Chapter 14

The Reconstruction of the “Youth Ideal” in Narrative Advertising

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ABSTRACT

It is asserted that the period of aging and society has a high correlation while aging can be considered as a formation of social institutions that provide a specific type of discourse in a life course. It is assumed that this discourse can have the potential to construct hierarchical stratification among age grades which can also cause ageism. It is asserted that a so-called postmodern world is constructed in a discourse where youth and its related ideals are centered in all life activities, which can commonly be observed in advertisements. The aim of this study is to find out how narrative advertisements reconstruct the ideals of the youth in a consumer society by the help of making semi-structural in-depth interviews with people from four different life stages. Three narrative advertisement examples from three different categories such as; service, durable goods and nondurable goods will be chosen and be analysed through discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Aging is mostly described as an inevitable and universal process. In fact, it is not just only valid for human beings, but also for all the living beings in the universe. But what makes the aging process of a human being unique? The answer to this question can be answered by emphasizing the cultural context of each society which may differentiate the reception of aging. It is assumed that the concept of aging is socially constructed by all the institutions in a society which produce a specific type of discourse about age and aging.

As the concept of aging having a functional role in organizing modern societies, it has been claimed that the content of this concept has also been surrounded by social standards and values in postmodern

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The Reconstruction of the “Youth Ideal” in Narrative Advertising

societies. It is thought that aforesaid extension of this meaning concludes in a vague boundary among age grades.

In a so-called postmodern society, the symbolic indicators of the aging process effecting the body such as; wrinkles, grey hair or any kind of weaknesses can be evaluated as something that individuals have to get rid of, or avoid as long as possible, as if aging depends on personal performance. That seems to be one of the reasons why the “young body” has to be protected and promoted as a value. On the other hand, being and staying young is not just only a case of protecting the body in a so-called ‘young condition’. In fact, the ‘youth ideal’ can also be described as a type of life style creating its desires in daily life activities whose materials of desire are cycled through in the capitalist system. Therefore it’s assumed that there has become a necessity for individuals from all ages to ‘stay’ young and unless admit to face a type of discrimination in societies called ‘ageism’. So, ageism can be evaluated as a type of discrimination which makes the aging process problematic while the values related to youth are idealized.

One of the most effective tools for distributing the consuming habits and life styles can be accepted as advertisements. These advertisements can also give individuals an opportunity to choose an identity from various types of options in postmodern societies. Therefore, it is accepted that advertisements market not only a product but also a set of habits that are related with the product, which can be referred as the ‘consuming ideology’. According to researchers who study the consumption society argue, that individuals who have consumption habits are expected to be ‘free’, ‘entrepreneur’, ‘trendy’ and ‘curious’. Within this study features mentioned are assumed to be related with the ‘youth ideal’. Thus the hypothesis of this study is constituted based on how the youth ideal is reconstructed via the dichotomy of youth & elderliness.

Especially in advertisements, the ideals that are related with the youth, doesn’t have to refer to people who are described as ‘young’ because it is assumed that the definitions and boundaries of age-grades are becoming ambivalent and blurred in postmodern societies. That’s why the ‘youth ideal’ is accepted as being committed to all the individuals so that everybody can consume as long as they feel at risk to face the ‘fact’ and the consequences of ‘being old’ which is also constructed as a discourse that serves for the consuming culture such as; retiring, illness and weakness and unable to work in any kinds of productive activities.

This study aims to find out the social meanings of aging by comparing the ‘young’ and the ‘old’ as narratives in advertisements and how narrative advertisements reconstruct the ideals of the youth in a consuming society by the help of making seven (7) semi-structural deep interviews from people with different life stages in Turkey in the city of Samsun. Three narrative advertisement examples from three different categories such as; service, durable goods and nondurable goods are chosen to be analyzed in a discursive way.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ‘AGING’ AND THE ‘YOUTH’

The concept of aging is accepted to refer to a biological reality in all the living beings. However, the individualistic aging experiences and the social reception of aging is mostly subject to historical and cultural processes (Wyn & White, 1997, p. 10). That’s why the boundaries and definitions of aging and age intervals are not so clear and certain in every society. It can be concluded that the demographical features of communities such as population distribution and population density are effective in the configuration of organization type of communities and shaping of age related cultural narrations.
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