

THE BODY IN PORTUGUESE ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Our research was aimed at understanding the different types of bodies used in Portuguese ads, verifying in which way ads, by transmitting certain images of the human body, convey notions of youth, beauty and seduction, which are normally idealised as having an erotic charge, especially the female body, whose social and effective appeal are essentially of a symbolic nature.

So, we studied the different body types; social marks; body expressions and postures; type of scenarios; arguments and appeals in the ads; and the social values inherent to them.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning ads have always used specific physical and body attributes that may be considered ideal, as well as positive codes such as beauty, health, richness and happiness in order to conquer new consumers.

It is in this context that certain body parts, nudity and even sexuality emerge as elements that are either provoking or seductive. Their persuasive power and their strong impact on the receiver contributes to the fame of certain brands.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The association of the ads to the brands they advertise, which are made to be persuasive, and the fact they are omnipresent in the media, legitimises the repetitive use of body images, shown up to the point that their contents and representations might become trivial due to the frequency of their repetition. This influences the receiver to adopt the behaviours he/she sees in the image (Gresy, 2002).

This leads to a cycle: an individual that is looking for an “ideal” body and then is confronted with one that was published looks at that image not only as an ideal body, but also a path in the incessant search for his/her own ideal model, which leads to the consumption of the products that are advertised, many of them not directly linked to physical aspects; this can lead to dieting, ingestion of drugs and even cosmetic surgery (Meyers 1995). The individual is looking for an ideal body image.

The ideal body image is associated with the building of an identity, thus having a very important role in the life of the individual, such so that it can even condition his/her relationship with others. First impressions given through physical attraction influence the way others perceive a variety of issues. The question that remains is how that individual is going to relate with his/her macro and micro environment that will inherently mark his/her self, as he/she establish personal interactions (Pereira e Veríssimo, 2005).

Method

Object of analysis

Advertising in Portugal media (press, television and outdoors) use beauty and images of a known person/character whose body is used in an attempt to interest the general public in the

ads. The categories of products that most commonly use body images in their ads are perfumes, body and face care products, clothes and make up products.

The gathering of the ads was done in two moments: Autumn/Winter season of the year 2003 and the Spring/Summer season of the year 2004.

The length of time analysed was to have a large sample that could show several ways of representing the human body in Portuguese ads.

501 media ads were analysed; ads broadcast on the television channels with a larger audience (RTP, SIC, TVI), printed in the press all over Portugal and in outdoors in the area of Lisbon.

Instruments

To research the selected ads we used analytic graphics based on the following criteria:

Kind of body: identification of the different ways the body is shown (dressed, half-naked, naked or only partly shown) and the several body typologies (athletic body, erotic body, body as an object, etc.);

Social marks on the body: analysis of the social status transmitted by the body (tattoos, piercing and rings, etc).

Body expressions and postures: identifications of the several body positions (upright, laid down, sitting, hands on genitalia, etc.)

Scenographic space: identification of the scenic spaces used to frame the body.

Arguments and appeals in the Ads: Analysis of the several types of arguments used in ads.

Social values: identification of the types of beliefs on which the ads are anchored.

RESULTS

In order to analyse the facts we started by characterising the ads, namely the use of characters, the presentation of the body and, finally, the arguments and social values that are transmitted by them.

Characters in advertising: their characterisation.

The first analyse we used when characterising these ads was looking at the beauty of the characters in order to get more elements on body images and how they are used.

The majority of the ads (93,8%) use characters to communicate their arguments. These results show that when ads want to sell products related to a person's appearance they use essentially characters that will show their bodies in those ads.

The main type of characters used fell under the category of ideal people (61,5%), where aspirations and imitation phenomena are endorsed.

The majority of the products that are directed to women use characters of the same gender. In 64,1% of the ads of women products the characters are women, in opposition to ads in general where the gender issue is more balanced (Pereira and Veríssimo, 2002).

Kind of body, expressions and posture of the main characters

In this part we characterised the body by the way it is shown in ads.

The use of the whole body in the ads only happens in 36,7% of the ads and in the majority of those ads the body is dressed (26,7%).

The use of nudity in ads is residual; half naked bodies (6,8%) and naked bodies (3,2%), which indicates that the ads are less innovative or even conservative, avoiding to change or

contradict social stereotypes, because negative consequences could be brought upon the brands that chose such an approach, which is understandable as the Portuguese culture is still based on a puritan Judaic-Christian tradition. (Table 1 - Types of body (showing the whole body))

As stated above, since the majority of the ads are directed to the female public female bodies are clearly used in the majority of the ads. Many of these ads use certain types of clothing that enhance certain body aspects, such as breast size or the hip outline (17,2%). In a minority of cases the woman's body is shown in seductive poses in order to use its persuasive assets (4,6%).

A very important issue is the use of body parts in the majority of cases instead of using the whole body (50,7%). The objective is to call the receiver's attention to the part of the body to which the product is directed. So, in 32,1% of the cases the face is the part of the body that is shown the most, in particular in ads of face and make up products.

Interesting is also the emphasis given to female breasts, present in 5,4% of the ads.

The remaining body parts are shown in such percentages that they can be considered residual (Table 2 - Parts of the body).

The body position is also a component in the message to be communicated by the ads. The upright position (39,1%), followed by the person sitting down (18,0%) dominated the frequencies of this analysis. Such is justifiable by the fact that such postures are adopted by all of us socially. So, ads as a social reproducer do nothing more than reproduce positions that are socially acceptable (Table 3 - Positions assumed by body).

The characters use different expressions to better convey the message advertisers wish to transmit, assuming a variety of expressions that go from primal emotions to reflexive and contemplative expressions. The results reveal that the majority of the ads use expressions that transmit sensuality (20,0%), followed by contemplative expressions (16,0%), joy (15,6%) and happiness (15,6%). These expressions are intended to convey to the target images of a life without problems, where they can be the happiest.

Some provocative expressions were also found (7,0%) which have as main objective to stress the erotic charge of the message (Table 4 - Expressions assumed by the characters).

Contrarily to what we expected, we found that there were not any important differences between the bodies used in the Autumn/Winter season and the bodies used in the Spring/Summer season.

Social Marks

When analysing social marks, as tools to define the position people have in society, we realised that Portuguese ads do not use them much, maybe because of the irreverence that are normally associated to these accessories.

If the ads do not have the intent to contradict the stereotypes of society, it is natural that they choose to omit images of social marks. Even though bracelets (6,4%), necklaces/threads (5,6%) and earrings (5,0%) are the most frequent accessories and adorns in the ads analysed (Table 5 - Social Marks).

Despite being fashionable at the time, tattoos and piercing are almost irrelevant in the analysed ads, maybe because they are usually used by marginal groups that are confrontational with the socially accepted groups in Portuguese culture.

When it is possible to identify the scenarios, we verified that the majority are daily situations (24,0%). There are also others linked to mysteries (10,6%) or the bizarre (10,6%).

Chromatic characterisation of ads

In the Autumn/Winter season brown (15,1%) was the colour that appeared more frequently in ads. Being a tranquillising colour, it represents safety, tradition, nature and calmness, and it is linked with the Autumn/Winter season, which is the season of the year associated with melancholic images and the smell of earth and humidity.

Next comes blue (13,4%), which is a colour that is always present in ads that convey harmony and calmness. It is also a colour that induces loyalty and happiness, arguments that all brands want to convey to their consumers.

In the Spring/Summer season shades of blue dominate (21,3%) together with creams (21,3%).

Contents of ads

To finish this article, we tried to identify the type of ads either through their rational and logical contents or the use of social and symbolic figures, the latter being more effective.

We studied this subject based on the perspective of Rossiter and Percy (1998). In this context we have two kinds of communication: the transformational or the informational. The first is marked by a communication centred on “image” and symbolism through which consumers are led to understand that the advertised brands give them the possibility of being socially accepted or offer them gratification of a sensorial order and intellectual stimulation. The second is characterised by a communication with a strong component of information in order to remove or resolve problems, or deals with a person’s needs.

Our results demonstrate the domination of transformational communication (63,3%). These ads give to the customer the possibility of being socially accepted (59,9%) and at the same time offer gratification of a sensorial order (40,1%). In the informational ads (36,7%), the removal or resolution of a problem is more frequent, namely in 72,8% of the times.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1 - Types of body (showing the whole body)

	Percentage
Dressed body	26,7%
Half-naked body	6,8%
Naked body	3,2%
Total	36,7%

Table 2 - Parts of the body

	Number	Percentage
Face	161	32,1%
Female breast	27	5,4%
Lips	19	3,8%
Male chest	16	3,2%
Eyes	17	3,4%
Buttock	8	1,6%
Female legs	4	0,8%

Table 3 - Positions assumed by body

	Number	Percentage
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Upright	196	39,1%
Sitting	90	18,0%
Laid down	35	7,0%
Leaned back	11	2,2%
Legs open	2	0,4%
Hands on hips	1	0,2%

Table 4 - Expressions assumed by the characters

	Number	Percentage
Sensuality	100	20,0%
Contemplation	80	16,0%
Joy	78	15,6%
Happiness	78	15,6%
Provocation	35	7,0%
Sadness	7	1,4%
Passion	7	1,4%
Shyness	6	1,2%
Care	2	0,4%

Table 5 - Social Marks

	Number	Percentage
Bracelets	32	6,4%
Necklace/thread	28	5,6%
Earrings	25	5,0%
Rings	14	2,8%
Tattoos	4	0,8%
Piercing	1	0,2%

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