



The Concept of Femvertising as an Innovative Advertising Appeal

Dr. Arzu KAZAZ^{1*}, Dr. Burçe AKCAN², Prof. Aşina GÜLERARSLAN ÖZDENGÜL³

¹ Associate Professor, Selçuk University Ali Akkanat Vocational School, Konya, Türkiye

² Baskent University Faculty of Communication, Konya, Türkiye

³ Selçuk University Faculty of Communication, Advertising Department, Konya, Türkiye

Abstract

The concept of femvertising expresses an advertising understanding that highlights women's talents, focuses advertising themes on pro-women messages, and opposes stereotypes in advertisements featuring women. This concept has been developed in response to the increasing criticism and sensitivity about the sexist presentation of the female image in advertisements and is designed to emphasize the empowerment and/or strength of women. Although this advertising narrative, which involves challenging this situation instead of reproducing stereotypical representations of women, has become increasingly common. The concept of Femvertising, which has been discussed since 2014, expands its scope in advertising practices as an advertising attraction. This approach paves the way for the questioning and revaluation of social stereotypes against women, however it is criticized by various groups, mainly by feminists. The basis claim of these criticisms is that these advertisements contain a false defence of feminism. In this respect, femvertising advertisements continue the capitalist pressure on the female body through advertisements and expand the social roles and responsibilities of women by adding new ones. This study has discussed the concept of femvertising qualitatively with its practices. The study focuses on the advertisements of an international jewellery company that produces handmade jewellery with the case study technique. It aims to develop a new perspective on femvertising ads through content and ideology dimensions, and it is among the pioneering studies in the literature. In addition, future research aiming to measure the effects of femvertising as an advertising appeal on consumer perception, brand image and purchase intention aims to be a guide.

Keywords: Femvertising, Feminism, Advertising, Stereotypes, Appeal

1. Introduction

Advertising today is not only a form of communication between companies, brands, and customers, but also a social opinion leader and a cultural work. Ads use symbols and ideas in combination with very powerful designs to create compelling scenes that connect individuals and images. Advertising, as a cultural work, displays certain kinds of values, attitudes, and behaviours, and reinforces only certain lifestyles and philosophies that help selling meta (Pollay and Gallagher, 1990). Within this scope, advertisements are persuasive advocates of a value system. As cultural values, philosophies and lifestyles transform, so do the values advocated by the advertisement. The changing role structure, especially in the family and the workforce, has brought significant differences in both male and female roles and how this is reflected in advertisements (Grau and Zotos 2016: 761).

Genders were portrayed in more traditional roles in advertisements for a long time. While women have been presented in a more limited way depending on their potential and abilities, recent portrayals of women have moved towards a more positive representation as powerful and versatile. The concept of femvertising expresses an understanding of advertising that highlights women's talents, focuses advertising themes on pro-women messages, and opposes stereotypes in advertisements featuring women (Varghese, N., & Kumar, N. 2022: 441). This concept has been developed in response to the increasing criticism of the sexist presentation of the female image in ads and the increasing sensitivity to sexism. It is also designed to emphasize the empowerment and/or strength of women. Although this form of advertising, which basically includes messages aimed at empowering women, has become increasingly widespread in the media, studies are limited in the literature. On the other hand, Femvertising expands its position in advertising applications as an advertising appealing element. Basically, brands that wish to reach female consumers use Femvertising as a unique communication strategy (Becker and Herby 2016: 5).

Femvertising is criticized by various groups, mainly by feminists, though it paves the way for questioning and re-evaluating social stereotypes of women. The main argument is that these advertisements try to create a false perception of feminism. Within this scope, femvertising ads reflect the capitalist pressure on the female body through advertisements and continue to expand the social roles and responsibilities of women by adding different roles.

More specifically, the “Real Beauty” campaign promoted by Dove, means a challenge to stereotypes about gender roles. In this study, how Roberto Bravo, an international jewellery brand, uses Femvertising as an advertising appeal in television ads will be revealed through descriptive analysis on 10 themes determined by Hsu (2018).

1.1. Women Image in Advertisements

Although the use of the female body as an aesthetic element in advertising is parallel with the visualization of advertising, the critical study of body in cultural studies and the increase in feminist sensitivity have revealed the necessity of bringing a new perspective to the subject. However, many studies are available focusing on the different representation of male and female images in ads to serve gender inequality and power relations in the advertising world (Shaikh et al. 2015; Uray and Burnaz 2003). On the other hand, various studies state that exposure to advertisements depicting the idealized thin body increases the anxiety and dissatisfaction associated with body image disorder in women (Grabe et al. 2008, Diedrichs et al. 2011, Halliwell and Dittmar, 2004, Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. 2008).

Metaphorical uses of sexual discourses are very functional in the process of creating many product and brand images. Coward stated that each section of the female body can tell us many products, concrete events and abstract concepts through looks and movements (Coward 1989 as cited in Taşkaya 2009: 122). On the other hand, Batı analysed 379 magazine advertisements and revealed that they reinforce the 'sexy' body idea about the ideal female body by using stereotypes created in 21 different categories, including unrealistic criteria about the female body and violence against the female body (Batı 2010: 103). This situation criticizes the use of cliché images about the idealized use of the female body in advertising and pushes advertisers to find a new way.

Another factor that paved the way for the rise of femvertising is related to the fact that women's complex social roles in real life are not reflected in advertisements. When women appear in advertisements, they are likely to be portrayed as an accessory to a male figure, as a passive observer, as a mother/caretaker or being at home (Berkey and Herbey 2016: 8). These depictions of women do not accurately mirror the facts and figures that represent women's role in society.

Since the presentation of sexism in advertisements, especially over the female body, arouses discomfort in the highly sensitive female audience, the solution is built on the concept of 'Femvertising'. In this sense, femvertising appears as a rhetorical element of gender sensitivity transformed into advertising appeal.

Impact studies on femvertising (Åkestam, et al. 2017, Teng, F., et al. 2021, Drake, V. E. 2017 Kapoor, and Munjal, 2019) are limited and these studies suggest that the ads examined can increase positive attitudes towards the brand and the ad itself, compared to ads using traditional depictions of women. This suggests that these ads may increase positive attitudes towards the brand and the ad itself compared to ads using traditional depictions of women.

1.2. Femvertising as an Advertising Appeal

Appeal, which is one of the most frequently used concepts in advertising and persuasive communication literature, is referred to by various names such as persuasion appeals, message appeals and advertising appeals. The Glossary of Advertising Terms and Concepts defines *appeal* as the sales message that the advertisement uses to attract the attention of the consumer (<https://docplayer.biz.tr>). In addition to this general concept, the dimensions and features of advertising attractiveness can be listed as follows (Elden & Bakır, 2010: 76).

- Advertising appeals are based on the intangible or tangible benefits that the consumer will gain or lose by buying or not buying a product.
- Advertising appeals address the physical, psychological, and social needs of consumers.
- The goal of advertising appeals is to draw attention to the advertised product, service or even the advertisement itself, to create interest and desire, and to influence consumer attitudes and behaviours.
- Advertising appeals utilize rational and/or emotional persuasion processes.
- It helps to differentiate the advertised product from its competitors.
- It reflects the essence of the advertisement and the lifestyle, attitudes and/or approach it adopts.
- It is directly related to target audience characteristics and positioning decisions taken accordingly.

In the marketing literature, it is mentioned that various characteristics of the source as an element of attractiveness can be a significant key to purchase intention and/or persuasion. The physical attractiveness of the source is one of them and especially the female image is used as an object of desire with its physical attractiveness as a persuasive element in advertisements.

The appeal that is meant using femvertising as an advertising appeal is quite different from the appeal that can be generated through the use of traditional depictions of women in advertising. Therefore, effective examples of femvertising should include pro-women messages based on brand objectives and research insights, realistic images of women and depiction of their lifestyles, and transcending gender distinctions and being realistic in representing women's expanding roles and aspirations. Looking at the concept of advertising appeal in the context of the dimensions and characteristics mentioned above, it is observed that the concept of Femvertising can be considered as an advertising appeal. If femvertising is used as an advertising appeal, the themes that should be included are determined by Hsu as follows (2018: 35-41):

1. Realistic depictions of women to promote body confidence
2. Advocating for women's self-esteem beyond a focus on beauty
3. Calling women to be active, do sports and overcome social barriers
4. Appreciating women's athletic skills and inner strength
5. Representing women in many new roles beyond stereotypes
6. Honouring mothers beyond their nurturing role
7. Encouraging young women in science, technology, mathematics, and engineering
8. Advocate for equal opportunities and equal pay for women
9. Men advocating for positive female roles and equality
10. Normalizing and celebrating menstruation

2. Findings and Remarks

Within the scope of the themes created by Hsu (2018), the table below demonstrates whether two different television commercials of Roberto Bravo brand named 'Salsa' and Bravo' contain Femvertising themes.

Table 1: Comparison of Salsa and Bravo Ads on Femvertising Themes

Femvertising Theme	Roberto Bravo- 'Salsa' Advertising	Roberto Bravo- 'Bravo' Advertising
1. Realistic depictions of women to promote body confidence	08-14. sec	not found
2. Advocating for women's self-esteem beyond a focus on beauty	05. sec. 08-14. sec	19. sec
3. Calling women to be active, do sports and overcome social barriers	23-30. sec	04. sec
4. Appreciating women's athletic skills and inner strength	30-33. sec	03-04. sec
5. Representing women in many new roles beyond stereotypes	not found	01-38 sec
6. Honouring mothers beyond their caregiver role	not found	not found
7. Encouraging young women in science, technology, mathematics and engineering	12. sec & 32. sec	25-28. sec
8. Advocate for equal opportunities and equal pay for women	not found	not found
9. Men advocating for positive female roles and equality	not found	not found
10. Normalizing and celebrating menstruation	not found	not found

2.1. Roberto Bravo- Salsa Advertisement

Creators define commercial film as follows: In the film, which highlights the brand's new Salsa collection inspired by the colours of nature, Gökçe Bahadır calls on women to say "never mind" (Salla) to those who try to imprison them in idealized body and behaviour patterns (www.mediakat.com). The text in the 40-second commercial with rhythmic music (youtube.com) are as follows:

Never mind those who say, "Have you gained weight again?"

Never mind those who say you are too weak, never mind, bravo to you

Never mind who say you'll never make it

Never mind those who say you can dance like that, never mind it, bravo to you

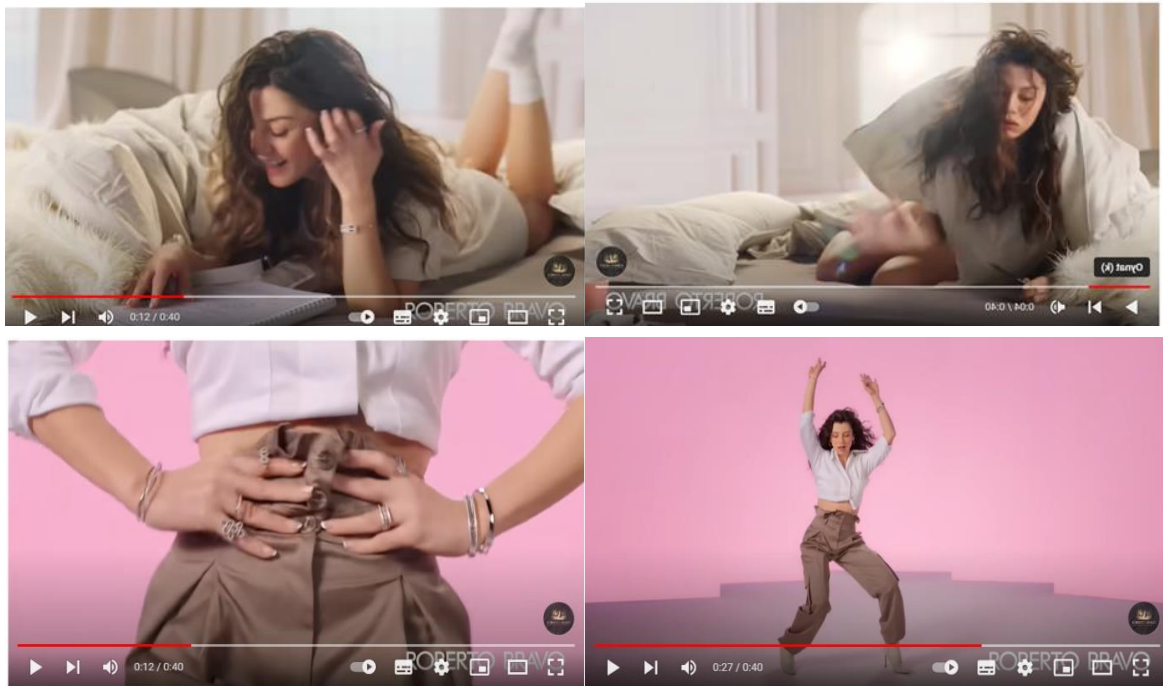
Voiceover: A unique collection 'Salsa' by Roberto Bravo.

The images and slogans in the commercial coincide with the idea of 'women rebelling against the body and behaviour patterns imposed on them' stated by the creators of the film. This rebellion is sloganized with the word "never mind" (salla) (www.tdk.com.tr), which in English means 'to forget, never mind, to dismiss, to disregard'. In this way, the brand's 'salsa' series, which is the subject of the advertisement, is referred to by connotation. (In Turkish the word 'Salla' (never mind) has collocation with 'salsa')

While the white bedding and clothes that appear in the opening scene of the commercial are reminiscent of cleanliness, freshness and purity, the actress who does not want to get out of bed and socialize (with a kind of lack of self-confidence) is reassured with the music and lyrics of the commercial, and is told to act as she doesn't care about the outside with the repeated slogan of "never mind" and is instilled with self-confidence to do so. In terms of its general structure, the advertisement has been prepared for the function of 'empowering women', which is the main purpose of Femvertising. However, there is no clear reference to themes such as 'Advocating equal opportunities and equal pay for women', 'Men advocating positive female roles and equality', 'Normalizing and celebrating menstruation' and 'Honouring mothers beyond their caregiver roles' during the short commercial film.

Furthermore, 'realistic depictions of women to promote body confidence' are not present at the image level. The female figure performed in the ad is a young and beautiful woman with a highly idealized body. Therefore, the theme of 'defending women's self-confidence beyond the focus on beauty' remains only at the words (in never mind slogan). At the visual level, there is no realistic depiction of the female body, which is more common in society. The commercial set out with the aim of 'challenging the idealized body size imposed on women', one of the main themes of femvertising, however, it contradicts with the main theme by using an actress with a highly idealized body and appearance. The commercial starts with " *Never mind those who say, "Have you gained weight again?"*", instead of a woman who has gained weight, there is an extremely fit woman. This is followed by the slogan never mind those who say you are too thin, but by emphasizing the thin waist of the same actress, being thin is validated and glorified.

Image 1: Screenshots of ‘Salla’ Commercial Film



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3fG1klZaw> Access Date: 24/11/2022

2.2. Roberto Bravo- Bravo Advertisement

In Bravo advertisement of the Roberto Bravo brand, broadcasted in Turkey in February 2022, Gökçe Bahadır takes the lead role, and applauds the women who overcame all difficulties and never gave up and said “Bravo” to them. The same actress is featured in Salsa commercials as well. The words of the 40-second commercial are as follows:

Bravo to the energetic woman

Bravo to those who succeed

Bravo, to the one who catches everything and remains beautiful Bravo, Bravo

The one who pins jewelry, the one whose love is all-encompassing,

The one who cut them down, Bravo, bravo

To the woman who Bravo enlightens the world with her good laughter, to the determined and strong woman, Bravo, Bravo

Voiceover: Roberto Bravo handmade, unique jewelry.

It is observed in the commercial that the discourse of 'empowering women' promote the main idea. During 40-second, the commercial managed to represent women in 'many roles beyond stereotypes'. These roles are expressed through the figures of politicians, businesswomen, leaders, athletes, artists, students, photographers, and housewives.

The expressions 'to the one who catches everything and *remains* beautiful' and 'beautiful laughter' in the commercial are noteworthy in terms of the word *beautiful* appearing twice.

The success of fulfilling multiple female roles depicted in the film is admirable if one can remain beautiful at the same time. Beauty is a concept that is emphasized and repeated both visually and aurally. In addition to being able to remain beautiful while fulfilling all these roles in the advertisement, other expected characteristics are to be energetic, to work, to succeed, to pin jewellery, to be able to love everything, to put those who overstep their boundaries and to have a good laughter. Women who achieve all the above are blessed with the word 'Bravo', which expresses appreciation, in line with the brand name.

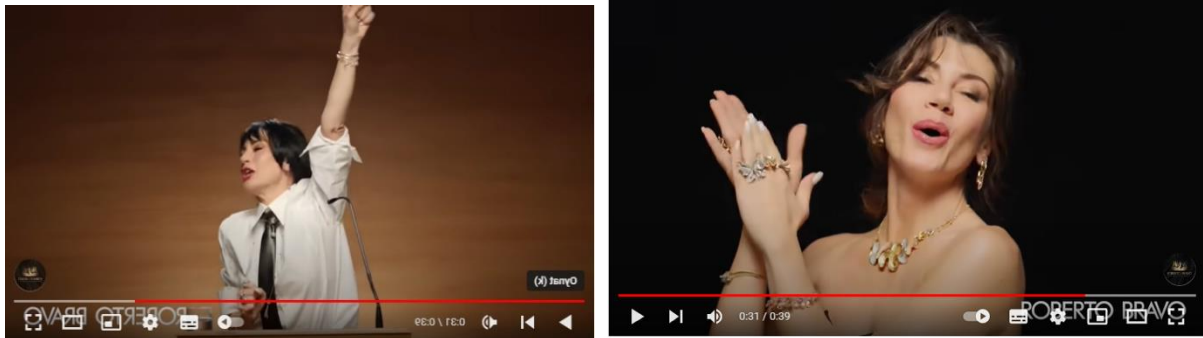
However, there is no explicit reference to themes such as 'Advocating for equal opportunities and equal pay for women', 'Men advocating for positive female roles and equality', 'Normalizing and celebrating menstruation' and 'Honouring mothers beyond their caregiver role'. These depictions in two commercials may be due to the relatively short duration of the commercial and the positioning of the brand, which focuses on beauty, away from concepts such as motherhood, equal pay for equal work and celebrating menstruation.

Moreover, in both commercials, 'realistic depictions of women to promote body confidence' was not used as a visual element. As stated above, the brand, which is positioned in the focus of elegance and beauty, did not refrain from using idealized stylish and beautiful female figures in both commercials. The linguistic messages used in the commercials were used in a simple manner. The language used in simplicity and comprehensibility, which is called everyday language, will be easily understood by the target audience, and contribute positively to the persuasion process. Since individuals remember messages and especially slogans that are close to colloquial language more easily (Küçükerdoğan 2005: 102).

Image 2: Screenshots of 'Bravo' Commercial Film







Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e52rWUO80-c> Access Date: 24/11/2022

3. Conclusion

The increase in examples of femvertising has been parallel to multidimensional developments and changes such as increasing sensitivity to gender issues. In addition, the increase in the representation of women in different business lines, especially in managerial positions and decision-making mechanisms, their role in the economy with increasing purchasing power, the rise of social media and the criticism of advertisements and practices deemed sexist through this media, the sharing of campaigns with positive messages through social media and word-of-mouth advertising (Youtube gives brands the opportunity to present long and impressive content through the concept of gender), the efforts of brands to establish a permanent bond with their consumers for a higher purpose beyond sales targets are reasons of development that have led to the rise of Femvertising. Especially Dove's 'Real Beauty' campaign in 2004 reinforced this rise and drew the attention of the advertising industry to the concept of Femvertising.

On the other hand, when there are no other concrete criteria to convince the consumer that a product is superior to others among very similar products/brands, the process of fetishization of the product comes into question. In other words, the first function of an advertisement is to create a difference between a specific product and other products in the same category. This is done by giving an 'image' to the product. This image becomes successful to the extent that it can make the product part of a system of differences (Williamson 2001: 24). In this sense, Femvertising aims to put forward a differentiating discourse.

Another persuasive element used in the advertisement is the commodification. It is made through the aesthetic value of the female body. The product and brand image are created by attributing abstract values independent of the reality of the product itself. Although the objectified body presented with these images is designed as not evoke exploitation, it is impossible to come across a 'non-aesthetic' woman image in the media. The examples in this study prove that even if it is Femvertising, brands cannot easily get rid of the obsession with 'aesthetics' and 'beauty' when it comes to the female body.

Although the idea that femvertising ads evoke a positive brand image and increase purchase intention in the targeted audience due to the positive emotions they evoke is a fact. Therefore, more studies measuring this positive effect need to be conducted. This approach paves the way for questioning and reevaluating social stereotypes of women; however, it is criticized by feminists. The basis of these criticisms depends on the creating false perception of feminism. Femvertising ads try to move the representation of women away from clichéd areas such as the home and kitchen, expanding their range of action, while maintaining the responsibility of

being beautiful, only bringing a new perspective to this understanding of beauty. On the other hand, the main motivation for brands to make pro-women ads is the desire to increase sales and generate profits. Brands want to benefit from the positive viral power of femvertising. Therefore, sincerity and credibility of these ads are significant criterion for the audience. Because the implicit message sent by examples of femvertising for beauty products is that they can succeed if they are beautiful, or that their worth or ability to succeed depends on the product itself.

Femvertising can be effective for brands that wish to reach female consumers only if it conveys credible and non-contradictory messages through real female figures. However, even if the messages include all the themes determined for Femvertising, they should be repeated to ensure integrity in all marketing communication. They also should not remain at the message level and should be put into action from sponsorships to corporate policies. Issues such as increasing the prevalence/visibility of women at all areas, ensuring that companies provide adequate benefits to women, and including additional women leaders at the corporate level should also be carefully addressed by brand owners.

References

- Åkestam, N., Rosengren, S., & Dahlen, M. (2017). Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a better understanding of “femvertising” and its effects. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(8), 795-806.
- Becker-Herby, E. (2016). The rise of femvertising: authentically reaching female consumers.
- Batı, U. (2010). Reklamcılıkta retorik bir unsur olarak kadın bedeni temsilleri. *Kültür ve İletişim*, 13(1), 103-133.
- Drake, V. E. (2017). The impact of female empowerment in advertising (Femvertising). *Journal of Research in Marketing*, 7, 593–599.
- Elden M. & Bakır U. (2010) *Reklam Çekicilikleri İletişim Yayınları İstanbul*.
- Grau, S. L., & Zotos, Y. C. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: a review of current research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 761-770.
- Grabe, S., Ward, L. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2008). The role of the media in body image concerns among women: a meta-analysis of experimental and correlational studies. *Psychological bulletin*, 134(3), 460.
- Harper, B., & Tiggemann, M. (2008). The effect of thin ideal media images on women’s self-objectification, mood, and body image. *Sex roles*, 58(9), 649-657.
- Halliwel, E., & Dittmar, H. (2004). Does size matter? The impact of model's body size on women's body-focused anxiety and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of social and clinical psychology*, 23(1), 104-122.
- Hsu, C. K. J. (2018). Femvertising: State of the art. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 7(1), 28-47.
- Varghese, N., & Kumar, N. (2022). Feminism in advertising: irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising. *Feminist Media Studies*, 22(2), 441-459.
- Drake, V. E. (2017). The impact of female empowerment in advertising (femvertising). *Journal of Research in Marketing*, 7(3), 593-599.

- Diedrichs, P. C., Lee, C., & Kelly, M. (2011). Seeing the beauty in everyday people: A qualitative study of young Australians' opinions on body image, the mass media and models. *Body Image*, 8(3), 259-266.
- Taşkaya, M. (2009). Kitle iletişim araçlarında kadın bedeninin nesneleştirilmesi: ürün ve marka fetişizminde cinsellik kullanımı. *Toplumbilim Dergisi*, 24, 121-132.
- Kapoor, D., & Munjal, A. (2019). Self-consciousness and emotions driving femvertising: A path analysis of women's attitude towards femvertising, forwarding intention and purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25, 137-157.
- Küçükerdoğan R. (2005) *Reklam Söylemi, Görsel Göstergebilim 1*. Es Yayınları İstanbul.
- Teng, F., Hu, J., Chen, Z., Poon, K. T., & Bai, Y. (2021). Sexism and the effectiveness of femvertising in China: A corporate social responsibility perspective. *Sex Roles*, 84(5), 253-270.
- Shaikh, M., Bughio, F. A., & Kadri, S. A. (2015). The representation of men and women in advertisements: A critical discourse analysis. *The Women-Annual Research Journal of Gender Studies*, 7.
- Uray, N., & Burnaz, S. (2003). An analysis of the portrayal of gender roles in Turkish television advertisements. *Sex roles*, 48(1), 77-87.
- Williamson J. (2001) *Reklamın Dili*. Çeviren: Ahmet Fethi Ütopya Yayınları Ankara
- <https://mediacat.com/kaliplari-salla-roberto-bravo-reklami/> Erişim Tarihi: 7/11/2022.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3fG1klZaw> Erişim Tarihi: 21/11/2022.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMMk_kTFuL4 Erişim Tarihi: 21/11/2022.
- www.tdk.com.tr Erişim Tarihi: 24/11/2022.
- <https://docplayer.biz.tr/59755659-Reklam-terimleri-sozlugu-1.html> Erişim Tarihi: 28/11/2022.