

# CRITICAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISEMENTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: CRITICISM OF THE USE OF MALE FIGURE AS AN OBJECT OF SEXUAL ATTRACTION, THE EXAMPLE OF BISCOLATA STARZ

## İLETİŞİM ARAŞTIRMALARI ÇERÇEVESİNDE REKLAMLARIN ELEŞTİREL ETKİ ANALİZİ: CİNSEL ÇEKİCİLİK OBJESİ OLARAK ERKEK FIGURU KULLANIMI ELEŞTİRİSİ, BISCOLATA STARZ ÖRNEĞİ

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### ÖZ

Görsel mesajların etkisinin önemine vurgu yapan Sullivan, (2008, s. 66) “Görsel çözümler evrenselliğini her zaman korumaktadır. Derin dondurucuda yıllarca kalsa da etkileri devam eder” diyerek konunun önemini altını çizer. Bu bağlamda kitle iletişim araçlarına bakıldığında, dikkat ve cinsel çekicilik özelliğine sahip olan görsel mesajlar gazete ve dergi reklamları kadar, televizyon ve internette yayınlanan videolarda da yoğunlukla yer almaktadır. Günümüzde toplumsal cinsiyet bağlamında yapılan akademik literatür çalışmalarına bakıldığında kadın, erkek veya çocuk figürlerinin cinsel obje olarak reklamlarda kullanılmasının yoğun olarak insan haklarına aykırı boyutta eleştirildiği gözlemlenmektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı biscolata reklamlarında yansıtılan erkek bedeninin cinsel obje olarak kullanımının ne derecede algılandığı ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmak ve eleştirel bir bakış açısı geliştirmektir. Araştırma kapsamında 30 kadınla SMI (Senso Motoric Instruments) cihazını kullanarak, göz izleme metodu uygulanmıştır. Erkek bedeninin cinsel obje olarak kullanıldığı tespit edilen ve arama motorunda en üst sırada çıkması göz önünde bulundurularak belirlenen bir adet reklam filmi izletilmiş ve incelenmiştir. Uygulama sonrasında 30 katılımcı ile bire bir derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. İzlenen reklam boyunca 30 deneginde erkek vucut ve yüzüne odaklandığı ve bakış yönlerinin ekran geneline dağılmamış olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları genel olarak ürün kesin olarak fark edilmiş olsa dahi, ürün diyagramının erkek figürünün önüne geçememiş olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Cinsel Objeler, Reklam, Nöropazarlama

### ABSTRACT

Emphasizing the importance of the impact of visual messages, Sullivan stated that (2008, p. 66) “Visual analyses always maintain their universality. Even if they stay in a freezer for a long time, their effects continue” and stressed the importance of this matter. When you take a look at mass media tools from this point of view, visual messages that have attention-grabbing and sex appealing characteristics appear intensively in newspapers and magazine advertisements as well as in videos published on TV and the internet. Looking at the academic literature studies conducted in the context of gender today, it is observed that the use of female, male or child figures as sexual objects in advertisements is heavily criticized in a way that is contrary to human rights. In this context, the aim of this study is to try to reveal the extent to which the use of the male body as a sexual object reflected in biscolata advertisements is perceived and to develop a critical point of view. In this study, eye tracking method was applied on 30 women using SMI (Senso Motoric Instruments). One commercial film in which male body was used as a sexual object and which was shown among the top results on the search engine was shown and examined. In-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted with 30 participants after the procedure. It was concluded that; during the advertisement, all of 30 subjects focused on the male body and face and their gaze wasn't directed to other parts of the screen. The research findings reveal that even if the product has been certainly noticed in general, the product diagram wasn't able to go ahead of the male figure.

*Keywords:* Gender, Sexual Object, Advertising, Neuromarketing

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The monitored and followed advertisements allow consumer networks to choose the most ideal product and service that can be to their advantage from thousands of brands in the market. Advertisers are adopting a number of strategies in order to present the goods or services produced by the manufacturer companies to the consumer channels and to distinguish them from other brands within the broad market share. It is an undeniable fact that the use of sexual attractiveness is one of the main strategies used in these commercials. Instead of using messages and images that would be memorable for the target audience, the messages and images which are appealing to the feelings and instincts are used in the commercials. The reason for this can be that many studies regarding the commercials revealed that the consumers act with their emotions rather than their minds when making purchase decisions. Considering the modern literature, the advertisement concept is accepted as a simulation that reinforces consumption perceptions and manages perceptions. One of the most important factors that needs to be underlined in the simulation is that the use of sexual attraction. The results concluded from the ongoing studies on the effects of sexuality used in commercials have revealed that sexuality works in promoting consumers' purchase motivations and desires. The definition of messages containing sexual information is made by Harris (1994) in the form of explicit or implicit presentation of sexual behavior, interest and need (p. 247-272). Reichert says that in some cases, sexuality in commercials contributes to the creation of strong, vibrant and long-lasting brands (Reichert, 2003, p. 9).

Looking at the academic literature studies conducted in the context of gender today, it is observed that the use of female, male or child figures as sexual objects in advertisements is heavily criticized in a way that is contrary to human rights. In this context, the presentation of gender roles within the scope of mass media is very important in terms of shaping the gender thoughts of the masses. Commercials that are repeated intensively through mass media convey a lot of gender-related behavioral messages to consumers. From this point of view, it reveals the idea that the messages contained in advertisements can shape the behavior and thinking patterns of society. Therefore, the importance of criticizing the use of women, men or children as sexual objects in advertisements should be underlined. Since the concept of gender is viewed as a structure in a cultural context, it can be interpreted that the concept of culture has a feature that presents as a teaching how men and women should be in society. According to Kellner (2007, p. 19) the structural characteristics of men and women who spend their lives within the scope of a certain gender ideology are shaped according to the ideological presentation in question.

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF GENDER AND ADVERTISING

When looking at the literature on the concept of gender, many definitions are encountered and it is observed that the concept is intertwined with other disciplines in various forms. When we look at the historical dimension of the concept of gender inequality, it marks the last hundred years that the phenomenon began to be discussed in a social

context, despite the fact that it dates back a long time (Sanday, 1981 p.35-37). The concept is generally expressed as “The equality of people beyond their physical and biological characteristics is defined as the equality of rights and freedoms in international conventions. In other words, the equality of people is the condition that the rights, participation in society, opportunities and facilities of the two sexes, male and female, are equal” (Ecevit and Tüzel, 2019 quoted by Şener, R., 2022, p. 96).

Advertising is very important and necessary tool, especially for the development of national economies, the formation of competition and the survival of the product chain. However, when we look at gender criticism today, there are criticisms of the figures in advertisements in many sources. In this context, considering the persuasive power of advertisements in influencing society, it can be underlined as an important factor that can cause gender inequality. An example of this is the creation of female and male figures that serve the prevailing ideology through advertisements, and the frequent presentation of female and male bodies as sexual objects through advertisements as a marketing tool. Nowadays this situation is quite common when we look at the food commercials such as ice cream etc. Commercials direct the audience to focus more on the way of female and male figures consume ice cream rather than the properties of the ice cream (content, health etc.) as a product. In this context, it can be stated that, beyond the informational and memorial functions of commercials, an indirect sales purpose is aimed and put forward by using bodies of women and men.

### 3. ADVERTISING IN THE CONTEXT OF NEUROMARKETING

Since the 1880s, brands have been following various strategies in order to increase their sales share. Especially in these strategies, the share of advertising is increasing more and more day by day. Therefore, the content allocated to sexuality in these advertisements is constantly growing (Reichert, 2004, p. 10). At the same time, many studies have been conducted on behalf of sexuality, which is used in advertising in this conjuncture. The researches carried out show that the sexuality used in advertisements increases the purchase (Batı 2013a, p. 235). For this reason, it is observed that certain brands in our age use sexual attractiveness in advertisements in order to appeal to the emotional states of consumers and to attract their attention and increase sales (Şener and Uztuğ, 2012, p.154). In particular, it is observed that female femininity is often used in order to attract more attention to advertising than usual, to ensure higher ratings and to increase sales in a positive way (Simsek, 2006, p. 84). In other words, It can be stated that the genders used in advertisements play an important role in the effectiveness of the advertising message (Ferguson et al., 1990, p. 173). For this reason, the use of sexuality, which is frequently observed in advertisements, is mostly focused on the female figure, and many companies use the female body as a sexual object in order to create a positive attitude and purchasing behavior for the consumer.

Although a large part of the sexuality factor found in advertisements often related to the female body, it is observed that nowadays, male bodies are now used

in advertisements with their physical images, which are usually muscular (Dumanli, 2011, p. 139). Abercrombie & Fitch is one of the brands that use male sexual attractiveness and it is observed that it creates a very erotic and sexy image. In addition to the use of heterosexual models with sexy, muscular bodies, lesbian and gay connotations have recently been experienced in the advertisements of brands (Bati 2013b, p. 303-311). Moreover, sexual attractiveness situations are often used in the advertisements of soap, lotion, perfume-like products. (Reichert, 2004, p. 32). The use of the phenomenon of sexuality not only increases the awareness rates of the brands being advertised, but also negatively affects the impact of the message by getting in front of the brand (Çakar, 2009, p. 18). Based on these comments, it is necessary to develop new forms of advertising research on the subject. In this context, It can be stated that in addition to traditional research methods (questionnaire, focus group, etc.), studies conducted within the scope of neuromarketing can bring a new direction to advertising studies within the scope of communication research.

Especially when looking at the market research carried out in the last decade, the concept of neuromarketing, which is carried out differently from traditional research methods, attracts attention. The concept “allows us to interpret the mental and physical reactions of consumers to marketing stimuli by directly observing their perception processes” (Alyar, et al., 2021, p. 311). "To measure with neuromarketing techniques is to question the reality of this approach in line with the changes in consumer perception. The use of neuromarketing techniques

provides the most accurate and reliable insight into the feelings, thoughts, desires and needs of consumers compared to traditional research methods” (Ariely and Berns, 2010 quoted by Alyar, P. et al., 2021, p. 314).

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Research Questions**

- 1) Does use of a male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertising applications have an effect on the level of women's interest in commercials?
- 2) Does the male's body characteristics (muscles, etc.) affect the interest level of women in commercials when using the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertisement-oriented applications
- 3) Does the use of the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertising applications have an effect on the level of women's interest in advertising on the product?
- 4) Does use of the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in commercial applications have an impact on the level of women's interest in advertising on the brand?

### **4.2. Purpose Of The Study**

The aim of the research is to reveal the criticism of the use of the male figure as an object of sexual attraction by performing a critical impact analysis of advertisements within the framework of communication research through the example of bicolata starz ads. In this context, it is aimed to try

to reveal the extent to which the consumer perceives the use of the male body as a sexual object reflected in the advertisement and to develop a critical point of view.

#### **4.3. The Importance of Research**

When looking at the literature in an academic context, it is seen that the studies conducted regarding the advertising and gender criticism focus heavily on the use of the female body as a sexual object. Man body is also used for marketing purposes as sexual objects in most of the commercials today. So the importance of the research is based on the criticism of the use of the human body as a sexual object in commercials. In the research, the ground for the analysis of the use of the male body as a sexual object in the Biscolata commercial using the eye tracking method is based on the reason in question.

#### **4.4. Limitations of the Research**

The limitations of the research were determined by selecting 1 advertisement in the TV advertising campaign on the Biscolata product, which is in the product group of the Şölen Chocolate company. In the selection of the sample, Biscolata Advertising keywords were written on Google search engine and the most viewed advertisement was selected and included in the sample. The main reason for the commercial choice is based on the fact that it was aimed to draw attention to the product while using bodies of men as sexual objects.

#### **4.5. The Method of Research**

The first of the methods used in the analysis studies related to advertising is eye tracking analysis, which is one of the neuromarketing regulations, and it is also supported by in-depth interview technique.

With the eye tracking method, eye movements are measured and examined, so visual information is easily collected instantaneously thus, it is determined where the users have looked at, for how long and how many times, and information about their mental state is collected. Thanks to the data received from the eye tracking device, it is aimed to make the information obtained by the users more efficient and effective. This gives researchers the opportunity to test products in advance, customer preferences are measured according to the identified focus points, and the probability of making mistakes decreases and the success rate increases (Eyice Başev, P., 2015).

The methods used in Eyice Başev's doctorate thesis in 2015 were adopted and the participants were given information about the room in which the research is conducted and the eye tracking device. Since very long eyelashes prevent the LED lights in the eye tracking device from seeing the eye clearly, subjects with long eyelashes were asked to curl the eyelashes as much as possible before starting the research. Participants who have dense eyelashes, whose eyelashes couldn't be curled or who are sensitive to the flashing images were not included in the study. Sitting positions were adjusted according to the 50-60cm distance between the eye and the screen and the seats were adjusted for each participants' height.

According to some of their approaches, in-depth interview studies also include key approaches by which the meaning of everything can be analyzed (Berger, 1996, p.13). Within this context, It can be stated that in-depth interview method is one of the most commonly used traditional methods which is carried out together with the researches carried out with eye tracking technique. "In-depth interview method is a one-to-one face-to-face qualitative data collection method in which open-ended questions are directed more when it is desired to collect detailed information in the research" (Tekin, 2006, p.101).

The questions directed to the participants in the in-depth interview method within the scope of the research are listed below.

- 1) What do you think about TV commercials? Do you like watching TV commercials?
- 2) Have you ever seen Biscolata Starz Biscuit commercial before? Did you like it?
- 3) What do you think about the male actors featured in the commercial?
- 4) What do you think about the use of male actors in the commercial?
- 5) If we ask you to evaluate the commercial, what do you have in mind? For example do you count the objects or the products held by the actors? Or what were the colors of the clothes on them?

### **Population and Sample of the Research**

The sample of the study was formed by selecting the snowball sampling method. The snowball sampling method is the sampling method used in

research where it is difficult to determine the units that will constitute the sample to be investigated. "In snowball sampling method, a first unit (a person or an object) which is in the population and is accessible by the researcher is determined. In the light of the data to be obtained from these units, it is aimed to reach the next unit and to create a sample that is thought to represent the universe, so that the sample volume consisting of a single unit at the beginning is enlarged like a snowball." (Ural, 2011, p 46). In this context, the research was carried out by including 30 female participants between the ages 24- 45, who are university graduates living in Istanbul, with the snowball technique.

## **5. RESEARCH DATA AND FINDINGS**

### **5.1. Visual characteristics of the advertising film within the scope of the research in general**

The commercial film is designed for semi-naked men to exhibit their muscular bodies in an exotic environment during the preparation stage of biscuit making. When I examine considering what was shown during the commercial, It demonstrates an image of strong, sexy, talented man who cares about his partner in a straight sense. As a connotation, it is observed that it gives the image of a product that is seductive and it gives pleasure and joy. Men perception in the commercial is semi-naked, smooth and muscular which contradicts to the traditional patterns, One of the other indicators revealed within the scope of the advertisement is that a beautiful woman eats a biscuit that men prepare for women. What is shown in the commercials is the packaged version of the biscuit. The plain meaning intended here is passion, desire and admiration. The side

meaning is that the product prepared by men for women is gladly consumed by a woman.

### 5.2.1. Demographics of the Study Participants

### 5.2. Data and Findings of Eye Tracking Analysis

#### Analysis

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group**

Demografik Özellikler		Frekans (f)	Yüzde (%)
Cinsiyet	Kadın		%
Yaş	24-29 Yaş Arası	6	% 20
	30-39 Yaş Arası	14	% 46,7
	40-45 Yaş Arası	10	% 33,3
Eğitim Durumu	Lisans	30	%100
Toplam		30	%100

When we take a look at the table in which the demographic distribution of the participants is shown; among 30 women, 6 participants (equals to 20% of participants) are between 24-29 age range, 14 participants (equals to 46,7% of participants) are between 30-39 age range and 10 participants (equals to 33,33% of participants) are between 40-45 age range. All of the participants are university graduates.

### 5.2.2. Analysis of Bicolata Advertising Film Heat Map Images of Research Participants

**Figure 1 The image of Heat Map of "4th, 7th and 10th Seconds" (Respectively) of Bicolata Commercial Film**



**Source:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMUmKhNAVL0>

As seen in Figure 1, it has been determined that the points that were being focused at the "4th second" on the heat map are the actor's face and body, that is, the chest area. No one looked at the coconut the actor was holding. The most focussed points at the "7th second" were the abdominal area, also known as the "six-packs" and it was observed that the other areas of the screen weren't looked at in general. The most focussed points at the "10th second" were the face, muscles located on the left shoulder and hands of the actor.

**Figure 2 The image of Heat Map of "12th, 13th and 16th Seconds" (Respectively) of Biscolata Commercial Film**



As seen in Figure 2, the focus of participants at "12th second" were directed to the face of the models, eyes, forehead and the smile in particular. As seen at "13th second" the focus of participants were directed to the face, left eye and the abdominal muscles of the model. At "16th second", the focus of participants were directed to the face and the muscles located at the point of the shoulder of the model. It was determined that the general focus of the participants weren't distributed over the screen in all three images.

**Figure 3 The image of Heat Map of "18th, 20th and 21st Seconds" (Respectively) of Biscolata Commercial Film**



As seen on Figure 3, it was determined that the focus of participants were directed to the face of the model, to the shoulder of the model that is standing at the back and to the chocolate machine located on the image on the left at "18th second." At "20th second", it was determined from the heat map that the focus of participants were directed to the chocolate flowing down from the spoon which was held by the left hand of the model. It was determined that most of the points that were focussed on were the face, shoulder of the model and the chocolate squishing equipment held by the model at "21st second".

**Figure 4 The image of Heat Map of "24th, 25th and 29th Seconds" (Respectively) of Biscolata Commercial Film**



As seen in Figure 4, it has been determined that the focused points are the star of the Biscolata Stars on the chocolate tray and the cookie part at "24th second". However, since there are no other images in the commercial frame, the focus wasn't distributed to the screen overall. As seen at the "25th second", the focus is directed to the Biscolata packages located inside the Biscolata parcel. It was determined that the participants did not focus on the model at all. At "29th second" however, the focus points were directed at the face, abdominal muscles, the arm of the model and the biscolata biscuit. It was observed that the model wasn't being focused at all.

### 5.2.3. In-Depth Interview Analysis of Biscolata Starz Biscuit Commercial by Research Participants

According to the results of an in-depth analysis conducted with 30 women, it was determined that 60% of women avoid watching television commercials and do not like watching commercials. All participants stated that they had watched the Biscolata Starz Biscuit commercial film before. 28 of the women stated that they liked the commercial while 2 of them stated that they didn't like it. When asked about the reasons for not liking, they said that it was unrealistic and absurd. What do you think about the male actors featured in the commercial? The general views about the use of men in the commercial consist of mainly two ideas. First of which is the sexy appearance, the second view is that they agree that the men are sexy but they think that the choice of models were wrong. When they were

asked to evaluate the commercial, the thoughts only focussed on the muscled builds, the smile and sexy appearance of men. Only 5 out of 30 participants gave the correct answer of coconut while the other 25 participants failed to answer correctly when being asked about the object held by the model. Only 3 people were right about the colors of the clothes on the actors.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Use of women as sexual objects by the companies in commercials in order to market their products and services is quite common. There are many critical research conducted in this context. Nowadays, especially when the last decennial advertisements are observed, the use of the male body as a sexual object in advertisements attracts attention and is among the criticized topics. When the subject is evaluated in terms of the concept of gender, use of human body

as a sexual object, not a woman or a man, and presenting it to the society through commercials in the context of body patterns has become one of the important issues that should be criticized today. Based on this research, as can be seen in the Biscolata advertisement of Şölen company, the use of male figure and body is remarkable and the audience's perspectives on the use of male figure instead of the usual female figure for 30 women. In the research, it has been determined that male bodies went ahead of the commercial and the product.

In the commercial that was the general subject of the research, the glance and the sexy bodies of men were demonstrated. As a result of the researchs conducted, it can be stated that the male body is presented as an object in order to use sexual attractiveness in the 58 second-long "Biscolata Star Biscuit". When we look at the finding of the first research question, "Does the use of a male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertising applications have an effect on the level of women's interest in commercials?", it was determined that on 9 out of 12 images from the commercial, the focus was directed to the body and the face of male models and the focus wasn't distributed to the other parts of the images. Therefore, it can be predicted that women have an impact on the level of interest in commercials.

When we look at the finding of the second research question, "Does the male's body characteristics (muscles, etc.) affect the interest level of women in commercials when using the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertisement-oriented applications?", it was determined that on 7 out of 12 images from the

commercial, the focus was directed to muscles of male models. Therefore, it can be predicted that women have an impact on the level of interest in commercials. When we look at the finding of the third research question "Does the use of the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in advertising applications have an effect on the level of women's interest in advertising on the product?", it was revealed that on only 3 out of 12 images from the commercial, the focus was actually directed to the product itself according to the results obtained by the eye tracking device. In this context, it can be predicted that the level of interest of women to the commercial is not affected by the product. When we look at the finding of the fourth research question "Does the use of the male figure as an object of sexual attraction in commercial applications have an impact on the level of women's interest in advertising on the brand?", on only 1 out of 12 images from the commercial, the brand was seen according to the results obtained by the eye tracking device. In this context, it can be predicted that the level of interest of women to the commercial is not affected by the product.

Looking at the research findings from a broad framework within the scope of the study purpose, the findings indicate that female audience may be affected by the male body used as a sexual object and they may change their purchasing behavior accordingly. Results of the eye tracking method conducted with 30 participants aged 24-45 reveal that the focus was directed on the body, muscles and faces of semi-naked male models. When deviation check is carried out across the screen, it was determined that there were no deviation while the

focus was directed only to semi-naked models where there is multiple models on the image. It was determined that the participants recognized the flowing chocolate from the spoon held by the male model rather than looking at the face of the model on live images. It was detected that the stars of the Biscolata Stars and the cookie portion were focused on by the participants and it was determined that the

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brand was perceived clearly. As a result, when looking at the findings obtained from the research questions, the need arises to criticize the use of the human body as a sexual object in commercial-oriented advertising, and it is assumed that the study contains findings that may open the door to new studies to be conducted within the framework of these issues.

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