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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF NIKE'S "DREAM CRAZIER" ADVERTISEMENT

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Abstract

Advertisements are a part of our daily lives and convey certain messages. In this way, they deal with the values, attitudes and shared knowledge embedded in a culture. In this context, the current study focuses on the critical discourse analysis of Nike's "Dream Crazier" advertisement. In other words, it aims to examine why and how the "Dream Crazier" advertisement text is uttered and the meanings underlying the discourse. Furthermore, this study focuses on the context analysis that evaluates how the advertising language is used in a manipulative manner, the implicit meanings behind the discourse, and the structures behind its seemingly natural expressions based on Fairclough's (1992) framework. The advertisement analysed in the current study reveals how language creates meaning in social relations, and directly draws attention to gender discrimination and gender bias against female athletes and indirectly conceptualizes gender through sports. As a result, although the message of equality is highlighted in this advertisement, it is seen that the discourse and representations used reproduce gender roles and indirectly pave the way for gender discrimination. The fact that the advertisement focuses on sports preferred by male athletes and encourages women to fit this mold reveals the limits of the equality discourse.

Key Words: Discourse, media discourse, critical discourse analysis, advertising, gender discrimination.

NIKE'IN "DREAM CRAZIER" REKLAMININ ELEŞTİREL SÖYLEM ANALİZİ

Özet

Reklamlar günlük hayatımızın bir parçasıdır ve belirli mesajlar iletirler. Bu şekilde, bir kültürün içinde barınan değerler, tutumlar ve paylaşılan bilgiyle ilgilenirler. Bu bağlamda, mevcut çalışma Nike'in "Dream Crazier" adlı reklamının eleştirel söylem analizine odaklanmaktadır. Başka bir deyişle, "Dream Crazier" reklam metninin neden ve nasıl söylendiği ve söylemin altında yatan anlamları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dahası, bu çalışma reklam dilinin nasıl yönlendirici kullanıldığını, söylemin ardındaki örtük anlamları, doğal görünen ifadelerinin arkasındaki yapıları Fairclough'un (1992) çerçevesine dayanarak değerlendiren bağlam analizine odaklanmaktadır. Mevcut çalışmada analiz edilen reklam, dilin toplumsal ilişkilerde nasıl anlam yarattığını ortaya koymakla birlikte doğrudan kadın sporculara yönelik cinsiyet ayrımcılığına ve cinsiyet yanlılığına dikkat çekmekte ve dolaylı olarak cinsiyeti sporla kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu reklamda eşitlik mesajı öne çıkarılmakla birlikte, kullanılan söylem ve temsillerin toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yeniden ürettiği ve dolaylı olarak cinsiyet ayrımcılığına zemin hazırladığı görülmektedir. Reklamda, erkek sporcuların tercih ettiği spor dallarının merkeze alınması ve kadınların bu kalıba uymaya teşvik edilmesi, eşitlik söyleminin sınırlarını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Söylem, medya söylemi, eleştirel söylem analizi, reklamcılık, cinsiyet ayrımcılığı.

Introduction

In the extensive literature of discourse analysis, the term 'discourse' is adapted in many ways (Fairclough, 1993). It is described distinctively regarding two primary paradigms: structural and functional. For the former one, discourse is a specific unit of language beyond the sentence level, and for the latter one, it is a specific centre on the use of language (Schiffrin, 1994). In this context, structuralists are mostly interested in the form of language like a type of structure, regard language as innate and personal assets while functionalists are concerned with the use of language like content (Anderson, 1988). Distinctions in these two paradigms affect definitions of discourse itself: structuralists consider discourse as language beyond the sentence level like grammar, and functionalists regard discourse as the use of language (Shiffrin, 1994).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is a part of discourse analysis deals with examining transparent and in-transparent relationships of hegemony, power, discrimination and control demonstrated in language as Fairclough (1993) asserted. Discourse analysis involves methodically investigating obscure causality and resolution between (a) linguistic patterns, occasions and contents, and (b) more extensive social and cultural frameworks, connections and phases; examine how these actions, occasions and contents are derived and are politically determined by bonds of power and conflicts overpower; and to study how the obscurity of these associations between discourse and community is an element ensuring authority and domination (p. 135). Similarly, van Dijk (2011) alleged that CDA deals with examining documented and oral contents to ascertain discourse-related sources such as hegemony, power, bias and inequality. Moreover, it reveals how these sources are controlled and expanded in political, historical and social contexts. Today, extensive discourse manifested in languages are addresses to people by means of different media tools such as radio broadcast, television, internet, adverting and newspapers. Among these tools, the role of newspapers in ideological manipulation is outstanding. Newspapers are biased when transmitting knowledge to people since they have political views (Fowler, 1991). In respect to this, language used in newspaper articles is a strong tool to impose an opinion or an ideology; accordingly, analysing discourse of newspapers is critically crucial.

Media texts, and what they constitute as discursive practice, can have a significant influence on the audiences' manners, beliefs and lifestyle consumption. Hence, the present study aims to look at what is the real message beyond the literal words in Nike's "Dream Crazier" ad and what linguistic elements and devices have been utilised to represent an idea. Furthermore, the present study focuses on the context of production and reception of the text and the analysis of context which assesses the relationship between the ad and broader social processes and ideologies.

Method

A qualitative design was adopted for this study. The advertisement opted for the study is available on YouTube and the related link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whpJ19RJ4JY>. The present study intends to answer the research questions below:

1. What is the difference between the apparent and implicit message of the advertising text, and what ideological purposes does this difference serve?
2. What kind of social identity or role does the perspective adopted in the advertising text attribute to the target audience?
3. How does the advertisement under the study represent social issues?

Data Collection

Nike's 2019 "Dream Crazier" advertisement is 90-second long and was directed by Kim Gehrig. Dream Crazier, narrated by Serena Williams, features many famous athletes, such as an Ironman Triathlete and Paralympian Sarah Reinertsen, a South African 800-meter runner Caster Semenya, and Paralympian wheelchair racer Tatyana McFadden. In the advertising discourse, Williams begins to narrate, "If we show emotion, we're called dramatic. If we want to play against men, we're nuts. And if we dream of equal opportunity, delusional," while scenes of different women athletes are presented. "But a woman running a marathon is crazy". "If they want to call you crazy, fine. Show them what crazy can do," Williams narrates at last.

Data Analysis

The data analysis is depended on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework. These facets which are all precisely connected to each other are explanation of textual analysis, interpretation of interaction and explanation of context, and are presented in Figure 1 below:

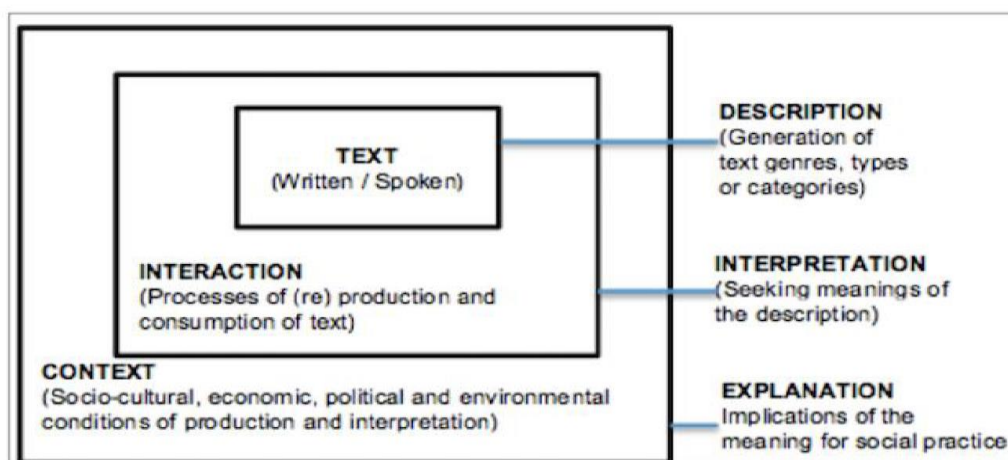


Figure 1. Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse analysis (1992, p.25)

The first stage, the description stage, is about the analysis of verbal or visual text or a combination of these. This stage is concerned with the linguistic features and text structure. The second stage, the interpretation stage, is about how the text is produced and interpreted by people. In this stage, the connection between the texts, its production and its consumption need to be clarified. The third stage, the explanation stage, is related to social practices, namely the socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental conditions that influence the production and interpretation.

With respect to the first dimension, what has been actually said in the promotional content and what linguistic units and instruments have been utilised to articulate a message were considered. Regarding the second dimension, the context of production, distribution and consumption of the ad, who the text of the ad was written by, what idea this person might want to bring forward, what type of person for this ad were considered. Finally, for the third dimension, the social issues particularly female empowerment and gender bias toward female athletes around the world were analysed.

Results

The analysis was conducted following Fairclough's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) structure, which considers the three interrelated aspects of description (text analysis), interpretation (processing analysis), and explanation (social analysis). Each stage examined the perceptions presented in Nike's "Dream Crazier" advertisement within linguistics, creation and broader socio-cultural inferences.

Description: Text Analysis

At the first stage, the descriptive level, the analysis focused on the ad's linguistic structures, figurative language, and diverse semiotic resources. Presenting Serena Williams as the narrator, the ad utilizes a variety of linguistic practices to both exclude and authorize female athletes.

One of the most striking linguistic features in the analysed advertising text is repetition. The word "crazy" is used 12 times, which seems to emphasize the word's association with the ambition, emotions and physical achievements of female athletes. The conscious repetition of the word both facilitates its retention and gives it new and empowering connotations, regaining a historically negative label. Psychological studies have shown that hearing a phrase repeatedly increases familiarity and perceived accuracy, and that repetition is a persuasive tool that shapes the audience's thoughts.

In addition, the Nike logo is constantly present in every sequence of the ad, which serves a double function: it reinforces the brand identity while also associating Nike with endurance, enablement and rebellion of community standards. This multifaceted approach combines verbal and visual discourse to create a coherent value-laden idea.

"And if we get angry, we're hysteric **al** , irration **al** ..."

"A woman box **ing** was crazy." "A woman dunk **ing** , crazy."

As seen in the quotations above, the ad uses stylistic devices such as alliteration, as seen in phrases such as "we're hysterical, irrational," and "a woman boxing was crazy." These phonological features create rhythmic stress and increase retention of the message.

Moreover, the use of personal pronouns such as embracing "we" and contradicting "they" draw attention to the socio-political gap between female athletes and the discourses or institutions that weaken them. "We" creates unity among the women and between narrator and audience, but "they" indicate social forces that undermine the women's credibility or affective articulation. The following quotations can provide an example of this:

"If **we** want to play against men, **we** 're nuts."

"So, if **they** want to call **you** crazy, fine. Show **them** what crazy can do."

Imperatives, such as "Show them what crazy can do," serve as invitations to action. By addressing the audience directly, the ad blurs the boundaries between narrator and viewer, encouraging a sense of shared struggle and personal commitment. See the quotation below:

"So if they want to call you crazy, fine. **Show them what crazy can do.**"

From a linguistic perspective, the ad tactically uses negative adjectives—"dramatic," "nuts," "delusional," "hysterical"—to depict social labels for female athletes' behaviour. These linguistic features are positioned together with endurance, determination, and accomplishment, with visual illustrations that mean resisting dominant narratives and redefining the meaning of the word "crazy." This can be exemplified by the following:

"Dramatic, nuts, delusional, unhinged, wrong, angry, hysterical, irrational, crazy".

As for the visual representation, it backs up the textual content. The ad features a variety of female athletes, including prominent athletes Simone Biles and Serena Williams and

lesser-known influential athletes Sky Brown and Olivia Moultrie. The convergence of gender, ethnicity and capability plays a core role in depiction, embracing difference and opposing the one-dimensional representation of sports.

Interpretation: Processing Analysis

The interpretation stage reflects the construction and interpretation of the advertising discourse. The advertising text is narrated by Serena Williams, who claims that she experienced gender discrimination at the 2018 U.S. Open tennis tournament and raised the issue of the treatment of female athletes. This situation was presented directly to the audience in the advertising text and increased the realism and emotional impact of the advertisement.

William's voice-over in the ad articulates the idea of "craziness" as a rejection of gender-based constraints rather than irrationality. Engagements traditionally considered inappropriate for women, such as coaching an NBA team, boxing, or returning to sports after giving birth, are renamed brave rather than abnormal. The phrase "crazy, crazy, crazy" is repeated over and over again in the ad as images of women overcoming obstacles are featured, labelling female athletes with this phrase.

Despite the message being conveyed about women's liberation, a more evaluative assessment of the advertising text reveals gendered constructions of success. Attitudes and behaviours such as anger, violence, conflict are generally related to male sports figure. Accordingly, while the ad superficially questions gender stereotypes, it also latently suggests that what equality requires is for women to embrace masculinized sports settings attributes.

The emotional manipulative nature of the advertisement causes persuasiveness. Nevertheless, this emotional intensity is exploited for profit and packaged within Nike's brand advertising narrative aligned with profit motivation. The individual transforms into ideological, and the ideological transforms into profitable.

Explanation: Social Analysis

The final stage analyses the more discursive and structural context in which the advertisement was created. The ad engages with gender inequality by addressing the historical marginalization of female athletes in sports, their lack of sponsorship support, and lack of media visibility. In this context, studies have addressed the 2% visibility of female athletes in the media (Messner & Cooky, 2010; Greska, 2019), which is an example of the disproportionate representation of female athletes.

From this perspective, through a value-driven marketing approach, the ad aims to attract consumers' attention to the product. However, it contains some contradictions. While the ad promotes gender inequality, it also belittles the achievements, resilience, personal choices, individuality and self-empowerment of female athletes. The imposed view that women must "stand up like men" in order to be successful in sports latently legitimizes the masculinization of ideals of success in sports.

Furthermore, the ad highlights the role of the media in constructing cultural norms. The emotional visuals and narrative appeals that appear throughout the Nike advertisement, a sportswear brand, portray the brand as a tool for cultural change. These persuasive strategies stem from the brand's commercial interest-oriented orientation, namely, appealing to women and ensuring product consumption.

The inclusion of narratives of female athletes in the advertisement deliberately contains economic and ideological motivations. In the ad, a female athlete wearing a hijab challenge Westernized assumptions about Muslim women's presence in sports, but on the other hand, it commercializes cultural distinctions. By means of this, the ad aims to reinforce Nike's impression as an embracing sport brand while increasing its worldwide recognition.

In conclusion, the ad creates a discourse practice in which gender, dominance and commercialization are bound together. The ad honours the persistence of female athletes, as well as drawing on the social and cultural hardships experienced by female athletes.

Discussion and Conclusion

The position, voice and role of women in sports represents the social position of women in that culture. Despite many advances made, especially under the influence of the feminist movement in the 1970s, gender in sports persists to eclipse athletes' sporting performance and achievements. Throughout the world, especially in socioeconomically evolving societies, patriarchal gender standards still explain women's presence in sports. In this context, female athletes are often presumed to adopt sports that are considered inactive, beauty-oriented roles and are secretly fostered to participate in sports perceived as "feminine-coded" such as skating, swimming or tennis (Açıkada & Ergen, 1990).

The advertisement analysed in the current study clearly attempts to advocate for gender equality in sports. But upon further examination, the ad appears to reinforce those exacting preconceptions it criticizes. As displayed in the ad's imagery, the portrayal of female athletes in sports adheres to masculine ideals such as resilience, power, and speed that have historically been attributed to male athletes (Rasmussen et al., 2021). Instead of appreciating female athletes' athletic identities by their own standards, the ad emphasises women only when they adopt a masculine performance style or when they are involved in sports that are perceived by society as male-oriented. In this context, Öktem (2004) also defends a similar idea, claiming that the success of female athletes is reported on in the media with expressions such as "extraordinary" and "coincidental", and that information about the femininity of these athletes is highlighted before focusing on their sporting achievements. This validates the idea that sporting victory is determined by masculine norms.

In this regard, the discourse of the advertisement is consistent with the studies in the literature (Arslan & Koca, 2006; Özsoy, 2008 and Greska, 2019) in that media today still prioritizes female athletes' feminine aspects, such as their appearance, emotionality, or home-based roles, rather than focusing on their talents and victories. The depiction of women in sports, even in neutral media, recreates within preconceived frames the idea that female athletes must validate themselves by conforming to masculine norms - an idea that is fitted into the underlying structure of the ad and metaphorical expression (Akkaya & Kaplan, 2014). Ningsih (2021) states that physical strength and achievement in sports are often perceived within a gendered framework by devaluing women in the world of sports and supporting the view that sport is a lens of hegemonic masculinity.

Historical viewpoints better explain this embedded bias. Examples such as the rejection of female athletes from the early Olympic Games and Pierre de Coubertin's gender-biased ideas about female athletes at the beginning of the 20th century illustrate the long-standing resistance to the presence of women in sports (MacPherson et al., 1989; Arslanoğlu, 2005; Fuller, 2006; Memiş & Yıldırım, 2011). Unfortunately, these inherited views continue to exist in less obvious forms today.

Furthermore, this study shows that sport is not equally available to everyone and do not include women and men fairly. Although participation in sports seems to depend on individual preferences, it is actually determined by organizational and societal structures. For female athletes, acceptance, incentive, motivation and cultural affirmation vary considerably. Even in this era, the sports that are deemed appropriate for female athletes are more elegant, polite, and aesthetically-driven, while physically demanding, high-intensity sports such as football and basketball are less approved (Yüksel, 2014; Kavasoglu & Yaşar, 2016). Media news generally

prefers to underrepresent female athletes who play team sports or present them to the public using discourses such as unstable emotions, vulnerability, uncertainty and breakability (Birrell & Cole, 1994).

The advertisement examined seems to convey a liberating and inspiring idea, but it certainly builds gender equality under male-dominated structures. The ad motivates female athletes to take on traditionally male-constructed roles, even though it must reinterpret the benchmarks of achievement from the female athletes' own perspectives. This instils a narrative of marginalization in female athletes, where femininity is relegated to the background or revalued within a masculine-oriented structure in order to avoid exclusion in sports.

For a fundamental innovation and change in sports, male dominance must be eliminated and there must be no gender discrimination between male and female athletes, and both genders must be evaluated equally. The portrayal of female athletes should not be shown as taking on masculine characteristics, but rather as a reflection of female athletes' own identities and experiences. Achieving gender equality in sports can be possible by ensuring that female athletes have fair access to sports, affirming that they have the same visibility in the media, and by re-establishing the historical perception of sports being associated with masculinity.

To conclude, although women's rights activism and social transformation have promoted the involvement of female athletes in sports, deep-rooted inequalities still prevail. To eliminate these embedded inequities, a thorough re-examination of the depiction of gender in sports advertising and media is necessary. As the current ad demonstrates, well-intentioned campaigns, if not carefully created, can promote male-centred ideologies. A non-discriminatory sports environment does not occur in compliance with male-dominated standards, but with the re-evaluation of athletic personality, adopting gender equality and self-governing terms.

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