

Females in Print Advertisements: The Cultural Stance

Wanita dalam Iklan Bercetak: Pendirian Budaya

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ABSTRAK

Imej visual yang disediakan oleh iklan dapat menceritakan tentang sikap, nilai, kepercayaan dan tingkah laku kita melalui makna dan persatuan. Para sarjana menyokong pandangan bahawa bahasa pengiklanan bukan sahaja menyampaikan maklumat mengenai produk tetapi juga nilai-nilai budaya. Dalam iklan, wanita sentiasa digunakan sebagai umpan untuk menarik perhatian. Media adalah berdasarkan jantina, ia mempamerkan trend dan corak tertentu yang berkaitan dengan wanita. Oleh itu, dalam media, wanita digambarkan dalam pelbagai peranan dalam jawatan penting tetapi juga dieksploitasi dalam kedudukan ketidakseimbangan; dari memperlakukan wanita dengan kerja-kerja rumah ke objek seks. Oleh itu, soalan kajian "Apakah peranan yang ditunjukkan oleh wanita dalam iklan cetak?" Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka 1) peranan wanita dalam iklan cetak digital; dan 2) makna perwakilan wanita tersebut. Lapan iklan cetak telah dipilih untuk kegunaan kajian ini. Dalam hasil kajian, representasi wanita akan dijelaskan dengan: sentuhan feminin, fizikal yang merendahkan, fungsi dan cara penggambaran citra wanita.

Kata kunci: wacana media, iklan, pementakan, budaya, pengajian jantina

ABSTRACT

The visual imagery provided by the advertisements can tell powerful stories of our attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours through meanings and associations. Scholars advocated the view that language of advertising not only conveys information about the product but also cultural values. In advertisements, women are often used as baits to attract customers' attention. Media is gendered, displaying specific trends and patterns associated with the female gender. Thus, in media, women are portrayed in diverse roles in positions of power, yet also exploited in positions of inequality; from household chores, to objects of sexual desire. Hence, the research question of "What roles are ascribed to the female gender in print advertisements?" This research aims to explore 1) the roles of female in digital print advertisements; and 2) the meaning-makings through representation of these females. Eight print advertisements are purposely selected for this study. In the findings, females are associated with: feminine touch, physical lowering, function ranking, licensed withdrawal and ritualization of subordination.

Keywords: media discourse, advertisements, framing, culture, gender studies

1. Introduction

The root of the word ‘advertisement’ in Latin is ‘advertere’ which carries the meaning ‘to turn towards’. It is undeniably true that advertisements’ main intention is to grab our attention and make us ‘turn towards’ them, which is to learn more about the product and know its existence. Advertising are goal and profit-oriented. Hence, they tend to present enviable fantasies to consumers so that they will buy the product. In fact, the fantasy in adverts are usually gendered in the sense that the audience are often divided into male and female. This allows for easy targeting and stereotyping. Berger (1982:122) in his work on gender in advertisements commented that “an advertiser has a specific mission. He created images with certain functions that will attract women”. He postulated this on two rationales: firstly, women are always the main target audience for manufacturers and advertisements are designed to sell products used in the women-dominated domestic realm; and secondly, most products, including the ones for men, continue to be bought by women since it is assumed that females are the one that do the shopping for the entire family.

Cook (1989) indicated that language of advertising as generally laudatory, positive, unreserved and emphasizing the uniqueness of product. Language of advertising not only convey information about the product but also a certain degree of culture or cultural values to the user. Cultural variations might be a huge barrier if it is not taken into consideration in advertising. First of all it is important to understand the text system in the different countries when the advertisements are going international. Second, cultures have different values and attitudes when readers are reading a text, therefore we should change the text to suit the different countries because words have also different and even several meanings.

Advertising is part of the culture and economics of a society and therefore, part of our everyday lives. Advertising deals with ideas, attitudes and values, giving them cultural form through its signifying practices (Sinclair, 1987). Advertising as “signifying practices” gives meaning to words and images. The visual imagery provided by the advertisements can have a powerful impact on our attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours through meanings and associations. It has been widely recognized that advertisements can play a substantial role in promoting and disseminating information and are key players in the social and economic development of women. Lasswell (1927) stated that “who says what to whom with what affect?” This can be applied to advertisement. The “who” refers to who is controlling the message. “What” is the message underlying the content of the advertisement. “To whom” deals with the receiver or the target audience and finally “with what” refers to the image portrayed in the advertisement. This model explains in part, the effects of advertisements on audience and the steps that it goes through.

Women have always been the target audience for manufacturers to market their products. To make the products appeal to women, advertisers use women in their advertisement. Media tends to portray typical images of women in advertisements. Advertisers often tend to exploit their products through women and the selection tends towards certain attributes: physically perfect bodies, they have to be young to be attractive for the purpose of the advertisements, they have perfect facial features that are camera photographic – in short, the beautiful people. These phenomena have inflicted a creating a dominant belief in the public eyes of how women should look like.

Hence, this study aims to answer the following research question:

- i. What are the roles ascribed to the female gender in print advertisements?

This study specifically seeks to identify the roles that represented by the female gender in digital print advertisements by

- i. Exploring the linguistic features that are used in relation with female gender as advertising subjects.
- ii. Identifying meaning-makings by the semiotic activities that associate with female gender with the products and/or services.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Framing

The concept of framing was introduced by Goffman (1959) saying that when we act in the social world, we put on a “social identity” to project a certain image of ourselves by manipulating the setting that we perform, our manner and our appearance. It is how we position ourselves when viewed by people. For instance, we project an idealized image of ourselves to impress people by wearing fashionable clothes and behaving like an urbanite.

In essence, framing theory suggests that how something is presented to the audience (called “the frame”) influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning. The most common use of frames is in terms of the frame the news or media place on the information they convey. They are thought to influence the perception of the message by the audience, in this way it could be construed as a form of second level agenda-setting. They not only tell the audience what to think about (agenda-setting theory) but also how to think about that issue (second level agenda setting, framing theory).

In his further work in framing Gender Advertisements (1976), Erving Goffman put forward his theory regarding how femininity and masculinity is displayed within the Western media. By looking at over 500 different photo advertisements and analysing the different poses, positioning of the body, clothing and so on, he finds stark contrasts between how male and female genders positioned in media texts. In his analysis, Goffman addresses several trends and patterns in how femininity is portrayed, as well as the messages conveyed to the viewer and distinguished six dimensions by means of which this symbolic infantilization could be classified:

- i. **Relative Size:** The tendency for men to be presented as larger or taller than women. Goffman also found exceptions to this tendency that ‘proved the rule’. For if the woman was larger in an advertisement, she was generally found to be of a higher social status.
- ii. **The Feminine Touch:** Goffman argues that females are frequently posing while “using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object, or to cradle it or to caress its surface (...). It can be argued that the pose is frequently sexualized, with the woman touching her crotch, breasts and mouth. Within this context, the pose can be interpreted as sexually inviting, depicting the woman as sexually available and accessible.
- iii. **Function Ranking:** When men and women were portrayed in a collaborative activity, the male was usually cast in the role of executor of the task while the female was cast in a secondary or supporting role. When the woman executed a traditionally ‘feminine’ task (cleaning, cooking), the man accompanying her usually had no role at all.
- iv. **The Family:** Goffman observed that family figures tended to be posed to illustrate a special mother–daughter bond on the one hand or a father–son bond on the other. The father–son relationship was generally represented as more spatially distant

from the viewer and as more emotionally distant by means of the space between the participants.

- v. **The Ritualization of Subordination:** The tendency for women to be presented in inferior positions and poses. Women were found to be more often pictured in spatially lower positions or recumbent on floors or beds. They were also more likely to be portrayed performing submissive or appeasement gestures such as head or body canting, bending one knee inward ('bashful knee bend'), smiling, clowning and acting less seriously.
- vi. **Licensed Withdrawal:** Goffman theorized that women in advertisements were symbolically being given the opportunity to withdraw from the scene around them because they were implicitly or explicitly under the care of a male protector who acted as a surrogate parent. This omnipresent protective presence allows the female participants the licence to withdraw psychologically or 'tune out' from the immediate environment.

Framing is a central organizing idea that makes sense of relevant events (Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2003). According to Entman (1993), framing is a fractured paradigm but it is attractive because it is inter-disciplinary in nature. As for Reese (2003), frames are seen as organizing principles that are socially shared and persist over time. Frames work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world. According to them, "frames are a relatively comprehensive structures of meaning made up of a number of concepts and the relations among those concepts".

In other words, framing in media focuses on certain elements and then places them within a field of meaning. The notion of 'framing' in the context of visual communication which was introduced by Kress and Leeuwen (1996) defines framing as how the arrangement of elements in the images grounded by the border of frame-lines or pictorial framing devices. When a topic is framed, its context is determined. Visual elements can be said to be connected to each other by their similarities in colours and shape. For instance, the ocean is an imagery of water and connotes something that can be equated to refreshing. The semiotic potential is to connect or associate these imageries as complementary descriptions related to the product. In this case, blue is often the colour of water, oceans and by extension, refreshing, and hence hydrating. Therefore, the concept associated with the product is hydration and if it is a beauty product, it has moisturizing properties. This, then is the type of equation that the consumers are led to contemplate. In fact, framing implies the relationship among elements in a message because they have been organized by a communicator (Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2003).

According to Entman (1993), framing involves selection and importance, which emphasizes some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby making them more important. He also noted that communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames that organize their belief system. He stated that the communicator's framing intention may differ from the receiver's thinking.

2.2 *Multimodality*

Introduced by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, their framework if analysing media looks at 4 aspects: discourse, design, production and distribution. They emphasised that analysing communication means articulation and interpretation. As beauty is one of the main focuses of media in general and in advertising in particular, female beauty is expressed in media with youthful attributes, including wide eyes, full lips, high cheekbones and flawless skin (Nicholas, 2013). This is usually emphasized by images of the idealized form of beauty. Hence, in using a multimodal analysis, photographs of the so-called beautiful face used in

print advertisements work as a system of signs that gives form and meaning to consciousness and reality. This is supplemented by looking at the design, how it is produced, and the channels and types of distribution – whether it is through the internet (digital) or in hard print copies in flyers that are distributed in malls.

There are always two modes of communication in a printed advertisement; a verbal mode and a visual one which interact together. These two modes can be expressed through the different signs utilized like colours, typed words and photographs. The more these signs are used, the more effectively they can convince the customer to buy the product. According to Chandler (2006), sign consists of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The form that the sign takes is called the signifier, while the reaction of the signifier is called the signified. For instance, if the signifier is a symbol, then the signified could be a concept in the mind pertaining to that symbol. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) present that multimodal communication creates meaning through each of four strata: i) discourse ii) design iii) production and iv) distribution.

3. Methodology

In order to investigate the portrayal of women in the digital print advertisements, qualitative method is chosen for this research. I will analyse the data qualitatively by identifying linguistic features and the semiotic activities that are associated with the female gender in advertisements. A content analysis approach is selected as it focuses on the interpretation of recorded material within a social own context. Emphasis will be given in a detailed analysis of the advertisements in order for researcher to obtain in depth understanding and eventually provide interpretation and explanation to the advertisements.

Over a period of two months from January to February of 2019, a total of 20 advertisements were collected and observed from the website and digital medium which use English as a medium of communication. The collected advertisements are found from Search Engines such as Google, Yahoo and Baidu. These Search Engines are collected because they provide loads of advertisements that fulfil the theme of women in my study and it is easy for consumers to find products advertisements in these Search Engines. The rational for choosing digital print advertisements because digital print advertising has much wider reach than print advertising in targeting audience. Using purposive selection, based on two primary criteria content and size. First, only advertisements that were of sufficient size to provide useable information were chosen. Selection of advertisements was restricted to sizes that cover one quarter page (4.75' x 5') or larger because the visual of women can be easily show. Second, the advertisements has to contain a female depiction that was clearly discernible. Eight digital print advertisements with clearly analysable women are enough to represent the roles of women were selected because the selected samples must have obvious features of image and semiotic activities that can provide clear information regarding the representation of female.

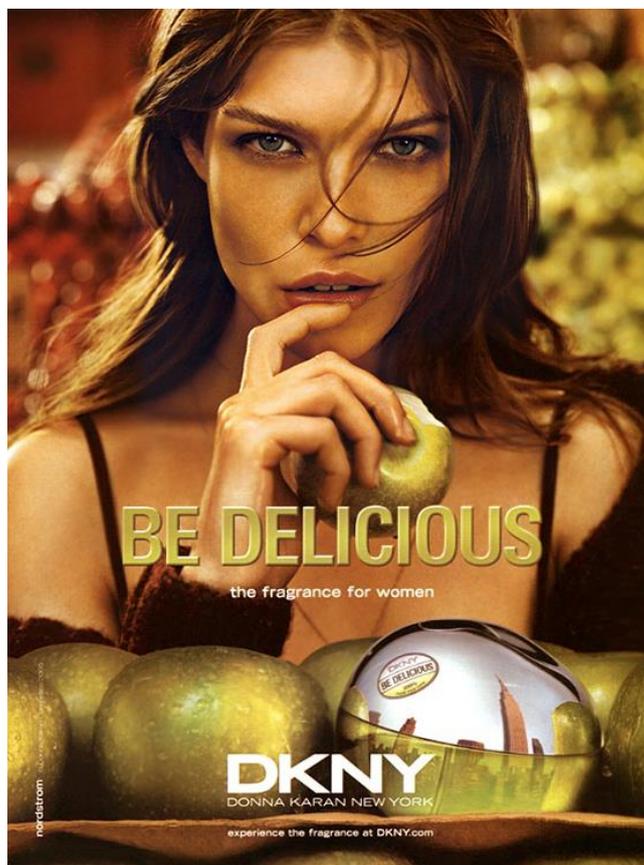
The selected digital print advertisements are:

1. Be Delicious – DKNY
2. Gucci
3. Baby Shampoo by Johnson's
4. Coconut Cooking Oil – Nirmal
5. j'adore – Dior
6. London Weight Management
7. Careful, they're HOT! – Air Asia
8. Designed to Simply Work Better – Dyson

4. Findings and Discussions

In this paper, 2 advertisements were selected for analysis using Goffman's framing of the female gender.

4.1 *The Feminine Touch*



Ad. 1. Be Delicious - DKNY

This advertisement is taken in an outdoor scene. Based on the number of apples on the table in front of the female, we would assume it to be an orchard maybe one that grows apples. This simulation draws up the connotative of fresh apples – meaning that the product advertised is as fresh and fragrant as an apple. It is supported by a close-up shot that draws our attention to the woman's facial expression and an apple-shaped perfume bottle. The image used is that of a mature woman with a sultry look demonstrated by her smoky brown eyes that focus straight to the consumers. She is wearing an off-shoulder brown outfit. She is posed with her lips slightly parted with one of her fingers suggestively touching her lower lip while her other hand holds a green apple which she has taken a bite. Such image is designed to give a suggestive impact to the consumers. The connotation is if women use *Be Delicious* perfume by *DKNY*, perhaps they will be able to seduce men or connotatively, they will be as sexy as the model in the advert.

The perfume is in apple-shaped and it indicates that women are personified as a delicious meal like an apple. The theme colour is brown, the colour of earth and it connotes earthiness. It is a neutral colour that is typically associated with the seasons of fall and winter. The

colour brown is a warm colour that stimulates the appetite, yet it also gives an impression of sophistication through the style of the clothes.

As *DKNY* is an American brand, it adopts the western ideology - what Peterson (2000) has claimed that green is the colour of nature and in marketing or packaging it signals things that are “all natural”. So as the green apple is a type of fruit, it is close to nature and signifies freshness and the reddish brown tones in the background signifies sensuality and passion for women. Hence, these colours symbolize that for women to be sexiness is part of nature. The woman in this advertisement is portrayed as a female preening herself for a man. Goffman (1976) argued that females are frequently posing while “using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object, or to cradle it or to caress its surface (...). This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds”. Within this context, the pose can be interpreted as sexually inviting, depicting the woman as sexually available and accessible.

The phrase “*Be Delicious*” may connote more than one meaning. Though at the surface level it can be interpreted as the new perfume by *DKNY* is “delicious” like the green apple, which means it has the scent of green apple or perhaps it means if a woman wants to be delicious as a green apple, the new fragrance is the answer. But to whom women need to be delicious and why does *DKNY* use a green apple? Perchance, a green apple is a sign of Eve in biblical concept which is also a symbol of men’s weakness and the women’s role is to entice them. Consequently, the word “delicious” is used to portray women and therefore women need to be delicious for her husband. In addition, it is also used metaphorically to indicate its power of sexual attraction.

4.2 The Family



He feels Mom's gentle touch.

His mind is rapidly developing.

Skin-to-skin touch at bath time during a JOHNSON'S® bath has been shown to promote happy healthy development. And the soothing scent, the soft lather and the silky smooth lotion after bath helps enhance the experience. Learn more at JohnsonsBaby.com.

Hypoallergenic. No parabens. No phthalates.

Johnson's SO MUCH MORE™

Ad. 2. Baby Shampoo by Johnson's

The setting of this advertisement is in a bathroom where the baby bath in a baby bathtub. It is a long shot advertisement that shows relation between the character and product. The advertisement consists of a woman, who is a mother and a baby. The woman is gently helping the baby to bath with Johnson's baby shampoo. The baby looks so enjoyable and happy that we can see through his big smile.

The woman is shown as smiling and applying body soap on the baby's body. This is symbolic of a mother pampering her child. This mother-son relationship is connoted through the expression on the woman's face and the way she holds and touches the baby – the softness of the touch is shown in the way the hands of the woman are placed on the baby's tummy. This is supported by the baby's happy and ecstatic facial expression which seems to both indicate enjoyment and a reciprocation to the expression of the woman's face. The woman in this advertisement is viewed in a very stereotypical way. The pictures in the advertisement focus on the mother and baby while the background is blurred to foreground the moment between the mother and child. The picture is framed to imply that *Johnson's baby shampoo* emphasizes bonding of the mother and baby more through *Johnson's* products. The advertisement promotes its product through the actions of the mother.

Soft colours such as light green, yellow and brown are compatible with mother-nature and its softness. It also complements a mother-child environment to highlight show a loving relationship between a mother and her baby. Light green is the colour of life, renewal, nature and energy is associated with meanings of growth and environment (Flash, 2011). Yellow stands for happiness and brown is the colour of home and security. The whole combination of texts and pictures emphasises a strong bond of a mother and baby.

The advertisement is on baby shampoo. Two sentences in the middle of advertisements which are "He feels Mom's gentle touch" and "His mind is rapidly developing" are mind to mind communications between the baby and his mother. "Gentle Touch" is bold to emphasize that *Johnson's* declared "gentle means love" and encourages mothers to choose gentle for their baby. Another word "developing" is bold to explain that skin-to-skin touch of a mother and baby can promote happy healthy development. Sentences in blue colour that placed in the bottom of advertisement to further promote the product that it has natural vitamins that gently nourish and strengthen hair to build a strong bond between a mother and baby. This advertisement associates women with baby. Baby connotes young, immature and weak while mother is strong and mature. Goffman observed that the mother-son relationship was generally represented as more spatially distant from the viewer and as more emotionally distant by means of the space between the participants. Women are assumed that babies are always their priority.

5. Conclusion

Examples and analysis have proven that all the advertisements use women as a lure to attract audience. Advertisers frame the ideology of the roles of women in many ways to promote their products and services. They use attractive and eye-catching slogans to align the response of the audience so as to create a dominant ideology of women in general so as to push their product through this set of illusion. The audience are also susceptible women due to the habits of consumerism. Therefore, it is easy to manipulate their opinions and wishes using the concept of "*I want this*" and "*I wish to be like this*". Furthermore, the use of the pronoun "you" is a semantic trap to create intimacy with the audience as if this is a personal message meant for every reader to lure them into this world of illusion. This has become a magnetic pull for the advertisers validate this ideology by constantly showing a perfect face and body shape and the use of powerful language to manipulate the minds of the audience. As a result,

advertisements have big impact on public opinion feeding to the needs and wants of the voracious society.

Advertisements also affect public opinion by setting the public agenda, not by telling the people what to think but by influencing what people should think about or believe are important. From the selected advertisement in this research, women as part of the public have the tendency to consent with what public have accept as norm. In other words, the public opinion helps women to mould themselves by offering an idealised image their selves. For instance, in the idealised icon of women, the perception is that smaller and thinner women are beautiful while larger size women are marginalised. These largely set the standard for the image an individual should aspire to and as a result, we are seeing an alarming number of young women pursuing this ideal and therefore buying whatever it takes to remould themselves into an iconic carbon-copy.

The advertisements that are analysed use branding as a powerful strategy to sell and influence the audience. Beautiful women are used as models in the adverts to show that this is the ideal or perfect women should achieved. In the advertisements analysed, it is shown that advertisers use many linguistic devices and semiotic activities such as colours, signs, metaphor and symbolism associated with the models to attract women's attention. Most of the advertisements that are analysed show that women in the selected adverts are all good looking and slim. These features are shaped by the advertisers as the ideal beauty that makes a woman a woman. To achieve what it means to be a woman, they should buy the products. The advertisers urge the audience to purchase the products without hesitation by saying "*Be Delicious*" so that they can have immediate remedy to make them feel better and more feminine. On top of that, the advertisers create an ideology of the status of women in the society by implying that being beautiful is an advantage because it is equated to power, and by implication, authority. Just as the model in the advert *Be delicious* appears to be successful because of her beauty. Whether it is true or a fallacy remains unknown, but it is a statement that aligns to the dominant thinking that *the beautiful are always successful*.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the Centre for Literacy and Sociocultural Transformation (CLaST) and my supervisor, Miss Lee Siew Chin for the opportunity to do this piece of research as my BA thesis project. This paper is part of the product of this research.

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