As the studies show that women are more successful and responsive than men in recognizing the sexism in advertising (Reichert et al., 2007), only the females were taken into consideration for this study. The sample includes 110 female college students and convenience sampling method was used. The reason why 110 is thought to be enough for the research is that similar research about this issue in the literature (Richins, 1991; Lavine et al., 1999; Bower, 2001) approximately used the similar sample size. Beside, there is no claim for generalization of the results, but to get a foresight about the attitudes towards women body portrayals.

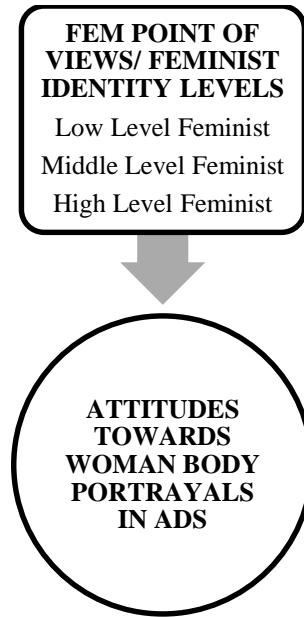
The questions used to evaluate feminist identities in the study were collected from Kirkpatrick (1936)'s FEM scale. Although the scale is one of the oldest scale measuring feminist identities, it was reworked in the other research such as Basow & Campanile, 1990; Branscombe & Deaux, 1991; Dempewolf, 1974; Smith et al., 1975; Singleton & Christiansen, 1977. Smith (2001) indicated that the reason why the researchers used the oldest, Kirkpatrick's FEM scale is that they evaluated and perceived the scale as a primary tool for indicating feminist identity levels, attitudes toward gender roles and anti-feminine stereotypes. Thus, in this research Kirkpatrick's scale was found to be useful to measure the feminist identities. Although in the original Kirkpatrick's FEM scale, there were 50 items, several trials reduced the items to 20. Smith et al. (1975) made reliability analysis to the 20-item scale and found that the internal consistency reliability was .91. The 20 item was used in this research to measure feminist identities.

In the scale, the items measuring issues such as females' point of views towards women movements, gender inequality, women nature, relationships with other women and male dominance. To determine the feminist identities of the women, exploratory factor analysis was performed to the scale, and three sub categories were obtained. The sub categories were given name as *low-level*, *middle-level*, *high-level* feminist, based on the indication that a high score on the FEM scale suggested a more feminist attitude (Smith, 2001). Then, each participants were attained to the sub categories according to their total scores obtained from each statements in the sub groups. 8 participants' score for each sub group were similarly distributed; thus they were eliminated from the analysis. After that, in the direction of the researches about gender discrimination, women body objectification and sexism in advertising, 18 statements were collected from the studies including Batı (2010), Zimmerman & Dahlberg (2008), Reichert et al. (2007), Harker et al. (2005), Peck & Loken (2004), Bower (2001), Lavine et al. (1999), Henderson-King & Stewart (1997), La Tour & Henthorne (1994), Gould (1994) and Whipple & Courtney (1985) and adapted to measure the attitudes of the women towards women body portrayals in ads. The reliability analysis of 18 statements was performed and the Cronbach's Alpha score was found .757 indicating that the scale was highly reliable.

The questionnaire technique (5 point Likert for each scale) was used to collect data. To measure whether the attitudes of women towards woman body portrayals in ads differ according to their feminist identity levels, Kruskal-Wallis test was performed (the test was used on behalf of One-Way Anova due to the fact that the data were not distributed normally). The test results is shown in Appendix I.

The model of the research indicating that the FEM point of views (feminist identity levels) of the women affect their attitudes toward woman body portrayals in ads is depicted below:

**Figure 1: Model of the Research**



The main hypothesis of the research was developed below:

H<sub>1</sub>: Feminist identity levels of women create statistically meaningful difference on the attitudes towards women body portrayals in ads.

#### **4. Findings**

The analysis results that are indicated in Table 1 presented in Appendix I show that feminist identity levels of women create no statistically meaningful differences on the attitudes towards woman body portrayals in ads. The general attitudes of women towards sexism, objectification of woman and gender discrimination in ads were found to be negative. The attitudes of women did not significantly differ on the statement indicating that even if they have negative attitudes towards the sexuality in ads, they keep purchasing the product/brand (mean rank: 50.72-52.78; asymp. sig.: .963). They similarly scored the statement indicating that they evaluate women sexuality in ads as a strenght factor (mean rank: 46.87-59.81; asymp. sig.: .150). They showed the similar high scores on the statement indicating that the objectification of woman body in ads irritates them (mean rank: 49.36-54.28; asymp. sig.: .667). They showed the similar low scores on the statement indicating that the usage of woman body as a decorative object in ads irritates them (mean rank: 47.50-56.72; asymp. sig.: .247). They similarly scored the statement indicating that they become dissatisfied from their body when they compared themselves to the attractive models in ads (mean rank: 48.00-56.53; asymp. sig.: .617). They similarly scored the statement indicating that women are portrayed as more disabled/weak than men are in the ads (mean rank: 46.53-58.67; asymp. sig.: .142). Besides, they similarly scored the statement indicating that women were portrayed as more awkward/needy than men are in ads (mean rank: 38.97-56.20; asymp. sig.: .115).

They similarly scored the statement indicating that sexuality in ads affect their attitudes towards the product/brand (mean rank: 49.13-52.44; asymp. sig.: .884). Also, they similarly scored the statement indicating that women sexuality in ads affect their product/brand purchasing behavior (mean rank: 48.27-55.89; asymp. sig.: .439). They showed the similar low scores on the statement indicating that sexuality in ads make them purchase the products that they do not need (mean rank: 49.36-54.56; asymp. sig.: .663). They showed the similar high scores on the statement indicating that portrayal of women as an object in ads represents the dominant men power through the society (mean rank: 45.36-58.78; asymp. sig.: .254). In addition, they similarly scored the statement indicating that contemporary advertising images empowers violence towards woman body and sexy body ideals (mean rank: 46.31-54.35; asymp. sig.: .646). Besides, they showed the similar scores on the statement indicating that grid strenght of women is humiliated in ads (mean rank: 41.89-60.13; asymp. sig.: .115).

.104). They showed the similar high scores on the statement indicating that the advertisements generally take women as sexual objects (mean rank: 48.75-58.07; asymp. sig.: .370). They showed the similar high scores on the statement indicating that the portrayals of women in ads irritate them (mean rank: 46.94-58.17; asymp. sig.: .192). They similarly scored the statement indicating that sexuality in ads is used in an aesthetic way (mean rank: 50.46-54.75; asymp. sig.: .858). They similarly scored on the statement indicating that today, men are used in ads as sexual objects as well as women are used in the media (mean rank: 47.15-53.08; asymp. sig.: .651). They showed the similar low scores on the statement indicating that generally they like the usage of women sexuality in ads (mean rank: 48.89-57.39; asymp. sig.: .481).

## 5. Discussions and Limitations

The results show that FEM point of views, in other words, feminist identity levels of women do not generally create statistically meaningful difference on the attitudes towards woman body portrayals in ads. It seems that whether the participants are in high level of feminism or not, they have negative attitudes toward the portrayals of women as sexual objects in advertising. Also, from the results, it seems that sexuality in ads do not make the participants purchase the product that they do not need. Thus, it can be considered that sexuality in ads does not sell all the time.

Research results show that women do not become dissatisfied from their appearances when they compare themselves to the sexual appeals in ads. Besides, results show that attitudes toward woman body portrayals in ads do not change according to feminist identity levels of women. These results are contradictory with the results in the literature indicating that women become dissatisfied from their appearances when they compare themselves with the sexual appeals in ads, and their attitudes toward woman body portrayals in ads change according to their feminist identity levels.

Due to the fact that this study has concerned only the females' attitudes within the similar years of age and conditions, the effects of demographical factors could not be measured. This study sample includes only 110 female students, thus, this study does not allow to generalize the results, just gives preunderstanding about the issue. To generalize the results, the sample size should be increased by adding females from different status and years of ages. For future researches, to measure FEM point of view, feminist identity development scale developed by Downing & Roush (1985) and Bargad & Hyde (1991) should also be used to clearly identify the FEM level of the participants. Also, identifying attitudes toward specific advertisements in order to reveal whether the sexual appeal in ads affects the effectiveness of ads, and/or whether the effectiveness of ads change according to the sexual appeals' relation with the product should be studied for future researches.

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**APPENDIX I**

**Table 1: Kruskal-Wallis Test Results**

Statement	Feminist Identity	Number	Mean Rank	Chi-Square=.076		Result
<b>S1. Even if I have negative attitudes towards the sexuality in ads, I keep purchasing the product/brand.</b>	Low Level	18	50.72	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.963	Rejected
	Middle Level	57	51.14			
	High Level	27	52.78			
	Total	102				
<b>S2. I evaluate woman sexuality in ads as a strenght factor.</b>	Low Level	18	53.69	Chi-Square=3.794		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	46.87	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.150	
	High Level	27	59.81			
	Total	102				
<b>S3. The objectification of woman body in ads irritates me.</b>	Low Level	18	54.11			Chi-Square=.811
	Middle Level	57	49.36	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.667	
	High Level	27	54.28			
	Total	102				
<b>S4. Usage of woman body as a decorative object in ads irritates me.</b>	Low Level	18	56.33			Chi-Square=2.795
	Middle Level	57	47.50	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.247	
	High Level	27	56.72			
	Total	102				
<b>S5. I become dissatisfied from my body when I compare myself to the attractive models in the ads.</b>	Low Level	18	56.53			Chi-Square=.967
	Middle Level	57	51.57	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.617	
	High Level	27	48.00			
	Total	102				
<b>S6. Women are portrayed as more disable/weak than men are in the ads.</b>	Low Level	18	56.50			Chi-Square=3.898
	Middle Level	57	46.53	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.142	
	High Level	27	58.67			
	Total	102				
<b>S7. Women are portrayed as more awkward/needdy than men are in ads.</b>	Low Level	18	38.97			Chi-Square=4.323
	Middle Level	57	53.23	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.115	
	High Level	27	56.20			
	Total	102				
<b>S8. Sexuality in ads affects my attitudes towards the</b>	Low Level	18	52.44			Chi-Square=.248
	Middle	57	52.32			

product/brand.	Level					
	High Level	27	49.13	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.884	
	Total	102				
<b>S9. Women sexuality in ads affects my product/brand purchasing behavior.</b>	Low Level	18	55.14	Chi-Square=1.645		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	48.27			
	High Level	27	55.89	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.439	
	Total	102				
<b>S10. Sexuality in ads makes me purchase the products that I do not need.</b>	Low Level	18	54.56	Chi-Square=.822		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	49.36			
	High Level	27	53.98	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.663	
	Total	102				
<b>S11. Portrayal of women as an object in ads represents the dominant men power through the society.</b>	Low Level	18	45.36	Chi-Square=2.739		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	49.99			
	High Level	27	58.78	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.254	
	Total	102				
<b>S12. Contemporary advertising images empowers violence towards woman body and sexy body ideals.</b>	Low Level	18	46.31	Chi-Square=.874		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	51.79			
	High Level	27	54.35	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.646	
	Total	102				
<b>S13. I think that grid strenght of women is humiliated in ads.</b>	Low Level	18	41.89	Chi-Square=4.535		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	50.45			
	High Level	27	60.13	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.104	
	Total	102				
<b>S14. The advertisements generally take women as sexual objects.</b>	Low Level	18	50.33	Chi-Square=1.989		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	48.75			
	High Level	27	58.07	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.370	
	Total	102				
<b>S15. The portrayals of women in ads irritates me.</b>	Low Level	18	58.17	Chi-Square=3.300		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	46.94			
	High Level	27	56.69	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.192	
	Total	102				
<b>S16. I think sexuality in ads is used in an aesthetic way.</b>	Low Level	18	54.75	Chi-Square=.306		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	50.46			
	High Level	27	51.54	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.858	
	Total	102				
<b>S17. Today, men are used in ads as sexual objects as well as women are</b>	Low Level	18	53.03	Chi-Square=.860		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	53.08			



<b>used in the media.</b>	High Level	27	47.15	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.651	
	Total	102				
<b>S18. Generally, I like the usage of women sexuality in ads.</b>	Low Level	18	57.39	Chi-Square=1.462		Rejected
	Middle Level	57	48.89			
	High Level	27	53.09	df=2	Asymp. Sig.=.481	
	Total	102				