

A Semiotic Analysis of the Changes in the Visual Sign System of International Advertisements in the Arab World

Authors : Nabil Mohammed Nasser Salem

Abstract : International advertisements targeting the Arab world are usually modified to be compatible with the conservative culture in many Arab countries. The portrayal of female models in international advertisements in Arab magazines avoids direct sexual representation. Arab culture is guided by religious teachings and social restrictions that prohibit the display of many parts of the female body. Exposure of shoulders, arms, armpits, cleavage, legs, thighs, etc., of the female body is usually avoided in international advertisements published in Arab magazines. Exposure to parts of the female body other than the face and hands may be considered offensive in many parts of Arab countries. Although extensive research has been conducted on Arabic advertisements, to our best knowledge, there are no publications in the literature that address the recent changes in the visual sign system in international advertisements in Arab magazines using semiotics as a research method. The present study aims to analyze the changes in the visual sign system of international advertisements published in Arab magazines that promote female fragrances. It tries to analyze the differences in the sexual representations of the same female models in some selected advertisements during different periods. The magazines are randomly selected from the period between 2000 and 2019. The selection of magazines is based on their availability and popularity. The study focuses on the Dior Jadore ads because they reflect important changes in the appearance of the same female model between 2000 to 2019. The result of the study shows important changes in the sexual representation of the same female body. The Dior Jadore advertisement in 2000 shows only the head of the female model. The model is modestly portrayed and shows clear cultural and religious restrictions on the sexual representation of the female body. The result shows that the same female model is portrayed differently in the Dior Jadore advertisement from the period 2005 to 2019. These versions of advertisements show more parts of the female body that are covered in the older versions and show stronger sexual representations. The study is an important contribution as it fills an important gap in the literature by extending semiotic research to the study of recent visual changes in the sign system of international advertisements published in Arab magazines during an important period in the history of international advertisement targeting the Arab world, as they reflect changes in the sexual representation of female models.

Keywords : Arab magazine, female body, international advertisements, semiotics, sexual representation

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