

## A RECEPTION ANALYSIS OF MALE & FEMALE ROLES IN THE ADVERTISEMENTS THAT CARRY DIFFERENT CULTURAL CODES

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to point out how the individuals from different cultural backgrounds perceive the female & male roles in the Turkish advertisements broadcasted on Turkey and their commenting about these female & male images through their cultural motives. Accordingly, the article tries to answer these following questions: How the audience gets the true messages and connotations that are aimed to be given through the brands/products of company? How the individuals exposed to the advertisements comment on father mother's roles and female & male roles that take place on the advertisements of a different culture? How their perceptions of these regarding advertisements affect their actual life? Due to the difficulties of a representative sample, the sample group is taken from a small cluster to collect reliable data and in-depth interviews have been conducted with 14 students who are studying in the department of Turkology in their countries and have come to Istanbul University Language Center for summer school. Most of the participants are coming from the countries in the Middle East countries. An audience perception analysis was used in this study while gathering the data about how the participants receive the roles of father/mother represented in the advertisements with the regard of their different cultural perspectives.

**Keywords:** Advertisements, perception analysis, female/male roles, cultural differences

### INTRODUCTION

It is notable that there are being many cultural changes and diversity in the world and the countries like Turkey where different sub-cultural groups live and take short-and long-term immigration for a variety of reasons. All other factors such as experiences, values and cultural items play an important role in the audience perception and interpretation of publications in communication channels. Advertisements not only have such sales functions as creating the product/brand awareness, providing information, persuading and reminding the audience about the product but also they transfer values, lifestyle, consumer culture of the society to the audience via visual, text and voice messages (Elde, 2009: 187-183; Aktuğlu, 2006: 4). Actually, a cultural transfer is a matter of fact through ads like all other mass communication tools. The advertisements have become communication tools where gender roles are reflected, represented and reinforced, consequently a variety of stereotype is offered. It is seen that the research in this area has been done by terms of content, tool and audience.

This issue is in the boundary of both sociology and economy if we take into consideration of the heterogeneous structure of the audience. It relates to the sociology and society since it deals with the question of how the message is perceived, commented on and how the audience develops an attitude towards the ads. It relates to the economy since it is a way of marketing a product. Although a limited number of perception analyses have been used in previous studies, they approach the audience not as a homogeneous whole, but mass of differences composing from a variety of experiences and practices.

In this study, in-depth interviews were made with 14 undergraduate students who are studying in the department of Turkology in their countries and they came Istanbul University Language Center for the summer school. 30-35 minutes interview was conducted with per student and many questions were asked. The study aims to find answer these following questions: How they perceive Turkish ads? Do they really make out true messages and connotations of the ads? How they make connections ads and the brands/ products? How they conceive male& female roles in the ads? How they compare and contrast these roles with the ones in their countries and what kind of differences do they see in the roles of father/mothers in Turkish ads and the ones in their countries by commenting on the ads in detail? Also, the study research what kind of meanings the participants produce after watching the regarding ads and what they think about them. Do they really find the secret messages and cultural motives inside the ads? Do the images of

father and mother in the ads reflect the ones in their mind? What kind of images they have about father and mother's roles in real life? Do they want to be mother or father like the ones in the ads?

## **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND REPRESENTATION OF THE ROLES OF WOMEN& MEN IN THE ADS**

When we have a look at the previous research done in the field of advertisement, we can clearly see that the representation of the roles of women/ men in the ads has been argued permanently. This hot topic has connections with both moral and social rules because the ads use the sexual images of women and men in the ads while representing those figures. Thus, the critics and regards about these represented images will continually be put forwarded and take the scholar's interests.

The representation of sexuality in the ads both inside and outside Turkey is being regarded in two ways: First one; "How are the images of women/men used in the ads?" (Levy, 2006:77; Hetsroni, 2007: 201; Soley ve Kurzbard 1986; Demir, 2006: 4; Yılmaz, 2007: 144; Karaca ve Papatya, 2011: 480). Second one; "What kinds of attitudes does the audience have towards both the ads and brands/products that contain the motives of sexuality on the social and moral level?" (Peterson ve Kerin, 1977:62; Latour ve Henthorne 1993: 52; Dudley, 1999:90; Poorani, 2012: 3; Şener ve Uztuğ, 2009: 160; Özdemir, 2010: 102; Bakır, 2013: 23). Previous studies show that women are sometimes represented as a sexual body on visual scale; that is less powerful and dependent on men but erotic, and sometimes women are portrayed as a self-dependent business woman, attractive, beautiful, successful wife and mother (Levy, 2006: 77; Ioan, 2006: 47-48; Rutherford, 2000: 140; Koernig & Granitz akt. Levy, 2006: 77-78; Özgür, 1996: 235; Demir, 2006: 291; Karaca ve Papatya, 2011:482; Yılmaz, 2007: 145). On the other hand, men are sometimes represented as a powerful, assertive, attacker, initiative, independent, competitive and ambitious character (Levy, 1996:77; Rutherford, 2000: 140; Karaca ve Papatya, 2011:480; Demir, 2006: 294; Özdemir, 2010: 103), sometimes men are portrayed as both a non-dominant businessman and a caring father, also a metrosexual character that is both doing household choir and working (Levy, 2006: 96; Fiske akt, Demir, 2006: 294; Ioan, 2006: 47-48; Rutherford, 2000: 140; Özdemir, 2010: 103).

On the other hand, the audience –focused studies are mostly interested in the attitudes of audience towards the brands/products in the ads, how these attitudes urge audience to act in favor of ad or not and how the audience perceive the ads by having an active role while doing this. These studies where the attitudes of audience are argued make the audience be active rather than passive while perceiving the ads (Becerikli, 2012: 163-177; Şeker ve İşliyen, 2011: 338-349; Akbıyık ve Karadüz, 2014: 159-190). The age, gender, ethnicity and culture of the audience are important determinant in both the audience-focused analyses and composed contents.

Culture is transferred by the society with all the things that compose it, such as symbols, behaviors, rules, moral rules, traditions, customs, ethics, religion and social values. The values of the society describe both social experience and models of later learned behaviors (Giddens, 2010: 30; Herbig, 1998:11). Henceforth, when it is looked the ads that are broadcasted on a country, we can get a overall data about the stereotypes, gender roles, lifestyle, cultural and economic structure, demography and social-cultural features of that country or relate the ads to the ethnicity, morality and social values of that society by taking the reviews and comments of the audience into consideration (Gilly, 1988: 75; Morris, 2007: 1390; Hestroni, 2007: 202; Demooij, 1998:179-210; Dudley, 75; Nelson and Paek 2008; 716; Pollay, 1983:80-84; Saydam ve Kanibir, 2007: Fernandez ve Vicente akt. Karaca ve Papatya, 2011: 486; Elden 2005:205).

Marieke Demooij and Geert Hofstede, who studied on the relationships between the cultural diversity and global marketing, try to improve product strategy model and advertising while addressing that there is a close relationship between people's values and culture, and their attitudes towards the ads. Demooij support that ads are affected by culture. As a proof to his remark:

1. Appeals should contain values and motives. But, values promoted in the ads are production of the culture.
2. Even a simple advertisement should contain different applications and visuals so that this visualization is the reflection of a specific approach.
3. Cultural values can be inferred from consumer behavior. (Demooij, 1998:12; DeMooij ve Hofstede, 2011: 181-188).

To Demooij, we can make connections between the ads and values “can be desired” that mean things exist in that culture and values “be desired” that mean things to be wanted in that culture. The culture wants to create values “be desired” through the ads (Demooij, 1998:179-210). In this respect, while it is aimed that the ads transfer the socio-cultural norms, lifestyles, consumer behaviors promoted by the resource to the audience, it is also important to explain how the audience perceive the message in the ads and how the audience social, cultural economic and ideological gains affect their lives.

### AUDIENCE RECEPTION ANALYSIS

In the field of communications, studies are done in three ways; content, tool and audience. Like many studies in other fields, audience-focused studies has gaining importance in the area of advertising especially last decades. Also, planning a successful advertisement and managing a true message strategy are highly important while considering audience reception and their taste scale.

A lot of research methods such as; field research, observation have been used by showing the content of advertising message, way of the transfer, advertising framework and discourse dissertation. But especially last decades, receptionanalyses are used often among the research about ethnographic subjects and they also help the audience to take a more active role rather than be passive while watching the ads. Thus, the effects of media messages on the audience are aimed to reveal with this method. Reception analysis depends on three main traditions; first, literary texts are used for revealing the differences between the customers’ opinions and experiences. Second; ‘Uses & Gratifications’ approach is concerned about why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. It assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. Rather, the audience has power over their media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Third is cultural studies tradition that focus on active audience and support that each audience has come from different social and economic group. Richard Hoggart’s contribution to the history of ideas and to Cultural Studies that emerge in the idea of Marksist and also in the center of English Cultural Studies is gaining fame. Also, the studies of Raymond Williams & Stuart Hall contribute to the area of Cultural Studies. Especially, Hall’s model of Decoding & Encoding reasons the concept of culture on the political ground. His model continues today because of the importance of decoding. Here, it implies that the audience is not a homogenous group, rather it is a part or a component of “country”, “nation” in a big scale and in the light of this background, different kinds of decoding are possible to be produced by the audience in that sense. Media audiences are presented with messages that are decoded, or interpreted in different ways depending on an individual’s cultural background, economic standing, and personal experiences. The process of composing message and interpretation of them are related to social, economic, cultural and ideological contexts(Şeker ve Tiryaki 2013: 4; Becerikli, 2012: 165; Mutlu, 2012, s.196; Yücel, 2015: 6).

Hall’s reception theory is accepted as new trends in area of communication and this theory is developed with the idea of decoding and encoding model that explain every individual interprets differently the same media text because of his different background. The first samples were applied on the news texts after 1950. Later, those studies continue with TV programs and content of news (Becerikli, 2012: 165). The ads are regarded as transfer tools of culture and in this the advertiser with the help of sound, visual and media texts encodes sense, values and ideas. Also, audience members make meanings of those decoded texts and understand reality through their use of cultural symbols, experiences, social and economic background (Wharton, 2013: 56). Wharton makes use of Hall’s theory of decoding/encoding in three scale: 1. Dominant/hegemonic position, 2.negotiated position 3.oppositional position (Hall, 2003: 323-325).Here, the first category is preferred reading: the reader fully shares the text’s code and accepts and reproduces the *preferred reading* (a reading which may not have been the result of any conscious intention on the part of the author(s)), second is *negotiated reading*: the reader partly shares the text’s code and broadly accepts the preferred reading, but sometimes resists and modifies it in a way which reflects their own position, experiences

and interests, third is *oppositional ('counter-hegemonic') reading*: the reader, whose social situation places them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, understands the preferred reading but does not share the text's code and rejects this reading. Furthermore, the readers' social situation has placed them in a directly oppositional relation to the dominant code, and although they understand the intended meaning they do not share the text's code and end up rejecting it. Still, the readers produce new meaning and interpretations (2003: 56). The third reading mainly concentrate on whether the audience gets the central meaning and connotations, and they reproduce meaning by refusing the message on the ads with their socio-cultural roots. Audience perception come out with in-depth interview or focused group study.

In this respect, the audience who receives the message and produce the new meanings is more important than what the ads try to say to the audience because the ads carries cultural and economic codes where the audience transfer from the past to the future. In addition, social class, gender, age, religion, cultural, economic, social factors, and environmental factors play big roles in the interpretations of a product/brand in the ads.

In this article, two ads that carry cultural motives are determined and argued. While one of the ads represents a traditional Turkish family with use of the players, music, place, etc, the other one represents a more modern Turkish family structure. However, both of the ads include cultural motives and codes. The codes must be given in written, oral and visual ways (Wharton, 2013: 56). It is clear that the ads texts are given in the same ways. Thus, the article try to put forth audience perceptions of the central and connotations promoted in the ads, their reception of women/men role and their overall evaluations about the regarded ads.

## FINDINGS

The class teacher and researcher have done the study in Istanbul University Language Centre with 14 foreign undergraduate students who are fluent in Turkish language and came Istanbul for summer school. A 30-35 mins face-to-face interview was done with per student by using a sound recorder over his or her own free will. During these interviews, many questions are asked to them and later, those interviews notes were analyzed in detail.

Here the participants of the study are Şems (India, male, 22), Arvaz (India, male, 22), Anna (Georgia, female, 23) Sanella (Bosnia, female,21), Raşida (Algeria, female, 21), Zehra (Algeria, female, 22), Rauşan (Kazakistan, female, 21), Halis (Ukraine, male, 19), Ahmet (Egypt, male, 22), Sibel (Kosovo, female, 19), Nazira (Algeria, female, 22), Habibe (Bosnia, female, 21), Tomaye (Japan, female, 22), Samira (Bosnia, female, 21). Their socio-cultural diiferen from each other even though they are almost same age scale.

In the study, the first ad is about a bank credit campaign of “Yapıkredi Bank” founded in 1944 by Kazım Taşkent as a private banking. The campaign motto is “Unlimited Family & Unlimited Country” and they are reflected both visually and orally. This ad was designed in accordance with the aim of the campaign that gives the message of “The family has extraordinary expectations” and the bank meet this unlimited boundaries of the family.

The target group of the ad about “Traditional Turkish Family” is young families (<http://www.mediacaonline.com>) and the bank ad tries to give message to them “we can meet your all needs and offer you new bank credits”. It still carries the hint of “ we know how important the family is but also we meet your future unlimited expectations”. In the bank ad, many traditional codes were represented such as Sunday picnics, barbeque in the forest, birthday party, family brunch, stuffed grape-leaves (local food) and cookies in the kitchen bottle. They are all the signs of cheerful, warm, friendly, comic Turkish typical familystructure thatexperiences all emotions without any limits.

The second ad is about Father’s Day campaign of AVEA that is one of the GSM Operator in Turkey. This new brand of Avea is special to Father’s day and the father is portrayed as “devoted”, “leader” “responsible”. In addition, a very old Turkish music by Melih Kibar was used in the background to give the emotion of “happy family posture”. Here, the cultural connotations are matter of fact because of the music that was used man times in old best family movies. The female and male images match with stereotypes of Turkish men and women. For instance, in the regarding ad, the father is bringing a bread in special market bag, calculating the debts, cleaning the baby’s bottom, these all portray a responsible family father and the mother is waiting for him come back from work.

All the participants are asked **“What they think about Turkish ads and what kinds of things in the ads draw their attention?”** to determine whether they decode the visual, oral and written motives of Turkish culture promoted by the advertisers or not.

The participants, who watched the Avea advert, generally get the intended messages in the ad. They get the information about the brand in the ad and they grasp the posture of “devoted and responsible father”. The participants state that it is a campaign of a GSM Operator promoted in the ad, but Halis (Ukraine,19) and Rouşan (Kazakistan, 21) state that this advert is possibly organized by Ministry of Family and Social Politics as public service and they also remark that they like the ad partially and find it a little bit emotional.

There are more hidden messages in the advert of Yapıkredi bank. The ad messages are not given in an open way. However, the participants understand easily that it is a bank campaign advert. The Turkish family portrayed on the ad is like a more modern family rather a traditional one, but again it uses some customs of a traditional family like “Sundays picnic”, “barbeque in the forest”, “birthday party” etc. Only Sibel (Kosovo,19) says that “we also go to picnics on Sundays”.

To the question of **“What kinds of Turkish cultural motives draw your attention from the aspects of women and men relationships in the ad?”** The participants generally answer that Turkish family image in their mind match with the family image promoted in the ad. The relationships between men and women are reflected in the ad as it must be in real life and there are similarities between their countries and Turkey. Nevertheless, after they start to live Istanbul, they come across a totally different family structure.

On the other hand, Halis(Ukraine,19) thinks that Avea advert is not reflecting the real Turkish family structure and also says: “Turkish families have serious communication problems among themselves, everything seems perfect on the ads but I have never seen a man and a woman talking on the Street in real life. Here, social relationships among people are so little and weak.”

Anna (Georgia,23) comments on Avea advert and says: “there are many things in the ad that reflect Turkish family; for instance the father who is cleaning baby’s bottom. However, in my country it is not possible in my country because this would show the father as a servant and a father cannot behave like servant. Generally, in Georgia men are outside and working, women are inside home. It is just like as it must be.”

Sibel thinks like that there is close match with the image of Turkish family in the ad and the one in her mind maybe because she comes Turkey so often. However, she finds some scenes (dancing scene of father and mother) of the ad really exaggerated

The participants say about Yapıkredi bank advertisement does not represent the real Turkish family and find the roles of father and mothers exaggerated, but they find the overall representation of Turkish women and men normal. Ahmet (Egypt,22) states that the representation of Turkish family structure in the ad is similar to the image on his mind but this does not match with the family structure on his own country. He also adds: “If I were the advertiser, I would have used a brunette woman or man, and I don’t want to be father like this in the ad.” It can be inferred that Ahmet get the real message and connotation of the ad but the representation of female/male roles are against his own culture. Samira (Bosnia,21) also find the female/male roles are normal, real but the behaviors of father and mothers in the ad very exaggerated. She thinks that the representation of the family in this bank advert doesn’t fit the one on her mind. Samira remarks: “I possibly wouldn’t like to be parents like the one in the ad. They are so close with the kids and there is no distance between parents and kids. This would be difficult for parents to establish authority over the kids.”

Tomeya (Japan,22) says that the family image in the ad is totally fake and not reflecting the reality. She also adds: “This family on the video is not real Turkish family, In Japan we have modern and flexible parents but they don’t even dance with their kids”.

When we ask the participants **“What do you think about the environmental factors like space and the artists used in the ads?”**, they mostly state that all the things included in the ads like space, music and artist represent

Turkey and Turkish people. However, Şems (India, 21) and Avaz (India, 22) express “If the artists in the ads had seemed like Indian people and they had get dressed colorfully like Indian people, I would have felt myself closer to the ads.”

Zehra (Algeria,22) states “overall, the relationships between women and men are similar in my society but the artists and actors should have been more beautiful and charming so that they can draw more attention.”

Raşida (Algeria,21) find the adverts successful in general but she also states :”Personally, I think that women and men in the ads should be more attractive, especially a woman should behave in a flirtatious way and care her body better not like the woman artist in this ad because she seems really bad, careless, as if she had no make-up and her hair is totally mess.”

Nazira (Algeria,22), who find the Yapıkredi bank advert very exaggerated, states “ The artists on the ad are literally so weaker than expected for the content of the advertisement and roles of the scenario.” She is more interested in the general physical appearance of the artists rather than the roles they are performing and stress on the point of “more beautiful artists should be selected.” Rouşan (Kazakistan,21) agree that there is a concept of modern Turkish family in the ad but she again find the representation of these parental roles exaggerated and fake. According to her opinion, there are not such modern family relations and atmosphere in Turkey like the promoted one in the ad.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, the advertisements that include the cultural motives have been determined, and then those cultural motives were presented. Finally, the participants’ comments and connotation on about the regarded cultural motives were mentioned and especially their opinions about representations of parental and male/female roles in the ads were shown and argued. In this respect, the study was done with foreign undergraduate students who have different identity, language, gender, and religion, social and economic background. Thanks to their fluency in Turkish language, they easily understood the ads and the messages of them. They are also studying Turkology in their countries. However, they sometimes have problems with getting the true cultural codes.

In addition, in this study Hall’s perception theory of three ways reading of media texts; Dominant/hegemonic position, 2.negotiated position 3.oppositional position were used (Hall, 2003: 323-325) and also, the study use the similar ways as Wharton applied the audience perception in the ads. In general, the audience get what the ads try say and implicit messages, also. They see and mention about the brands/products promoted in the ads. All of the participants have an overall opinion and deductions about the real messages of the campaign/product/ brand in the ads.

It is clear that the participants’ different comments vary one culture to another one. Although all of the participants say that they like the ads, they state that real Turkish female and male images are not the ones portrayed in the ads. They think that the ads represent the “ideal” Turkish family, not the real and traditional family in Turkey. After they come to Turkey, some of them changed their minds and regard the ads with a critical eye. Therefore, it can be seen clearly that they read the ad texts in a negotiated position. In addition, some of them prefer the female/male characters in their countries; Indian participants’ remarks are examples of this.

In conclusion, when it comes to their evolutions about the environmental factors like the use of space and artists, they especially find Yapıkredi bans adverts so exaggerated and far away from the reality. The most criticized themes in Yapıkredi bank advertisement are the fake representations of the female/male roles. Furthermore, Halis (Ukraine,19) and Rouşan (kazakistan,21) at first assume that both advertisements are done by Ministry of Family and Social Politic for the public use. In both advertisements, Avea and Yapıkredi, emotional texts are used so often that all the participants totally get the messages at the end of the ads. This situation shows us that the audience can produce alternative meanings towards the ad texts.

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