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THE VISUAL PRESENTATION OF WOMAN AT THE WEB SITES IN TURKEY*

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ WEB SİTELERİNDE KADININ GÖRSEL SUNUMU

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Abstract

Approaches to explain the form of the relationship between technology and gender have risen from different traditions that define the relationship forms, which take roots from the patriarchal society. Especially, technological improvements over the past 20 years have given rise to an over-all convergence between knowledge, communication and media. Throughout discourse from the ancient Greeks to our own times, the means of mass communication are a consequential power used in order to strengthen and diffuse class and social gender ideology.

These approaches make different conceptualizations of men and women, starting with how they are described in science and technology, in terms of the social consequences of the symbolic encodings, which take place in mass media. Descriptions of women from cinema to television, magazines and newspapers to the Internet, are like a concrete object that is taken in hand in a specific category

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that women are portrayed as objects. The ascendancy of men and the second-class status of women have been repeated constantly.

In the Internet, it is not possible to have precise control; people are being hailed with categories such as female-male identity and web pages present specific values to women and men via forming a new technology language. So, this study aims to explore the relationship between the visual presentation of woman, with the concept of gender research, and the web pages on the Internet. It is thought that web pages invite individuals to a specific identity within a cultural form. The visual presentation of women in this new media will be explained by scanning the contents of the first 20 web pages which are mostly visited on International Women's Day.

Key Words: Internet, Web sites, Gender, Women

Öz

Teknoloji ve cinsiyet arasındaki ilişki biçimini açıklamaya yönelik yaklaşımlar, ataerkil toplum ve bundan kaynaklanan ilişki biçimlerini tanımlayan farklı geleneklerin içinden yükselmektedir. Özellikle, geçtiğimiz 20 yıl içinde meydana gelen teknolojik gelişmeler; bilgi, iletişim ve medya sektörleri arasında topyekün bir yakınlaşmaya (convergence) yol açmıştır. Eski Yunan'dan bu güne devam eden tartışmalar bağlamında kitle iletişim araçları, sınıf ve toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisini güçlendirip yaymak için önemli bir güç olarak kullanılmıştır.

Bu yaklaşımlar kadın ve erkeğin, bilim ve teknoloji ile nasıl tanımlandığından hareketle, kitle iletişim araçlarında yer alan simgesel kodlamaların toplumsal sonuçları açısından farklı kavramsallaştırmalarda bulunmaktadır. Sinemadan televizyona, dergilerden gazetelere ve internete kadar pek çok mecrada kadının betimlenmesi belirli bir kategoride ele alınan herhangi bir somut nesne gibidir. Erkeğin üstünlüğü ve kadının ikincilliği kitle iletişim araçlarında sürekli tekrarlanmaktadır.

Tam bir denetime sahip olamayan internette, insanlara, kadın - erkek kimliği gibi kategorilerle seslenilmekte ve web sayfaları oluşturduğu dil sayesinde kadınlara ve erkeklere bazı değerler sunmaktadır. Bu kavramların ışığında çalışma bir teknoloji ürünü olan internetteki web sayfalarını ve toplumsal cinsiyet kavramı ile birlikte kadının görsel sunumu arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu nedenle bireyleri kültürel bir form içerisinde belirli bir kimliğe davet ettiği düşünülmektedir. Bu bağlamda ülkemizde 8 Mart Dünya Kadınlar Günü'nde en çok girilen 20 web sayfası ve içerikleri irdelenerek, kadının görsel sunumunun bu yeni medyada ne şekilde olduğu açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnternet, Web Siteleri, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Kadın

INTRODUCTION

Technological improvements over the past 20 years have given rise to an overall convergence between knowledge, communication and media. The social, economic, political and cultural effects of this new communication environment, which can be accessed via fixed and mobile phones, desktops, laptops, handheld computers and digital TV, which have come to be known as Cyberspace, or the Internet, have started to be used more extensively (Polat, 2009). In this context, web sites present values regarding gender through the language composed by it. Consequently, it has been thought that new communication types urge individuals to cohere to a specific identity in a cultural form.

Language is patriarchal. Hence, it contains gender-based prejudices and inequality. According to Bhasin (2003:14 –15), “Languages are full of idioms and expressions which reflect women as more inferior than men and regard them as sinful, evil and aggressive,” and these expressions are used everywhere and frequently. Throughout discourse from the ancient Greeks to our own times, the means of mass communication are a consequential power used by men in order to strengthen and diffuse class and social gender ideology. Descriptions of women from cinema to television, magazines and newspapers to the Internet, are like a concrete object that is taken in hand in a specific category that women are portrayed as objects. The ascendancy of men and the second-class status of women have been repeated constantly.

As Foucault expresses with the concept “plurality of the balance of power,” there is a continuous battle and mutual permutation between parties in different positions of power, such as that between men and women, government and citizen, technology-based and non-technology based, those who embody technology and those who use it (Foucault by Maral, 2004:137). As Erol Maral (2004) also emphasizes, the Internet shouldn’t be thought of as only a technically- and economically-organized means. With the newest, fastest and most easily reached means of mass media, the Internet, it is not possible to have precise control; people are being hailed with categories such as female-male identity, youthfulness, consumption, fashion, entertainment. People who respond to these calls or behave accordingly are adorned with consciously selected cultural forms constructed identities. With this study, the percentage of Internet-use will be taken into account in terms of gender (female-male) and the representational images of woman will be evaluated in the context of gender.

INTERNET AND GENDER

Internet technology started to be used in Turkey in 1987 with Turkish University and Research Enterprises Network, established by Ege University. On April 12th, 1993, METU and Bilkent University disseminated the

first Turkish website and other enterprises and companies were granted Internet accounts starting in 1994 (www.webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr, 15.02.2011). In this quick expansion process, as world, Internet-linked universities, education enterprises, governmental and commercial establishments, social organizations and every computer fan and requires reached knowledge (İbrahim, 1998: 4445-4447).

While Healy describes the Internet as the last circle of civilization, beginning with the railway, Poster describes it as a social space (by Güzel, 2006). Timisi (2003) regards this new space as a means to create social-relational forms. This means is not dissimilar than classical media in terms of gender perception, as gender is a linear relationship and hegemony from past to present. In this context the Internet acts as a go-between in politics, used in gender relations (Bhasin, 2003:2). While gender is described as genetic, physiological and biological features show an individual as a woman or man; gender mainstreaming expresses the social responsibility and role of a woman or man. According to the mainstream Freudian theory of gender, being a man or woman is reduced to a difference based on the sex organs. On the other hand, Chodorow suggests being a man or woman results from learning.

Generally, if a gender mainstreaming concept is taken into account, with the definition of Connel, (1998:190) it means merely a biological difference. Considering gender as Connel (1998:190) defines it, there is a separation between male and female in terms of reproduction and organized practices connected with reproduction Gender mainstreaming is not a definition about biological differences; rather, it is about how society sees, perceives and thinks of people and how it expects them to behave (Akin, 2005:30). A gender-mainstreaming concept rejects biological explanations. In this context, according to Scott, gender is an approach, which distinguishes subjective identities of men and women in accordance with their social origins and a social category that is imposed on the gendered body (2007:11).

In this context, Scott describes that gender is a social status. With this category, the things every gender should or shouldn't do are defined by unwritten rules. Up until now since the day human beings first existed, every society had adopted these rules in its own way, has carried on life in accordance with them, and used them to regulate social relations. The custom and usage, texts, myths and images about gender-mainstreaming and gender role-formation (a biological and cultural approach), alleges that the formation of female and male identity is specified socially.

“The definition of “femininity” and “masculinity” in a society and its related images, stereotypes, imputed characteristics, gender role and status, behavior patterns, gender based division of labor, gender identities and the formation process of them (socialization), the regulation of relations between genders, marriage traditions and family types, sexual ethics, love and beauty approach and constitute the gender culture of a society (Türköne, 1995:14).”

As understood from this definition, the gender-mainstreaming concept conveys the roles and responsibilities, which are stated socially and culturally, and expresses the notion about the perception of women and men in society and their anticipated behaviors. These roles and responsibilities that are formed in the media, home and business atmospheres are transmitted by mass media to society. As a fast and easily reached tool, the Internet has achieved in globalizing the cultural field expeditiously. Leadership of the Internet in cultural areas obtains a homogenous and global culture and enables new social and individual relational forms, new identities and new cultural forms (Polat, 2002:93-117). If we take into consideration the process which people have gone through in order to form a culture, the culture, defined by Durkheim as an area which emerges due to natural conditions, the gender, which is also cultural, as Ann Oakley pointed out, might change according to place and time and spread through media. (Bhasin, 2003).

WOMEN AND WEB SITES

Women are defined by Aristotatle, as an object serving for sexual intercourse with men and furthermore as entities shaped by people who have come back to this world after having been sent to the afterworld because of their sinful actions. According to Freudian theory, the woman represents passion and unsex. While men are active and have control, women are demoted to the role of erotic subjects and icons. At the same time, women pose a threat, due to difference. Richard Stele (by Çaylı, 2008) made a general definition by saying, "A woman is a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother and an annex of a human being." Considering all this, a woman is a person whose organs are complete, who is more fragile than oversexed, is well-educated, and can be a cute friend to her husband and a good mother to her children (Duby – Perrot, 2005:252).

According to general perception, the 19th century was witness to positive changes and improvements in the technological, cultural and social fields. During this process, in which urbanization, democratization and industrialization increased rapidly, human beings embarked on a quest of new rights and laws. There have been changes regarding the role of women in society with the fast social changes, which grow out of the modernization process. When women started to work and had the chance to receive a good education, this reduced the number of marriages and children they had. This process also changed the perception of women and reformed the role of women in social life (Tallichet and Willits, 1986: 219-220). But unfortunately, even though women's presence was felt more in public, it did not change the problems they faced. Capitalism forced women to participate in all fields of social life. This participation seemed to enable women to be free but actually made them "slaves," with the image of "super woman," who has both a career and children at the same time.

Women have been compelled to learn and adopt specific behavior patterns which mass media tools tell them they are suitable for. Women who live in an urban

environment gather a nominal social respect by emphasizing that they do not prepare food for summer and winter, knit, or look after animals; in brief, they do not produce. In 1828, courtesy of Sarah Hale, who wrote for *Ladies's Magazine*, the ideal woman was described as a wife who was aware of her sexuality and realized the magic of dressing effeminately (Oskey, 2000:110). In the perception of women, attitudes about their bodies have been dominant.

To be able to understand the lives of women in terms of cultural life, the perception of the "body" should be taken into account. Perfect 'beauty' has been defined¹ in 33 different articles throughout history (Grieco, 2005). Women have been expected to succeed in household chores, be attractive for men, raise children and be accepted by society. In accordance with these tasks, the representation of women in media has increased. However, in mass communication means, women are generally portrayed as wife, sister, daughter, miserable women, in traditional womanly jobs, namely, secretary, nurse or servant, sexual object or consumer (Kuruoğlu, 2000, van Zonnen, 1997). These women are generally young and beautiful; however, they haven't had a good educational background or are not as smart as men.

In this respect, it would be important to remember Baudrillard emphasizing of woman's body. According to Baudrillard, the body is the most precious and unique thing among consumed objects.

It is certain that images of women remind men aesthetically of pornography, eroticism, fertility and love. In history, worshiped, being a fairy of inspiration and sold (the first item of consumer culture), women have been represented by their breasts, hips and sex organs; it is the same today (<http://www.msxlab.org/forum/sanat/87472-sanatta-kadin-imesi>, 02.04.2011). Nowadays the female body comes into prominence especially in ads, fashion and mass culture. In this respect, the female body is perceived as an object of consumption.

METHOD OF STUDY

In the next part of the study, the images of women on the web on March 8, International Women's Day, will be taken into account and a content analysis will be done. In this context, period of 19:00 – 20:00 was chosen.

Criteria for the images are as below:

Woman as mother, wife and sister,

Woman as a sexual object,

Violence aggrieved, deprived, miserable and ugly woman

Woman as a consumer and urged to consume,

¹ see, *Women's History* Volumes 3, Sara F. Matthews Grieco, *Body, Appearance, Sexuality*

Prolific and employed woman

In accordance with these criteria, all images of women will be counted and evaluated.

THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE 20 MOST CLICKED WEBSITES IN TURKEY

In contradistinction to other Western countries, the Internet is a distinguished tool in Turkey. It has been used since 1994 in educational establishments, through government grants. According to the results of the "2005 Household Information Technology Usage Research"² the percentage of households which have the possibility of Internet access was 8.66%. 77% of the subjects never used a computer and 82.4% of them never used the Internet. If these rates are taken into account in terms of gender, 85% of women and 69% of men never used a computer and 90% of women and 76% of men never used the Internet until 2005. According to the same research, which was done in 2010, 5 years later then the previous one, 41.6% of the households had the chance to access the Internet. (This rate was 30% in 2009.) In accordance with the research results, computer- and internet-usage rates for men aged between 16 and 74, the rates were 53.4% for the computer and 51.8% for the Internet. The rates for women were 33.2% for the computer and 31.7% for the Internet. The age group with the highest usage rate was 16-24. These rates were higher for men than women in every age group. According to educational status, bachelors and equals had the highest level of computer and Internet usage. 72.8% of the people use Internet to send and receive e-mails, 64.2% to chat, 58.8% to read newspapers, magazines and news, 55.7% to purchase goods and services, and 51.2% to play games or to watch music and movie.

Table 1: 2010 Internet Usage Percentages

| 2010 INTERNET USAGE PERCENTAGES | TOTAL | MAN | WOMAN |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| Turkey, General | 41,6 | 51,8 | 31,7 |
| City | 49,2 | 59,8 | 39,0 |
| Countryside | 23,7 | 33,1 | 14,6 |

In light of this information, visual images of women will be analyzed by looking at the statistics of Alexa (<http://www.alexa.com/>) and the most clicked web sites in Turkey. Before analyzing these web sites, it will be useful to explain the reasons for using the Alexa statistics.

² www.tuik.gov.tr , 25.04.2010 – 25.01.2011

Nielsen/NetRatings evaluates internet and digital media audiences with surveys which are done by internet and telephone. Companies like ComScore and Hitwise follow the click number of each web site. Alexa, which belongs to Amazon.com, gets statistics from information of software users called the "Alexa Toolbar." Alexa shows the classification of web sites according to the number of clicks by sorting them in respect to countries, as well as the general world. It uses two criteria: ranking and popularity. Ranking consists of the resultant number of visitors and page notation. On the other hand, popularity is about visitor loyalty. The reliability of Alexa is a debated matter, but lack of trusted enterprise regarding this issue makes Alexa an important application point (www.wikipedia.org, 30.03.2011, www.alexa.com, 30.03.2011). The information taken from Alexa has been used in tandem with the statics taken from "House Hold Information Technology Usage Research."

In this study, on March 8th, 2011, International Women's Day, web sites' home pages between 19:00-20:00 were evaluated according to Alexa (http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/TR, 08.03.2011). Due to web sites such as google.com.tr and google.com being search engines, no visual subjects were observed on their home pages. Owing to the fact that wikipedia.org is an internet encyclopedia and facebook.com, live.com, blogger.com, r10.net, twitter.com, and blogcu.com are social networking sites, in which users first enter their username and password, there are no visual images on their home pages. By way of sahibinden.com and gittigidiyor.com, which are sales-purpose web sites, meaning that visual images on their home pages are not suitable for this study, no research was done on these web sites. Accordingly, the tables below were obtained via a census of nine web sites.

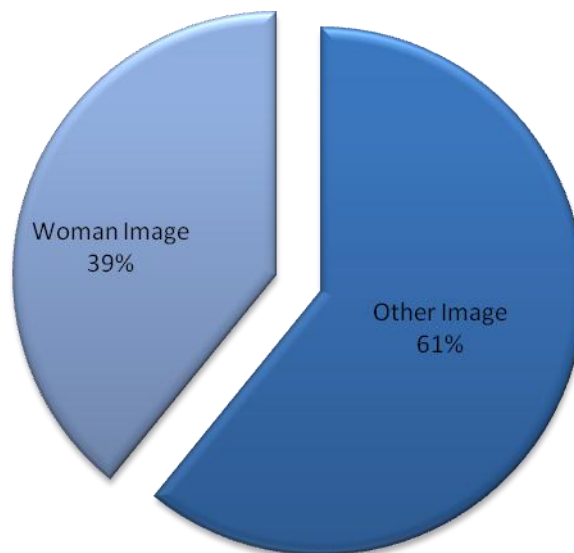
Table 2: Web sites and image numbers

| WEB SITES | TOTAL IMAGE | WOMAN IMAGE |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| youtube.com | 21 | 6 |
| mynet.com | 39 | 16 |
| hurriyet.com.tr | 35 | 16 |
| milliyet.com.tr | 143 | 47 |
| msn.com | 37 | 19 |
| ekolay.net | 110 | 55 |
| haberturk.com | 94 | 35 |
| dailymotion.com | 29 | 10 |
| sabah.com.tr | 78 | 23 |
| Total | 580 | 227 |

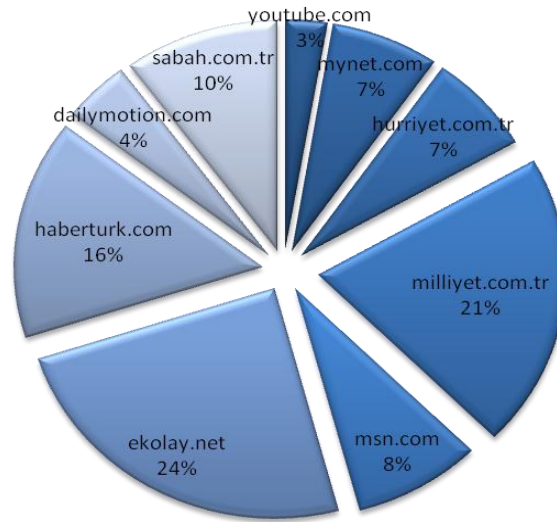
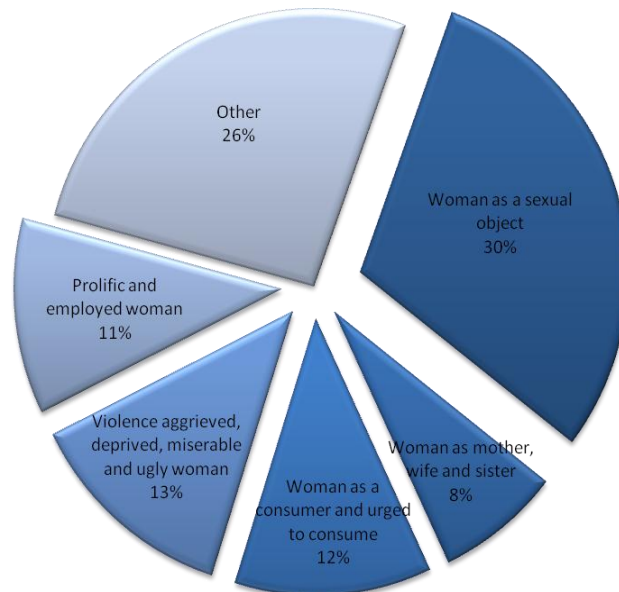
Statistics on web sites show that users visit relevant web sites for less than 5 seconds and tend to leave the sites as soon as possible (<http://www.webcredible.co.uk/user-friendly-resources/web-credibility/website-design/>, 08.04.2011).

The number of male users (18-24 aged, university graduated) for these 9 web sites is higher than women users. The content of the web sites and the number of images they use are directly proportional. In this point, sometimes in spite of the fact that the content is more suitable for women, images address men users.

Chart 1: Share of woman images on total images



The most female images (51%) on the web sites within the context of this study are seen on msn.com, which is described as a “news and life portal.” e-kolay.net, on the other hand, describes itself as “the most comprehensive life portal of Turkey,” and is second rank with 50% and gives place to 55 images of women out of a total of 110 total images. Images of women on this web site are located as sexual objects. Nude female bodies accompany the subjects about sexual life in the page which is directed from the home page under the “women” link. Women are invited to be erotic and romantic in this web site. Hürriyet, which is an Internet newspaper, is number three with the rate of 46%. Then with the rate of 41%, mynet.com, with 37%, haberturk.com, with 34%, dailymotion.com and, with 33%, milliyet.com.tr. With 29%, sabah.com.tr and youtube.com are in the last positions.

Chart 2: Distribution of 227 images of women on the web sites**Chart 3:** Distribution of 227 images of women according to the criteria

86 famous women are given place out of 227 images and most of these famous women are brought in the foreground with their bodies. Besides the people who work in business and politics, images of famous women from the world of art and magazines are seen. These images mostly are used because they are mentioned in the subject. Especially celebrities are reflected as sexual object and their bodies are placed in the forefront. In advertising-content images, by adding a man and child image next

to the woman, a “wife and mother” status is attributed to the woman. On International Woman’s Day, images of beaten and miserable woman were reflected on the news web sites. In only 26 images, women were described as effective, employed and serious. It has been confirmed that, to be able to engage men’s attention, images of women are used, even though there is no relation.

Conclusion

This study shows that the perception of women as sexual objects, more than as an individual and usage of the feminine body (especially nudity) continues with the Internet, which is the basic carrier and distributor of cultural values that comes about through globalization. Women are reflected as merchandise, even though there is no link with the content.

Media enterprises use women only as an object in circulation and rating competition. The role that is given to and encoded within women is nothing more than her sexual identity. The Internet has the ability to gather radio, newspaper, television and cinema—namely, all media—supports the transformation of women to an passive individual by showing the things men can/will do for women, instead of showing the things women can/will do like other means. If the fact that men are the dominant users of the Internet is taken into consideration, with the female body it is aimed to get the interest of men, who is the target group.

In spite of the special politics to prevent sexism and recent programs, the Internet, called the “new media”, does not totally reach gender equality. This study also shows that MEDİZ (Media Monitoring Group), which was founded in 1996 after the Pekin+5 Political Declaration, does not execute its duty properly. Even though MEDİZ shares the results of the “End to Sexism in Media” campaign, which traces violations of women’s rights, discrimination and sexist approaches by following television, radio, newspapers and web sites, our study shows that media is not interested in this situation.

The rates of images that reflect women as producer and worker are really low. As mentioned before, only 26 images out of 550 reflect women as producer and worker. The image that is imputed to women exposed to violence, poverty, in need of protection, sexual object, wife, mother, daughter, sister, worker of traditional feminine jobs (secretary, nurse, retainer), abandoned, consumer and consume-maker, serve the ideology that stabilizes women’s addiction and their secondary position.

Women who were defined as precious and distinguished with their nutrient production artifice and had an important role in society became slave to paternalistic values throughout the development of human beings. To be able to erase this perception, there should be radical modifications on culture. New attitudes should be developed to understand the actual place of women in society. This must not be

forgotten; imputed values to women do not only enslave women, but they also enslave men, who are the product of women.

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