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Hanns Kropff, “Women as Shoppers” (1926)

Austrian advertising expert Hanns Kropff (1882-1963) had worked for Leonhard Tietz and other large retail concerns before turning to the study and teaching of advertising, on which he published several influential papers. He was particularly interested in the psychology of advertising, and he started teaching commercial advertising at Vienna University of Economics and Business in 1936, at a time when it was still a relatively new field in German-speaking Europe. This text appeared in the June 1926 issue of *Reklame*, a trade publication. It is supposed to illustrate Kropff’s method of “psychological” market analysis. In the end, Kropff’s patent sexism reveals more about his own prejudices than about the psyches of his female subjects.

Women as Shoppers

Seventy-five percent of all things are bought by women. Women buy for themselves, for their children, for their homes, and also very often for their husbands. Most money spent passes through the hands of women. For this reason you should check carefully whether your goods are not also purchased by women. The tie that a man buys because his wife likes it has in reality been purchased by her.

Women tend to think in strongly personal terms. Nevertheless they are easy to influence. Their first question will always be: is there a use or advantage in it for me? They relate everything directly to their appearance, their happiness, their sympathies. General facts, logical reasons, abstract considerations, and technical details do not say much to them. Statistics and politics leave them cold in the moment of a purchase. They demand instead that their smaller desires be understood. They are pleased by easily understood explanations of the use of an item or about the reasons it is better.

Women love a simple and personal language, however modern they might be in their professions and progressive in their opinions. With things that touch them personally, they are first of all women. And, once again, that is the reason they perceive everything personally.

Only in the rarest of cases will women analyze their feelings or actions. Their sensations, decisions, affections, and rejections are thoroughly emotional and irrevocable.

The majority of marketers find it very difficult to write advertisements for women. They think in terms that are too complicated, too masculine. The love they have for the products they sell is colored by their own perspective. They frequently use expressions that mean something entirely different to women, that lead

to misunderstandings, indeed, that often offend them. An idea that is good in itself is often spoiled by an incorrect expression.

Consider the fact that women love their homes, be they ever so simple, and that they are proud of certain pieces of furniture and keepsakes. Do not insult them with sarcastic disparagement. Never use ridicule in your texts and never be skeptical. You might cause a few to laugh, but many will be irritated.

Shopping is a serious matter for all people, but most especially for women. Do not attempt to make advertisements humorous, for firstly there are only a few really humorous ads and secondly to women humor is neither generally understood, nor congenial, nor persuasive.

Women regard life as a shockingly serious business which must be endured if necessary with clenched teeth. They wash, they iron, they sweep, they cook, they sew, they attend to the children, they make the beds ... a woman's work is never done. Not only do they have their own language in which they think and discuss these things, but they also have a whole set of very particular feelings for them, which an advertiser must know and may never overlook.

Consider the fact that women are experienced in the care and treatment of children. If you give them advice in this area, then do so in a way that does not offend the views they learned from their mothers. Women are generally conservative. They find sudden innovations unpleasant—with the exception of those in fashion. Their education in new thoughts must proceed slowly and carefully. Convince the women that your offerings represent an easily understood advantage for them or their children and half the battle is already won.

Speak to housewives of the “small amenities of the item,” of the work it saves. Give her suggestions on how to procure and prepare meals with less trouble. Speak with her about new methods for simplifying housework. Inform mothers of new advances in the area of hygiene and nutrition.

Do not speak of slavery but offer the woman a hand to gain more time for herself. She will be grateful to you.

The woman with a profession, unburdened by crude household worries and in possession of more money that she can dispose of freely, wants simply to be a woman in her leisure time. She does not think so much of the price if you convince her that your goods will make her life easier, more pleasant, and nicer. Like the housewife her first question in regard to a fashion advertisement is: does it become me? And like the former, she is interested only in the one pictured, and not in the dozen presented in the text. She strives for new knowledge in order to advance herself, but learning by being entertained is most congenial to her. Women politicians and parliamentarians are captivated by a pretty and skillful speech, even if the calculation is wrong, even if the statistical figures do not add up and even if after the third word all the men are already shaking their heads. In short, having a profession has not changed her in her heart of hearts. She remains a woman.

You see that it is not easy for men to write texts for women. It is even harder to illustrate such texts. Give your drafts, pictures, and texts to women to evaluate—not your wife or your daughter or a lady who knows what is at issue but a complete outsider. A woman's judgment is quickly influenced when she knows why she is supposed to give it.

Everything that has been said already applies to an even greater extent to illustrations. If a good picture is worth a thousand words, then ten thousand good words will not induce any woman to look at an ugly or false picture. The effect of the ad stands and falls with the picture. They look first of all at the picture, and if it appeals to them, they read the text. Something incorrect in fashion, a badly arranged kitchen, or a false step in the care of the children, everything that is ridiculous, impossible, or horrible to women occasions them to pass over the ad immediately in scorn and irritation.

Without a doubt the majority of women would rather look at a pretty, appetizing girl than an ugly one. But the ever-cheerful "sweet girl" performing the dirty chores in the public toilet wearing elegant evening gloves is even more ridiculous for women than for men.

Pure text ads, be they ever so clear and aesthetically pleasing, do not interest women. Mere text is too cold and structural for them. Not even trimmings and borders help matters. On the other hand, many women, out of curiosity and the desire for sensation, read the personal ads and the announcements of weddings and engagements, carefully. A clever ad in close proximity to these generally succeeds.

Let us summarize: ads for women must be as personal as possible. They must take into account the typical female characteristic: to agree without reservation, or to repudiate absolutely. Women see things with their eyes—nothing can move them to read an ad that, for some reason or other, does not appeal to them on first sight.

The young women of the postwar period distinguish themselves in some things very clearly from their sisters of 1914. Their bodies, freed from the corset, reasonably dressed, and athletically trained, have become more natural and prettier. Their minds, steeled by need and the worries of war and sharpened by the business of work, are freer and clearer. Their demeanor, although more tomboyish, is easier and less forced than it was in the times when it was thought that the solution to the problem of the erotic was solved by hushing it up. The fellowship of young men and women, often slandered and abused, has become a fact in many parts of Europe.

A new race of women is growing up in Europe, consciously demanding the rights from which they have been barred by the slavery to convention of earlier times.

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